

Festivals in the Waldorf School and Celebrating the Lantern Walk in the Children's Garden

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Festivals

Festivals are a celebration of life. Each festival is a mood and an experience, a social expression reflecting the season. Celebrating festivals together is a great way to build a sense of community in our school, or within our families.

“Celebrating festivals illuminates our life on earth with meaning and shows us the significance of our human existence in the universe.

– Evelyn Frances Derry, *Festivals and Seasons*

Waldorf schools all over the world are known for their beautiful festivals. There are both universal festivals you might find in any Waldorf school, as well as celebrations brought to reflect the particular community or culture where they are. At home, festivals and holidays can enrich family life and help establish a comforting yearly rhythm. Festivals create a sense of belonging and mark the rhythms of the year. Children thrive on repetition and consistency. Traditions can be created in your family that follow your children through life. Rudolf Steiner spoke often about rhythm – we consider the rhythm of the year, month, week and day. Festivals mark the rhythm of the seasons. Together, we can celebrate these universal seasonal festivals. In preparing for a festival, it's important for parents and teachers to explore the essence of the festival. This can be inspiring as it reminds us of the important work we are doing with the children, and to deepen the celebration itself for us individually.

Preparing for a Festival at Home

Plan a preparation day about a week before your festival celebration if you can in order to make items that will be part of the festival and to practice songs and verses. This helps to build anticipation for the special day.

When planning a festival, a very simple structure incorporates four components:

1. Songs and Verses
2. A Story
3. An Activity
4. Food to Share

Many of our memories from childhood celebrations include sensory experiences and the feelings that those experiences engender. Plan with the senses in mind and you will create a festival that brings strength to all participants and re-enlivens our love for being human.

The Lantern Walk

The Lantern Walk is a simple, reverent event bringing to life for our youngest children their role as a spark of light in the dark of night — a spark of light in the world. As the sun sets earlier and the world grows darker, this tradition of making and carrying lanterns into the dark evening symbolizes that the inner light of humankind wants to shine forth.

Every November, the Lantern Walk affirms symbolically that light can continue to shine, even as the light and warmth of the sun are waning. This festival is held after dusk, when our lantern light breaks through the outer darkness of approaching winter. It marks the end of harvest and the beginning of winter. Now light and warmth come more from our homes, and from the fellowship of friends and family. Carrying a light into the darkness in the company of others – as we do during the Lantern Walk – can be reassuring. As we journey into the darkest time of the year, it is increasingly important for each of us to kindle warmth and light in our hearts.



Create a Lantern Walk or Festival for just your family or a group of friends. This is a wonderful event to plan for November. This can be a magical experience around Thanksgiving. This festival is for all ages to experience the magic of a Lantern Walk outdoors, Though we have limitations at this moment in time around getting together in groups, in any size group you can create a lovely fall ritual for yourself and your children.

This festival hearkens back to a time when children in Great Britain and Europe carved out turnips and other small squashes, making them into lanterns to carry throughout their villages after dark (where our Jack-O-Lantern comes from!). It is also a time of year when we recognize that the cold and darkness are coming, and we band together to help each other as the darkness closes in. The essence of this festival is to acknowledge the light that shines forth from each of us. This light needs to be protected, just as the lights inside our lanterns do, so they don't blow out. Like one song says: "Each of us is one small light, but together we shine bright!"

This can be held in your yard, or at a local park or trail at dusk. If you venture beyond your yard, you may want to look for a park that has a shelter, an outdoor fireplace and some trees where you can set out a path lit with lanterns for walking through. It's helpful if you are able to have one adult arrive an hour or so before everyone else to set out the path.

- For this festival in particular, it helps to remind everyone that while we walk the lighted path each carrying a lantern (that we made ahead of time and parents carry a lantern too), we are singing or silent. If talking is necessary, we whisper!
- Older children can recite a memorized verse or a poem in front of the outdoor fireplace. Then a story like the one included here called *The Lantern* can be presented.
- While lighting all the lanterns, older children might play one of the songs on recorder. Parents and older children who know the songs can be in the front or back of your group.
- After the lantern walk, a fireside snack or meal can be shared. In cold November weather a meal of soup, muffins and hot cider can be warming and satisfying.

In preparation for this festival make lanterns and practice the songs. Instructions for a few types are included here. Also included is a song sheet that can be printed, and recordings to help parents to learn it before practicing with the children. After celebrating a Lantern Festival for a number of years, you will accumulate many lanterns that can be used to set out on the ground to create a lighted path through the forest, and brought to create a beautiful glow in your home each fall.

