

Christmas in the Philippine
Pasko Sa Aming Bayang Pilipinas

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I. Introduction

- A. Grade: 6th-8th (middle school)
- B. Topic: Christmas traditions and their meaning in the Philippines.
- C. Scope: The module was designed to be used during one school week. Lesson plans are for five, 40-50 minute class periods.
- D. Goals:
 - 1. General objective:
 - a. Students will become familiar with Christmas traditions in the Philippines.
 - b. Students will understand how and why Christmas is the most important festival in the Philippines.
 - 2. Specific objectives:
 - a. Students will learn the basic geography of the Philippines.
 - b. Students will learn some general history of the region.
 - c. Students will better understand Christmas in this region by participating in the traditions explained in lecture.

- d. Students will compare and/or contrast the traditions to their own culture through individual worksheets and group discussions.
- e. Students will learn to create one of the regions biggest symbols of Christmas.

E. Materials:

1. map of Southeast Asia
2. map of the Philippines
3. pictures of Christmas festivities
4. appropriate materials needed for the students to create the *parol*
5. appropriate ingredients from a recipe to pre-make a Filipino dish to bring to class
6. various worksheets

II. Overview of Christmas in the Philippines

A. Basic Geography

1. The Philippines includes about 7,100 islands in the South China Sea, only a few hundred miles off Asia's mainland. Its total area of land is about 115,124 square miles, a little larger than Arizona. It is separated into three sections. The largest island is Luzon, the north. The second largest island is Mindanao, the south part. The middle islands are called the Visayas (Tope & Nonan-Mercado, 2002).
2. Because of its geography, Filipino people and their traditions are very diverse. There are about 70 different dialects, and 35 different ethnic groups. Although Filipino is the national language, English is also an official language (World Book, 1990).

B. History of Christianity

1. Although people of Malay and Indonesian decent had already been living in the Philippines, Ferdinand Magellan, a Spanish explorer, was the first to "discover" and claim the region. Christianity was brought to the region in the 1500s by these Spanish colonizers who ruled the Philippines for the next three hundred years. Thus, Christmas here is greatly influenced by this long Spanish history (World Book, 1990). Today, the Philippines are 83% Catholic (Tope & Nonan-Mercado, 2002).

2. However, Spain is not the only country that has left a mark in the Philippines. The Indians, Chinese, British, Americans and Japanese have all made imprints in Philippines culture as well, making its people and Christmas traditions diverse (World Book, 1990).
3. Christmas in the Philippines is a blend between Western and native customs. Such contributions from the West include: Santa Claus, Christmas trees, mailing Christmas cards and caroling. The people however, are the strongest element of the Christmas celebration because they remain so gracious, hospitable, devoted to their faith, and respectful to family and friends (World Book, 1990).

C. Christmas Traditions

1. *The Official Christmas Season.* Officially, the Christmas season begins on December 16th. This is when Filipinos begin attending ***Misa de Gallo***, which is Spanish for “Mass of the Rooster.” Miso de Gallo is mass that is celebrated for 9 days until Christmas Eve. It is at 4 each morning before sunrise. It is also commonly called ***Simbang Gabi*** which means “Night Mass” in Tagalog. Midnight Mss on Christmas Eve is called ***Misa de Aguinaldo*** means “Gift Mass,” referring to the shepherd’s gifts to Christ. Awaking this early every morning for *Miso de Gallo* is seen as sacrifice they make for Christ. In order to awake all those in the village, the town band may play carols an hour before mass, the priest may walk from door to door knocking, firecrackers may be set off, or the church may play carols on a loud speaker system (World Book, 1990).
2. *After Mass Socials.* The socials after Mass held outside the church are a great source of motivation to arise at such an early hour. Vendors set up the cart in the churchyard and side streets to sell breakfast delicacies to the hungry parishioners. Filipinos look forward to talking with friends and family while the sun rises (World Book, 1990).
3. *Caroling.* Although Christmas caroling was adopted from the west, this has become a cherished tradition for Filipinos. Starting December 16th, caroling usually lasts from 6 each night until midnight. Children, teens and adults all participate in this tradition, signing both native and western carols. Carolers, often called ***cumbancheros***, sing to raise money for charity, to receive money or treats, or for simple enjoyment. Some caroling groups

called *pastores*, dress in Mexican or Spanish folk outfits to dance, sing and reenact the Nativity story. These performances include Christmas carols, ballads, love songs and native folk melodies (World Book, 1990).

