

Exploring the Christmas Holiday Season

Written by Lyn French, Director of A Space for Creative Learning and Support

This resource is used in conjunction with 5 cards drawn from the **Emotional Learning Cards** series, *What do you Feel?* Purchase the cards online at: www.inivacreativelearning.org

The Christmas holiday can be complicated because we often have unrealistic expectations. We may want it to be the best time of the year we can imagine. However, it doesn't always turn out that way. We can all benefit from re-kindling the spirit of 'holy days' which were originally introduced so whole communities could come together with others in meaningful ways and, the process, re-commit to shared life values.

Below are a series of questions around 3 Emotional Learning Cards from *Who are you? Where are you going?* These can be used as the starting point for individual conversations with young and/or vulnerable people who may be experiencing negative emotions around the Christmas holiday season. They deal with issues around family relationships, feeling lonely, disappointment and cultural difference.

Artist: **Fiona Tan, *Lift* 2000**



Breaks from everyday routines and schedules can be good experiences. We may feel refreshed or even as buoyant as the person in Fiona Tan's photograph 'Lift' who is harnessed to bright red balloons and is floating just above the ground.

What kinds of experiences are most fulfilling?

What might people do with their friends or families over the December holiday period which would leave them feeling closer and with good memories to hold on to?

Of course Christmas might be a stressful time, with family tension and arguments; an experience from which we actually want to escape. Maybe the figure in this card is also trying to escape from their particular situation?

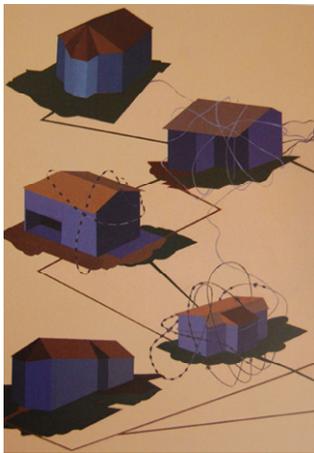
Do you sometimes find yourself in the middle of stressful situations? Do you try to escape them? How do you do that?

The December break in Western countries marks the birth of a religious figure, Jesus Christ. The 'Mass of Christ' or Christmas is often celebrated whether or not we are Christians. We'll all have a mix of memories –both good and bad – from past Christmases.

What do you think makes Christmas work best?

What might make it a painful, disappointing or lonely experience?

Artist: Otobong Nkanga, *Social Consequences I: Encroaching Barricade*, 2009



Holidays often mean we spend more time with family than we might usually do which can lead to misunderstandings, hurt feelings and disappointments. Otobong Nkanga's painting *Social Consequences I* shows the home as a kind of prison or emotional 'hotspot'.

What might family members fight about?

Why might it be difficult for some family members to talk things through?

Describe some of the disappointments that can be felt over Christmas.

Artist: Alex Fleming *Flying Carpet, 2006*



Some of us travel to relatives near or far over the Christmas period or they come to visit us. Others may be separated from their close family members for many reasons.

Why might an important family figure be missing from a holiday celebration?

What might a child or adult feel if someone important to them wasn't able to be there?

Is there anyone missing from your life whom you'd like to see over Christmas?

What could you do to honour your memories of them?

Artist: Yara El- Sherbini, *Mother and Child*, 2009



This sculpture is made of two bowling pins wrapped in shawls so they look like figures.

The cloths draped as shawls could represent the old world, or a different culture and the bowling pins might represent the Western world. This shows how many of us have more than one culture in our lives.

What are the different cultures represented in your family and in your community?

Do they have their own religious festivals? What are they?

What do all religions have in common?

What kind of celebration could you imagine which would reflect everyone's cultural beliefs and festivals?

The figures look very close, almost like they are gaining strength from being together. Maybe they are the only family they have.

Do you have a big or a small family?

Does your family make you feel stronger?

What did you think of this resource? We want to hear from you...

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About Iniva Creative Learning

Iniva Creative Learning is a not-for-profit partnership between A Space (arts and therapy service, Hackney) and Iniva (the Institute of International Visual Arts). We share a commitment to producing art-based resources and delivering initiatives which promote emotional learning, personal development and psychological growth.

Emotional Learning Cards

It is now widely recognised that well-being in every part of life depends on successfully building understanding, insight and emotional resilience. **A Space** and **Iniva** have been co-publishing **Emotional Learning Cards since 2008** and they now occupy a leading position in the growing fields of **emotional learning and psychological therapies**.

Each boxed set of Emotional Learning Cards includes 20 cards:

- **On the front:** visually rich images of a contemporary artwork by a variety of culturally diverse and emerging artists known for their engagement in social or political enquiry.
- **On the back:** open questions and discussion prompts around the theme 'What do you feel?', 'Who are you? Where are you going?' and 'How do we live well with others?' for group or one-to-one use.

Suggestions for using the cards in different contexts such as school, home, gallery workshops and individual or group therapy settings are offered in a **fold-out leaflet**.