

## Theme Day ~ Planning Guidelines

**Purpose:** The purpose of this document is to provide planning criteria and guidelines to ensure that themed days that are celebrated in schools are done so in an inclusive manner for all students.

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER IN PLANNING:

- What is the purpose of the day?
- Is it accessible to all students? Is there a cost to be able to participate?
- Does the day have multiple entry points for all students to participate?
- Is it meaningful to students? Does it inspire excitement and connection for the school culture?
- Does it create a shared positive experience for students and nurture a sense of community?
- What demands does this place on families to be able to participate?
- Are celebration days balancing the recognition of diverse celebrations in the inclusive Heritage Days of Significance calendar? (Avoiding only Euro-Centric celebrations)
- Has the Religious / Creed, Significance / Heritage Awareness Calendar been considered for dates of theme days? (Avoid solemn days of observance, religious fasting if there may be food on the celebration day, etc.)
- Is there a process in place for administration & community stakeholders (School Councils, Home and School Associations) to review and approve theme days prior to them being announced and publicized?

**Lenses to Consider:** Race, Socio-Economic, Social, Cultural, Gender Identity, Ableism, Mental Health

Inclusive List	Rationale
School Colour Days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This language welcomes all students to wear school colours rather than a specific “mascot wear day” where students may not financially be in a position to participate</li> </ul>
Comfy Clothes Day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This language welcomes all students who may not have a specific set of pajamas to participate in the day.</li> </ul>
Backwards Day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The simplicity of the day allows students to participate in the day with no cost and minimal demands on families.</li> </ul>

Exclusionary / Problematic List	All Reinforce Stereotypes
Crazy Hair Day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crazy Hair Day perpetuates the idea that some hair styles are the standard and others are 'not normal'. For example- some hairstyles associated with 'crazy hair day' may resemble some Black hairstyles, with racist implications that Black hair is 'not normal' or 'unkept' etc.</li> <li>• Another issue with this day is the usage of the word 'crazy', which has ableist connotations.</li> </ul>
Jersey Day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students may not participate in sports or own a sports team jersey. This is an example of a theme day that causes exclusion through the items required to participate.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Socio-economic disparities.</li> <li>• Affordability</li> </ul>
Twin Day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The requirement to pair with someone and match, excludes students who cannot find a friend to “twin” with, or who forget to coordinate with a friend causing feelings of being left out.</li> <li>• Socio-economic disparities (matching outfits, accessories)</li> <li>• Could exacerbate issues with beauty standards and body image.</li> <li>• May reinforce gender norms / stereotypes if feel pressure to pair with someone of the same sex.</li> </ul>
Cultural Dress Day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dressing up as an ethnicity, race or culture that is not your own can be viewed as perpetuating tokenism and stereotypes.</li> <li>• Discussion and communication with students and families around this will need to be had.</li> </ul>
“Whacky” or “Crazy” Days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When the word “whacky” or “crazy” is used to define a theme day, it implies a negative connotation with regards to a particular style (e.g. hair, clothing) and mental health.</li> </ul>

## A Special Note about Halloween, Christmas, Valentine’s, etc. Theme Days

### HALLOWEEN:

Many schools celebrate Halloween with costume dress up and/or black and orange. Halloween is a day that is not observed by all students or staff. With this, it is considered a choice to participate as are all theme days. Question the traditions. ***How is a Halloween parade excluding or centering out a student or students? Who is included? Who is excluded by this practice? How might we engage students, staff and community in celebrating this day in a more inclusive way?*** Does a parade need to happen? Could inclusive activities during a portion of the day instead be offered? Is there an alternative to a dance option? Games room? Quiet room?

Don’t assume that all students will participate in Halloween activities. Remember there are students who do not celebrate and/or participate. Their choice should be respected and the activities that are planned in their class shouldn’t interfere with their schooling/education.

