

KOHLRABI: SEASONAL EXTENSION ACTIVITY

DESCRIPTION

Students will learn about cultural traditions associated with winter and make nature art.

MATERIALS PROVIDED	MATERIALS NEEDED
Images related to Yule celebrations and art projects	Will depend on which nature art activity the students complete. See below for details.

PREPARATION

We provided two art activities to choose from, Nature Mandalas for younger students, and Twig Stars for older students. Decide which nature art project the students will complete and collect any needed materials.

BACKGROUND FOR LEADER

Ancient societies relied on agriculture for their survival and were very attuned to nature, paying close attention to the movement of the sun and moon and the changing of the seasons. Yule is an ancient winter festival that is celebrated near the winter Solstice, a date that marks the shortest day (and longest night of the year). Yule celebrates the return of the sunlight and the promise of spring. It was historically observed by the Germanic people but celebrated by many Nordic cultures.

ACTION

A. Explain the following information about the winter solstice and Yule to the students:

- Kohlrabi is a crop that does well in the cold temperatures of winter. Farmers can plant kohlrabi in late summer when it is still warm, and then harvest them in December when the nights are long and the days are cold.
 - Kohlrabi is especially popular in Germany, and it is eaten during a winter celebration called Yule.
- Yule is an ancient festival that is celebrated near the winter solstice, a date that marks the shortest day of the year. The winter solstice falls around December 21.
 - After the summer solstice in June, the sun rises lower in the sky each day. The days grow shorter and the nights grow longer until the sun reaches its lowest point on the winter solstice in December. The process then flips and the sun then begins to climb higher in the sky each day again until the summer solstice.
 - Yule celebrates the return of the sunlight, lengthening days, and the promise of spring.

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3. Yule has been celebrated for thousands of years by Germanic peoples which include people living in what are now Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Belgium etc. Nordic countries such as the Netherlands, Denmark, Iceland, Norway and Sweden also celebrate.

- **Share the map that shows the region Yule is celebrated (Image 1).**

4. There are many ways Yule and the return of the light are celebrated.

- Bells are rung to welcome the sun as it rises.
- People will light a fire going to keep warm, then let it burn down as the sun rises. The fire holds space for the sun, and as the sun rises, it becomes the fire.
- After the sun has risen, a simple meditation is done to honor the returning light to express gratitude for new beginnings. What are you grateful for?

B. Tell students that another important part of Yule celebrations is making crafts together and that today we are going to head outside and collect things from nature for our next activity.

OPTION 1: Nature Mandalas (good for younger students)

Elements of a nature mandala include a central focal point, natural materials arranged in symmetrical, circular, and radial patterns, and the use of repeating designs. Common materials are twigs, leaves, stones, flowers, pine cones, and shells, which are gathered and arranged to create a design that expands outward from the center. This is not meant to be a lasting art piece...after it is made the materials are returned to their natural habitat.

Supplies Needed

- Bowls or paper bags for collecting items from nature

Instructions (see photos of mandalas for reference):

1. Using the pictures provided, share that this activity is called a Nature Mandala. Ask students what they notice about the pictures. Talk about the elements such as repeating design in a circular pattern and choosing a center piece.
2. Every kid needs a bowl or paper bag to gather their natural materials from outside.
3. Have kids either work in pairs or small groups to go outside and collect natural materials from around the school. For example: leaves, pebbles, pine cones, flower petals, etc. Make sure they each select one special item to be the center of their mandala.
 - *Note: It could be helpful to show an example of possible things to collect, appropriate amounts for the activity, boundaries, and what is off limits.*
4. Gather back indoors and have students work in pairs or individuals to create their Mandalas. You could put on soothing instrumental music as they create.
5. When they are finished, do a gallery walk to see all the different art creations and then have them clean up by putting materials back in the bowl and returning them outside.

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OPTION 2: Twig Stars (good for older students)

Twig stars are made from natural materials and can be used to decorate for Yule and the winter solstice.

Supplies Needed:

- 5 twigs or pieces of driftwood per star
- Scissors and/or garden clippers
- Glue gun and a few glue sticks (If you don't want to use hot glue, you can use rubber bands, string, or floral wire instead)
- Natural twine, ribbon, or yarn

Instructions (see photos of twig star assembly for reference):

1. Start by collecting twigs or driftwood. Look for sturdy, straight twigs without too many knots or bends. If the twigs are wet or dirty, allow them to dry and brush off any debris before starting.
2. Twigs should be relatively the same length. You can just break the twigs or use gardening shears to cut them to be similar lengths.

Note: For a cohesive look, ensure that all five twigs for each star are of similar thickness and size.
3. Lay two twigs in an upside down V shape, with the ends overlapping a bit at the top. Apply hot glue to the point where the sticks cross and hold the sticks for a few seconds while the glue sets.
4. Add one twig in the center of the V and apply a bit of hot glue to hold it in place. Should look like an A.
5. Add two additional twigs diagonally to finish the star shape. Secure in place with hot glue.
6. Wrap the twine or yarn around the ends 3-4 times and tie. You can hot glue to secure if needed.
7. If you want to add a little embellishments to personalize it, options can include pine needles, greenery, and other natural items.



Image 1.
Map of Europe showing where Yule was first celebrated.



Image 2.
Nature Mandala examples.



Image 3.
Twig Star assembly.