

Religious and School Holidays

Every religion has important holidays. Christians celebrate Christmas and Easter. Jews celebrate Yom Kippur and Passover. Muslims celebrate Eid Ul-Fitr and Eid Ul-Adha. Each holiday is explained on this page. In pairs or small groups, read about them.

CHRISTMAS

This Christian holiday celebrates the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. Christians believe Jesus was the son of God. They celebrate the holiday by feasting, giving gifts, and being with family. The holiday falls on December 25 each year.

GOOD FRIDAY

Good Friday is the day Christians believe that Jesus died. Three days later, on Easter Sunday, they celebrate their belief that Jesus rose from the dead after being executed by Roman soldiers. Good Friday is marked with prayer; Easter is celebrated with feasting. Both holidays are observed during early to late spring.

YOM KIPPUR

Yom Kippur, usually in September or October, is the holiest day of the year for the Jewish community. The name of the holiday means “Day of Atonement.” To atone means to apologize. On Yom Kippur, Jews ask for forgiveness for the things they have done wrong during the year. They pray and fast from sundown one day to sundown the next day.

PASSOVER

Passover celebrates the freeing of Jewish slaves from Egypt. The holiday lasts for eight days, usually in March

or April. During Passover, Jews eat matzo, (unleavened bread) because those fleeing from Egypt did not have time to allow their bread to rise. People mark the holiday in a special prayer service at home.

EID UL-FITR

This holiday marks the end of Ramadan, the Muslim holy month. The name of the holiday means “Festival of Fast-Breaking,” which refers to breaking the fast (not eating) that is observed from sunup to sundown every day during Ramadan. People celebrate the holiday by praying, feasting, and visiting family. They also give to charity, which is required of every Muslim.

EID UL-ADHA

This Muslim holiday marks the end of the hajj, which is the pilgrimage to the holy city of Makkah that every Muslim must take during his or her life. Eid Ul-Adha is a day of thanksgiving and is celebrated by everyone, not just by those who make the pilgrimage in a given year. It commemorates the belief that Abraham obeyed God’s command to sacrifice his son Ishmael. The holiday is one of remembrance and forgiveness.

1. Some of these holidays are school holidays. On which of these holidays is your school closed?

2. Based on the information in the Wall Street Journal story, “Muslims Press for School Holidays in New York City,” answer the following questions:

What percentage of students in the New York public schools are Muslim? _____

What “political aspect” has come up regarding the question of Muslim holidays being school days off?

Why has Mayor Bloomberg opposed the idea of making the Muslim holidays school days off?

How did the Hillsborough County, Florida, schools deal with the question of religious holidays?

What has New York’s city council done regarding the Muslim holidays?

3. Do you think that the percentage of students from different religious traditions should affect which days schools are closed? Why or why not?