### Cultural Appropriation and Costumes:

Cultural appropriation means taking or borrowing a look or trait from a culture that is not your own. Costumes that are based on people’s culture are offensive, harmful and insensitive. The following are suggested questions to reflect on when choosing a costume to avoid being disrespectful or offensive that schools can share with their school community:

- Is my costume making fun of a group of people, their culture, religion and/or belief systems?
- Does my costume reinforce jokes and stereotypes about certain groups, cultures, religions and/or belief systems?
- Am I altering my skin color, facial/body features to make it like a particular race, ethnicity, or cultural group?
- Am I dressing up as a culture or borrowing from a religion that is not my own or is not part of my background?



**Costumes:** It is our responsibility to ensure that school community members avoid using identities and cultures as costumes. This includes appropriative regalia / cultural stereotypes (e.g. cultural garments), black / brown face, transphobic costumes (e.g. man dressed as a woman), body-shaming and objectifying costumes and costumes that joke about situations that have caused harm or include weapons. Such costumes perpetuate stereotypes and can cause harm that can further marginalize and oppress community members.

**CHRISTMAS:**

When considering Theme Days, the week before the Winter Break, it has often been tradition to have Christmas-themed celebration days. When planning this week, consider the following:

- Does our school acknowledge other religious holidays and other culturally specific days throughout the school year as is included in the board’s Religious/Creed, Significance / Heritage and Awareness Months calendar?
- If so, how might you also include acknowledgement of other religious holidays at those times and in this week?
- What learning do we need to do to recognize other religious celebrations?
- What commonalities do many traditions and celebrations have during these months that can be used to unify all cultures?

Another possibility may be to consider this week as a celebration for the hard work staff and students have completed from September to December. Consider conversations with an equity team or culture and celebrations team to discuss possible theme days that are celebratory in nature with a focus on school unity, but not necessarily tied to any religious or cultural holiday. We want to ensure we are not celebrating one religious holiday while excluding others. Are your celebrations Euro-centric?

<b>INCLUSIVE LIST Examples for the Week Before the Winter Break – Non-religious</b>  	<b>INCLUSIVE LIST Examples for weeks leading up to Winter Break – Religious Celebrations</b>  	<b>EXCLUSIVE LIST Examples for the week before Winter Break</b>  <b>X</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cozy sweater day</li> <li>• Comfy clothes day</li> <li>• Favourite sports, arts day</li> <li>• Fun socks day</li> <li>• School colours day</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Winter Solstice</li> <li>• Hanukkah (blue, white, silver day)</li> <li>• Kwanzaa (red, black and green day)</li> <li>• Christmas (red and green day)</li> <li>• Diwali?</li> <li>• Chinese New Year?</li> <li>• Most of these winter celebrations celebrate with LIGHT and / or candles – how can this be used as a unifying theme?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Christmas-themed activities for all five days or the 12 Days of Christmas</li> <li>• Ugly sweater day</li> <li>• Events only centred around Christmas</li> </ul>

**VALENTINE’S:**

Themes of friendship, love is love, kindness are all appropriate stories and discussions to have around Valentine’s Day. Try to avoid the commercialization of store-bought valentine’s and focus on authentic writing experiences of thoughtful messages to classmates. Families may not want to choose between purchasing items for a tradition or food on the table, no matter what the sale price is. We also cannot make assumptions

that every child has an adult to sit and prepare valentine cards with at home. Bring it back to the classroom with picture books, discussions, and writing (purpose + audience = form) and ensure that everyone is included.

Selling Candy grams? Has the school considered this in the Food and Beverage Policy guidelines? Who is included by these sales? Who is excluded?

### **APPLICATION**

What can you apply from your thinking, learning and reflection on Halloweén, Christmas and Valentine's to other traditions and celebrations throughout the school year? Easter? Mother's Day? Father's Day?

Thank you for your continued work in eliminating bias, oppression, and racism in our schools through disruption and action, and by using our values of compassion, dignity, trust and joy to ensure that all our students are represented, feel safe and seen in our schools and classrooms.