Latino Traditions: ¡feliz cumpleaños!

**Purpose**
Participants will learn about the traditions and customs of a birthday celebration from another culture. This lesson fits under the 4-H Citizenship program priority.

**Iowa CORE Skills**
- Understand the concept of culture
- Understand that peoples’ values and behavior are shaped by their culture
- Understand that a large society may be made up of many groups, and these groups may contain many different subcultures
- Understand the influence of perception, attitudes, values, and beliefs on personal identity

**Time**
60 – 90 minutes

**Group Size**
10 – 20, but can be flexible

**Age Group**
9 – 13

**Materials**
- Drawing materials (pencils, markers, paper, etc.)
- Means for showing video clips
- Optional craft: Colorful tissue paper, pipe cleaner, scissors

**Background**
The goal of this lesson is for youth to understand the concepts of culture and develop an appreciation for cultures different from their own. This begins with acknowledgement of their own culture’s values, beliefs and traditions which will provide a foundation to build upon when discussing and analyzing the ways of other cultures from around the world. In this lesson, youth will reflect on birthday celebrations in the United States and explore the many characteristics of birthday celebrations in Latin American countries, including: Spanish birthday vocabulary, the history of the piñata, birthday basics (food, dance, song, outfits, decorations, etc.) and a look at a very special celebration: the Quinceañera. This lesson is meant to expose youth to the ways of
culture. Birthdays are something every child experiences which makes it a topic youth can relate to. Because they will have preexisting beliefs based on their experiences, they should be reminded to keep an open mind – there is no one way or right way of doing something.

**Vocabulary**
Culture: goes beyond characteristics, customs, traditions, artifacts and institutions. It is also a collective way of being, thinking, valuing the past, present and future, reasoning, problem solving, and relating to others (Mestenhauser, 1998).

**Spanish birthday vocabulary**
To sing – cantar  
Candy – el caramelo  
Gift – el regalo  
Cards – las tarjetas  
Candles – las velas  
Cake – la tarta  
Doll – la muñeca  
Hat – el sombrero  
Toys – los juguetes

**Procedures**
**Overview**
Open with an overview of the workshop and introduce the key vocabulary word: culture. Ask participants to brainstorm and share with the group what they already know or think about culture before you give them the formal definition. Be sure to explain that when talking about culture, even individuals within a culture are not all the same. For example, when we think about our culture here in the United States, we in Iowa live in a very agricultural state and are not the same as people living in a big city like Chicago. However, generally speaking, the big picture of our culture – our beliefs, value and relations with others in the United States are similar. So when talking about Latino culture, we cannot automatically assume that this information is true for every Latino individual. We are only talking generally, i.e. the big picture.

**Opening Activity**
Ask participants to share what they know about Latin American countries and any vocabulary words they know. For example, see if they know where Latin American countries are in relation to the United States and how many countries they can name. Follow up with sharing the names of countries that they did not mention.
Birthdays in Our Culture
Introduce the topic of birthdays and ask them to think about how birthdays are celebrated in their culture, whether it is in the context of family, school, friends, etc. Divide the participants into groups of 2-4 individuals and assign each group a topic relating to birthdays. Examples include: food, decorations, music/dance, what you wear, who is invited, etc. Groups can brainstorm ideas related to their topic, create a brief skit/talk and present their ideas to the rest of the large group. See if the large group has anything to add after each topic is presented.

Spanish Vocabulary
Next they will learn some simple Spanish vocabulary words. Using the small groups from the previous activity, assign one or two vocabulary words from the “Spanish birthday vocabulary” list above and allow them to draw a picture of a scene that includes their Spanish vocabulary. Small groups will present their masterpiece to the large group. When doing so, small group participants can use English to describe their picture, but cannot use the English vocabulary words they were assigned. For example, if a group is assigned the words candles – las velas and cake – la torta, then when describing their picture they may say, “The birthday girl or boy will blow out las velas and then everyone will eat la torta.” After they describe the picture, the other small groups can try to determine what the Spanish words translate to in English.

Latino Birthday Traditions
After vocabulary, the group will complete a craft making decorations that are often found at Latino birthday parties; colorful, paper flowers. The following link gives easy-to-follow instructions about how to make “Mexican Tissue Paper Flowers.”

One thing they may be familiar with in Latino birthday celebrations is the popular use of the piñata. In fact, sometimes the piñata is used in birthday celebrations in the United States, too. Ask participants to share what they know about the piñata, and then share the following history with them:

Though the piñata is often associated with traditional celebrations in Latin American cultures, the Chinese culture is where its history began. It was decorated with colorful figures of oxen, buffalo or cows which would mark the beginning of the Chinese New Year and celebrate the coming of spring. Marco Polo introduced the concept of the piñata when he traveled through China. Spanish explorers later took the piñata and other traditions and customs to Latin American countries. Piñata making is one of the most well-known Latin American customs, but do you know the rich culture and
tradition that piñatas symbolize? One explanation comes from the tradition of the Posada celebration, in which the piñata symbolizes the battle between good and evil. The piñata is very beautiful and represents temptation which must be smashed in order that good may come to all. Originally piñatas for the posada were shaped like stars to represent the star that was followed to Bethlehem. The stick is used to destroy the sins. Finally, the candies and treats that come pouring out from the broken piñata symbolize the forgiveness of sins and a new beginning (Edwards, 2005).

**Quinceañera**
Similar to what a child in the U.S. may know as a Sweet Sixteen birthday, the Quinceañera is a special celebration when Latino girls reach the age of 15. Visit the following link to find information to share about “The Quinceañera Celebration.”
http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/chngmexico/3.0

Mariachi music is often a key component of Latino celebrations. You can have youth experience this music along with the traditional song, Las Mananitas, by playing the YouTube video “Las mañanitas tradicionales con mariachi.” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bFf5_XP-It8.

A good video that shows various components of a typical Quinceañera celebration can be found by watching the “Mexican Quinceañera Tampa with Drone” video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F4hT_0Sj-Eg. You may pick and choose which parts you want to show, if not the whole video.

Finally, have the youth compare and contrast the Latino birthday traditions to their own.

**Group Reflection and Application**
1. What is something you learned today that surprised you?
2. What did you learn when working with others in a group?
3. Why is it important to learn about other cultures?
4. What are some ways you can apply this new knowledge in your day-to-day life?

**References**

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