

**Topic: Holidays and Traditions – St. Patrick’s Day**

**Let’s get started...**

Saint Patrick’s Day, March 17, is a traditional American holiday, taken from the Irish immigrant culture. It is not a federal or national holiday. Schools, banks, post offices and government offices are all open on this day. In stores and in advertising inserts in the newspapers, you will see the color green, and you will see many pictures of symbols of this holiday – for example, pots of gold, leprechauns, and shamrocks (clover leaves).

**Background:**

Saint Patrick is the patron saint of Ireland. Many Irish people came to America and brought this holiday with them. People who are not Irish enjoy the holiday too. In American cities with many people of Irish descent, there are parades on St. Patrick’s Day. Bagpipes play Irish music. People dance Irish jigs and sing Irish songs. People wear green clothes, or at least a green ribbon, and put green food coloring in cakes, cookies, and beer. The city of Chicago even puts green dye in the Chicago River. Favorite foods on this day are corned beef and cabbage, Irish soda bread, and Irish stew (made with lamb, onions and potatoes, with a thick gravy). Symbols of the holiday include the shamrock (a three-leaf clover), the shillelagh (a wooden club, pronounced “sha’-laa-lee), and leprechauns (tiny little imaginary men, pronounced lep’-re-kahns). The Irish Celtic harp is another symbol. In Irish tradition, the leprechauns were very smart, clever, and tricky. They had pots of gold buried in the woods. If you could trick a leprechaun into showing you where his gold is buried, you could become rich. But if he fooled you, you got nothing. The legend of Saint Patrick includes stories of his converting the Irish people to Catholicism, and driving snakes out of Ireland (there are no snakes in Ireland today). Irish Protestants prefer the color orange. The Irish flag has three stripes – green for the Catholic heritage, orange for the Protestant, and white between, to signify unity. Yet, conflict continues between these groups in Ireland today.



**In pairs for 5 minutes, ask and answer these questions:**

- Have you or your family brought any holidays with you from your native country?
- What is the holiday (OR What are the holidays) you brought with you?
- Tell a partner about how you celebrated this/these holiday(s) in your country.
- Tell a partner about what you do to celebrate this/these holiday(s) in the U.S.

**Share your partner’s answers with the group.**

**Discussion Questions:**

Does your country have minority cultures whose holidays are celebrated as part of the country's folkloric traditions? Tell a partner about some of these holidays and traditions.

Cultures around the world have proverbs and special sayings. As one example, in the United States, there are proverbs and sayings with colors. For example, with the color green:

Green with envy  
Green thumb  
Green around the gills  
Greenbacks  
You look a little green.  
Green construction  
Green (environmentally-friendly) – live “green,” shop “green,” buy “green”

Americans have other sayings and phrases for other colors, for example:

Red with rage	In the red
Black with rage	In the black
I feel “blue.”	In the pink
Sunny yellow (“mellow yellow”)	yellow (cowardly; “chicken”)

Do you have “colorful” sayings or phrases in your culture? Tell a partner about some of the ways color words are used in your culture to express feelings and emotions.

Does your native country have superstitions about little people, colors, water, music, eyes, money (gold)? Tell a partner, and then a small group, about these superstitions.

**Challenge Questions:**

Why do you think “little people,” money (gold), and prosperity are a part of so many countries' folkloric traditions?

Why do you think people, countries and cultures have developed folktales and traditions about these topics and ideas?

In your country's religious traditions, are there special people remembered for their good works in your country's history or religion. Tell a partner about one or two of these people. Compare similarities and differences about these people, ideas and cultures.

**New words and Idioms:**

Folklore, folkloric, tradition, prosperity, culture, folktale, superstition, proverb, saying, phrase, celebrate, minority, express, construction, environmentally-friendly, trinity, special, significance, bagpipe, jig, patron, saint, descent, parades, dye, food coloring, symbol, clever, tricky, club, imaginary, harp, Celtic, converting, driving... out of, buried, at least, shamrock, religious, legend, fooled, buried, explaining, stew, brought, gills, envy, thumb, greenback, rage, mellow, developed, pot of gold, similarities, differences, conflict, signify, heritage.