4. *The Parol*. The biggest symbol of Christmas in the Philippines is the *parol*. Parols are handmade, star-shaped lanterns. They are used to decorate homes, churches, schools, stores, city streets and public transportation. In homes, they are hung in almost every window, placed on the Christmas tree, and used to decorate the yard. Most often they are made from bamboo sticks, crepe paper and a candle. They symbolize the star of Bethlehem that led the Three Wise Man to baby Jesus (World Book, 1990).
 - a. The *parol* originated from the Mexican piñata. The piñata started in Italy and then spread to Spain in the 1300s, which brought it to the Philippines (World Book, 1990).
 - b. Families can make or purchase parols. They are sold in stores and by vendors who line every street in December (World Book, 1990).
 - c. San Fernando is the Christmas capital of the Philippines. It is known for attracting thousands of natives and tourists. During the Christmas season it holds a contest displaying the biggest and most extravagant parols (A2004 Writers Team, 2003).
5. *Other Decorations*. Filipinos decorate their home with much more than parols. They decorate with brightly colored streamers, Christmas cards, candles, wreaths, multicolored lights and Christmas trees (World Book, 1990).
 - a. Adopted from the west, almost every home in the Philippines has a Christmas tree. Because in the Philippines pine trees are often times too expensive, artificial and handmade trees are more common (World Book, 1990).
 - b. City streets, buildings, shopping districts, public squares, department stores, large commercial areas and churches (both Roman Catholic and Philippine Independent) are all decorated as well (World Book, 1990).
 - c. The *belen*, the nativity scene, is the most important part of the church's celebration of Christmas; and is the oldest

symbol of Christmas in the Philippines. The church's *belen* is arranged before the first Mass on December 16th. The baby Jesus is not put into the scene until midnight on Christmas Eve. Although initially the *belen* was only placed in churches, now they are in Filipino homes. A few homes display this scene all year. The *belen* is also displayed in public parks, shopping malls, department stores, movie house lobbies, police stations, town plazas and public transportation (World Book, 1990).

6. *Noche Buena*. **Noche Buena** is the family dinner immediately after Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve. Preparation for Jesus' birth includes extensive cleaning, stocking and replenishing one's kitchen, replacement of old household items with new ones, purchasing or making new outfits for the occasion, purchasing fresh flowers, cooking and confessing one's sin. To Filipinos this celebration is a time of "rebirth" or "renewal." They do everything they can to make the celebration perfect. Those family members that can better afford such a feast are the one who host it. Everyone and anyone is welcome – family, friends, neighbors, friends' friends, etc (World Book, 1990).
7. *Christmas Eve*. The most favorite time to carol is Christmas Eve. Families carol from door to door to other family members' homes, and then they all proceed to Mass. The church is usually filled for Midnight Mass by 10:00. Sometime before this Mass begins a **panunuluyan** is performed. This is a reenactment of the search for shelter of Mary and Joseph by townspeople. The group begins at 9:00 going door to door throughout the village. It ends right before Mass begins (World Book, 1990).

During Mass, the baby Jesus is lowered into the *belen*; and afterwards, the parishioners can "greet" the baby. After this, they may begin caroling at the homes of family and friends. Those who do not attend Midnight Mass to stay home with the children attend Mass in the morning. Upon arrival to their homes, they begin *noche buena*, where the very best is served. The most respected family members at this feast and gathering are the **Lola** – "the grandmother deeply respected, highly revered, always present" (World Book, 1990).

This celebration often goes until 6 in the morning. For large families, mats are laid out on the floor for relatives who may decide to take naps when needed. A few kids put out stockings for Santa Claus; however, most kids know that their gifts come from their parents (World Book, 1990).

8. *Gift Giving*. Produce, harvest items and baked goods are usually the gift given to friends, neighbors and relatives in the city. However, those city relatives usually send games or t-shirts. Money is always welcome. Practicality is kept in mind when purchasing or making gifts. Sharing is more important than quantity when it comes to gift giving (World Book, 1990).
 - a. *Gift Exchanges*. Filipinos participate in what the West knows as Kris Kringles. Schoolmates, co-workers, friends and relatives organize gift exchanges. Usually this is either done by pooling gifts or by secretly giving your person a weekly gift and then finally revealing yourself after you have given the final, meaningful gift (Fortune City, 2003).
9. *Christmas Day*. Visiting is important on this day. Children must visit godmothers and godfathers, aunts, uncles and grandparents. They kiss their hands or bring their right hands to their foreheads, a tradition which is called *mano*. In return, they receive a small gift (World Book, 1990).
 - a. *Christmas Day Food*. **Lechon**, roasted pig, is main course on Christmas Day. Families raise pigs just for this purpose. A grandfather or uncle will take on the task of preparing it, unless a professional is hired. Those who cannot afford a pig usually have stuffed chicken or Chinese ham. Deserts include bibingka, puto and leche flan, creamy caramel custard (World Book, 1990).
10. *The Twelve Days of Christmas*. The Christmas season ends twelve days after Christmas, January 6th, on Three Kings day. The holiday spirit and celebration lasts until this day. Holiday entertainment is held nation-wide, which include *parol* competitions and festivals, famous *belen* displays, fiestas and famous orchestras (World Book, 1990).
 - a. *Ninos innocent*. Holy Innocents' Day is on December 28th. On this day King Herod tried to kill baby Jesus by having all children under two murdered in Bethlehem. However, because Herod was unsuccessful in killing Jesus, this day is one of fun in the Philippines. They use this day to play pranks on each other. If Filipinos manages to borrow money from friend because that person forgets what day it is, then that money does not need to be paid back (World Book, 1990).

