



Winter is Not a Synonym for Christmas

By Educator Barnes – December 23, 2021

I remember when the time off at the end of December and the beginning of January was called Christmas break. Even though all of my classmates might not have celebrated Christmas in a religious or non-religious way, that is what break was called. In elementary school, I had an awesome music teacher, Mrs. Susan Tidrow. She put on spectacular shows in the winter and spring. She had two music clubs, Minstrels and Harmony Club. I was in Harmony Club. We stayed after school to practice for these shows. In 3rd grade, the winter performance was called "Twelve Modern Days of Christmas," and in 5th grade, it was called "It's Christmas Tree Time of the Year." We had a great time performing and singing Christmas songs, but everyone does not celebrate Christmas.

To become more inclusive, school districts across the United States switched from saying Christmas break to winter break. I was in middle school when I noticed the shift. This shift remains today, but in most places, it is only lip service. Winter celebrations and activities before break seem to be no different than activities when I was in elementary school in the late 80s and early 90s.

My sons' last day before winter break was Wednesday, December 22, but they had winter spirit days from Monday, December 13 until the last day of school. What I appreciated about the calendar sheet that was sent home were the inclusion of pictures. I know first hand how a spirit week can go wrong if students don't understand what they are supposed to wear. The downfall was also the pictures. Five of the eight pictures were clearly associated with Christmas. Even though the word winter was used, Christmas could have been used instead. *Also, side note, why on Earth was the last day dress to impress? You want children to wear dresses and suits on the same day as the winter parties. Who is going to pay that dry cleaning bill?*

When I looked through my elementary school yearbooks for third and fifth grade, I felt nostalgia. I had some fun celebrating Christmas at school. That nostalgia is what carries on these non-inclusive traditions in present day. I am not against wearing red or green or doing holiday activities but children need to know the bigger picture of what various families do during this time of year. Children should learn about multiple holidays. They should also learn about why some people don't celebrate holidays.

Additionally, the celebration could really be just about winter. If it is truly a winter celebration, teach students about the winter solstice, have them learn about how the weather differs in different places this time of year.

If school leaders don't want to take that path, they can have parties to celebrate academic growth and achievement ... remember the main focus of school is to learn.

... but Shawnta, we are on winter break now. What is the point?

The point is to prepare for next school year. Principals are already in the mode of planning the 2022-2023 calendar. Now is the time for teachers and leaders to take a critical look and see if the winter activities are really winter activities or just a cover for secretly celebrating Christmas.