Story for the Lantern Festival



The Lantern

(file copy of story attached)

Once there was a girl. Through the dark streets she carried her little lantern and happily enjoyed its shine. Wheel came the wind and blew with might! It snuffed out the candle - blew out the light! "Oh!" said the girl, "Who can light my lantern again?" She looked all around – there was no one to be found.

A hedgehog scampered along. "Oh dear hedgehog," said the girl, "the wind blew out my candle. Who can light my lantern again?" "Cannot tell you, ask the bear. Cannot stay, home to my children I must go on my way."

The girl walked on. A big brown bear came tramping. "Oh dear bear," said the girl, "the wind blew out my candle. Do you know who can light it again?" The bear shook his fuzzy head, "Cannot tell you, ask the fox. I'm tired and sleepy, need to rest."

Next came the fox, sneaking through the pass, "What are you doing here in the woods?" he said to the girl. "Go back to your home. You are chasing away my mouse."

The girl sat on a stone and cried. "Is there nobody who will help me?" The stars heard her crying and said, "To Father Sun next go. Father Sun is the one who'll know."

Then the girl took new courage and went on. Finally she came to a small hut, in it sat an old woman at the spinning wheel. The girl opened the door and asked the kind woman, "Do you know the way to the Sun? Will you come with me?" "Oh no!" said the old woman, "I must turn the wheel and spin, spin, spin a fine, fine thread. But sit a little while with me, you still have a long way to go." The girl sat down and rested. After she had rested, she took her lantern and went on.

And again she came to a small hut; in it sat the old cobbler and hammering his shoes. "Good day, dear cobbler, do you know the way to the sun? Will you go with me?" "Oh no!" replied the cobbler, "I have to patch many more shoes. But rest a little while with me you still have a long way to go." The girl sat down and rested. After a few moments of rest, she took her lantern again and went on.

At last she saw a tall mountain in the distance. "There the sun must live," she thought to herself and ran as fast as a deer. Near the mountain she saw a small boy playing with his ball. "Come with me," called the girl, "We are going to Father Sun!" But the child rather wanted to play and went skipping over the meadow with his ball.

So the girl continued on her path alone. Higher and higher up the mountain she climbed.

However, when up there she did not find the sun. "I shall wait here, till the sun comes," she thought, and sat down on the ground. And as she was so tired of the long walk, her eyes closed, and she fell asleep.

But the sun had seen her for a long time already. And as the evening came, the sun came down and lit the lantern. The girl awoke. "Oh! My lantern is shining again!" she cried out, jumped up and happily went on her path.

Again she met the child. "I lost my ball and cannot find it anywhere." "I will light your way," said the little girl. "There it is," cried the child and happily skipped away.

The girl kept walking back into the valley until she came to the cobblers hut. Sad, the cobbler was sitting in his shop, "My fire went out. Now my hands are stiff from the cold, and I cannot patch the shoes anymore." "I will light your fire again," cried the girl. The cobbler warmed his hands and again could busily hammer and sew.

Slowly the girl continued walking through the forest. She came to the old woman's hut. "My light is burnt out," said the old woman. "I have not been able to spin for a long time." "I will light it for you," said the girl happily. The old woman went back to her spinning wheel, and spun, spun a fine, fine thread.

At last the girl came on to the open field and all the animals awoke from the light of her lantern. The fox sniffed and blinked into the light. The big old bear growled and grumbled and hid deeper in his winter's den. Curious, the hedgehog came along --"What big firefly is that?"

Happily the girl returned home, singing the song:

Glimmer Lantern Glimmer

*Glimmer lantern glimmer, little stars a-shimmer.
Over meadow, moor and dale flutter flutter elfin veil.
Pee-wit pee-wit, tick-a-tick-a-too, coo-coo-roo-coo.
Glimmer lantern glimmer, little stars a-shimmer.
Over rock and stock and stone wander tripping little gnome.
Pee-wit, pee-wit, tick-a-tick-a-too, coo-coo-roo-coo.*

LANTERN WALK SONGS

(Lyric Sheet and Audio Recording attached)

Gimmer Lantern Glimmer

Lantern Walk Song

Autumn Is Here

Twinkle Twinkle Little Star (with extra verses)

Making a Lantern



Here are links to a few different lantern designs:

[Balloon Lantern](#)

[Waldorf Paper Lantern](#)

[Glass Decoupage Lantern](#)

[Paper Dodecahedron Lantern](#) (for adult or older child)