

Lesson 16: Gathering

“Why do we gather? We gather to solve problems we can’t solve on our own. We gather to celebrate, to mourn, and to mark transitions. We gather to make decisions. We gather because we need one another.” —Priya Parker

Social Justice Standards: Diversity 8, 10

Summary

Our gatherings can be filled with foods and activities passed down generation to generation, eliciting memories of yore. Or our gatherings can be brand-new endeavors, bringing together chosen families and infused with the anticipation of a new tradition being made. As we reflect on the beauty and necessity of gathering with our communities, we learn that exclusionary policies and practices prevented communities of color from gathering with one another to celebrate, organize, mourn, and rest. Slave Codes across the United States and several European countries banned enslaved peoples from gathering for education, celebration, or organizing. These codes continued into Jim Crow laws post-emancipation as well. In the mid-19th century, federal policies banned Native American peoples from gathering in practice of their own traditions. Only in 1978 did the American Indian Religious Freedom Act restore the right to worship and gather. A popular gathering holiday, American Thanksgiving, is also predicated on a sanitized and false story. In contrast the Wampanoag Nation marks American Thanksgiving as a day of mourning, not celebration. How, then, do we balance these nuances of gathering and bring them into our own families and communities?

In the following lesson you’ll find perspectives on how communities gather. From walking in a community marketplace to gathering around a table for a holiday celebration, each book explores a different facet of gathering. We use food customs too, as a way to understand how communities similar to and different from our own build custom and tradition into gatherings. We hope these stories illuminate the beauties and challenges of gathering in community with each other.

Booklist

- *Baby Goes to Market* by Atinuke, illustrated by Angela Brooksbank
- *Dim Sum for Everyone* by Grace Lin
- *Freedom Soup* by Tami Charles, illustrated by Jacqueline Alcántara
- *Dumplings for Lili* by Melissa Iwai
- *Watercress* by Andrea Wang, illustrated by Jason Chin
- *Bowwow Powwow* by Brenda J. Child, illustrated by Jonathan Thunder, translated by Gordon Jourdain

Consider This

- What does it mean to gather in community with one another?
- How can we evaluate our traditions for gatherings? What are potential places in our family calendar to add in new gatherings?

Talk Together

- What would your ideal gathering look like? Who would be there? What would you do?
- Do you have a favorite memory of a gathering? What did you like about it?

Engage

- Plan a gathering! This can be real or imaginary play. Have your child or students plan a gathering with their toys, stuffed animals, or friends. Encourage conversations about why they are gathering and what makes it special. Have them consider what is needed in order to celebrate the event.

Explore More

- NMAAHC's "Community Building"
- NPR podcast Code Switch's A Taste of Freedom (June 16, 2021)
- "The Invention of Thanksgiving" by Philip Deloria (*The New Yorker*, November 18, 2019)
- *I Invite My Parents to a Dinner Party* by Chen Chen