- b. *New Year*. Starting on New Year's Eve, two days of noise, fireworks and merriment begins. They believe the more commotion they make, the more prosperous the next year will be. Vendors set up on the streets to sell hats and noisemakers. Some people chose to celebrate in their own homes with family and friends for a *media noche*, which means "midnight repast." It is important to wish elders a Manigong Bagong Taon, a "Happy New Year." Mass is either attended at midnight or during the day on January 1st. During this celebration, food is "a sign of hope for prosperity to come." Round objects – coins, polka-dots, grapes, eggs, etc. – also symbolize good luck in the Philippines. They believe they should spend New Year's Day in their own homes, otherwise the year will find them distant from loved ones (World Book, 1990).

- c. *Three Kings Day*. The feast of the Three Kings, January 6th, can be celebrated on this date or the first Sunday of January. Mass is attended. This day is generally for children. When families gather, the children are given small gifts – candy, coins, and tinker toys. On Three Kings Day Eve, children place their shoes by the window hoping that the king will drop gifts in them when passing by. Many villages hold parades representing the arrival of the Magi. Those participating throw gifts to children watching. This ends the longest celebrated Christmas season in the world (World Book, 1990).

III. Lesson Plans

A. Day One: Introduction

The first thing the teacher will do is discuss with the students what they already know of the Philippines in general and any knowledge they have of Christmas in Philippines. The students will write all this down on worksheets. Once this is completed, the teacher can explain the basic geography and the basic history of Christianity. Maps of both Southeast Asia and the Philippines can be distribute to each student, as well as presented on overhead. It is important to know where the Philippines are in relation to the rest of Asia and how the country is divided geographically. The basic history of Christianity is needed to introduce the country's Christmas celebration. General pictures of the Philippines can be found in the books, *Cultures of the World – Philippines and The Philippines – Enchantment of the World*.

B. Day Two: Christmas Traditions Lecture

Teach the information given above to the students. Have the students fill out the vocabulary/events worksheets while the items are presented in class. Show the students some pictures of Philippine celebrations and decorations. The following website has some good pictures – (<http://sim.soe.umich.edu/parol/>).

C. Day Three: Making the Parol

Today, the students will be making their own parol. The teacher should make an example parol and bring it to class so the students have a model of what their final product will look like. Instructions on how to make this can be found at the end of the book, *Christmas in the Philippines*, or at the following website – (<http://sim.soe.umich.edu/parol/>).

D. Day Four: Critical Thinking

Today, the students will have the opportunity to compare and contrast their Christmas or holiday traditions with those celebrated in the Philippines. First, have the students fill out the compare/contrasts charts on their own. Then, divide the students into groups of four. Have them share with each other their personal charts. Have them decide which traditions they share with each other, and which they with the children in the Philippines. They should then share this as a group to the class.

E. Day Five: Celebrate Filipino Style

The students will have a chance to decorate their classroom with the parol like Philippine students would decorate theirs. The teacher will pass out a Philippine dish that he/she made ahead of time. Other activities could include listening to and/or singing Christmas carols, participating in a gift exchange, asking volunteers to perform the panunuluyan, and of course socializing.

A recipe for leche flan, custard, can be found at <http://www.tribo.org/filipinofood/flan.html>. Other recipes can be found at the back of the book, *Christmas in the Philippines*.

IV. References

Books

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Worksheet #1 – What You Already Know

Name: _____

Answer the following questions the best you can.

- 1. Where are the Philippines?**
- 2. What religion dominates?**
- 3. What is their biggest religious holiday?**
- 4. How do they celebrate this?**
- 5. Have you ever been to the Philippines?**
- 6. Do you know any other facts or traditions celebrated there?**

Worksheet #2 - Vocabulary & Events

Name: _____

Fill in the definitions of the words or phrases as we go over them in class.

1. **Pasko Sa Aming Bayang Pilipinas:**

2. **Misa de Gallo:**

3. **Simbang Gabi:**

4. **Misa de Aguinaldo:**

5. **Cumbancheros:**

6. **Pastores:**

7. **Parol:**

8. **Belen:**

9. **Noche Buena:**

10. **Panunuluyan:**

11. Lola:

12. Mano:

13. Lechon:

14. Media Noche:

15. Manigong Bagong Taon:

16. Maligayang Pasko:

Worksheet #3 ~ Compare and Contrast

Name: _____

Fill in the charts comparing your Christmas or Holiday celebration to the Filipino way of celebrating Christmas.

Contrast your way of celebrating Christmas or a Holiday with the way Filipinos celebrate Christmas.
