## Lecture 8. American national holidays and traditions.

**Plan:**

1. National celebrations: New Year, Independence day.
2. Religious holidays: Easter, Christmas, Thanksgiving day.
3. Fun days: Valentine’s day, Halloween.

**1. National celebrations: New Year, Independence day.**

## National celebrations

Although the United States is young compared to other countries, its culture and traditions are rich because of the contributions made by many groups of people who have come to its shores over the past three centuries. Hundreds of regional holidays have originated from the geography, climate and history of the different parts of the country. Each state holds its own annual fair with local themes and music; and some celebrate the day on which they joined the union and became a state.

In Pennsylvania towns people celebrate the fall foliage by demonstrating ways of cooking that have been handed down to them by their ancestors. Spring festivals are common here with costumed theatrical performances and parades.

African Americans observe Kwanzaa, a holiday based on the African celebration of the first harvest of the year. Founded upon the seven principles of unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity and faith, Kwanzaa encourages African Americans to think about their African roots in addition to their present-day life in America. African Americans exchange gifts as rewards for their achievements; and they light seven candles to remind them of the principles which unite them.

Winters are long in many Midwestern states, so winter festivals have become social events. Winter Carnival in Minnesota offers exhibitions in skating, skiing, ice fishing and even snowmobile races. In Michigan a winter festival, called Tip-Up-Town, offers a contest for the best sculpture carved in ice.

In Houston Texans come to the Astrodome to see cowboys ride horses and rope cattle during the Livestock show and Rodeo. Visitors watch the Hopi Indians carry on their strong tradition of rain dancing, a combination of dancing and prayer to ask for rain in a hot dry August.

Hawaii is warm the year round, and flower festivals were held there even before it became a state. A large colorful garland of orchids worn around the neck, is a sign of friendship and welcome for visitors to the islands all year. The biggest celebration of the year is the legal holiday Kamehameha day on June 11. Honolulu begins to fill with enormous floats, on which costumed people stand among scenes from the history of Hawaii. Someone is chosen every year to sit on the main float and represent King Kamehameha the First, who was the first of five monarchs to rule Hawaii over a hundred years.

These are only a small representation of the hundreds of holidays and celebrations observed throughout the United States. Each state has its own individual history and people, and the right to celebrate its own tradition. But one thing is certain all Americans welcome you to celebrate with them!

Check your comprehension.

1. Why do Americans think that their traditions are rich?

4. What is Kwanzaa?

9. What kind of a holiday is Kamehameha?

**New Year**

The beginning of the new year has been welcomed on different dates throughout history. Ways of celebrating differ as well, according to customs and religions of the world.

In the United States the legal holiday is January first, but Americans begin celebrating on December 31. Sometimes people have masquerade balls, where guests dress up in costumes and cover their faces with masks. According to an old tradition, guests unmask at midnight.

On January first Americans visit friends, relatives and neighbors. There is plenty to eat and drink when you just drop in to wish your loved ones and friends the best for the year ahead. Many families and friends watch television together enjoying the Tournament of Roses Parade in California. At first the parade was a line of decorated horse-drawn private carriages.

In later years colleges began to compete in football games on New Year's day and these gradually replaced other athletic competitions. The parade of floats grew longer from year to year and flower decorations grew more elaborate. Today the parade is usually is more than five miles long with thousands of participants in the marching bands and on the floats. City officials ride in the cars pulling the floats. The queen of the tournament rides on a special float which is always the most elaborate one of the parade. The cities with the most unusual and attractive floral displays are awarded with prizes. After the Parade, the Rose Bowl football game is played.

The Mummer's Parade in Philadelphia is a ten-hour spectacle. Clowns, musicians, dancers and floats - all are led by King Momus dressed in gleaming satin. All these events make the first of January one of the most entertaining and relaxing holiday.

In most cultures people promise to better themselves in the following year. Americans have inherited the tradition and even write down their New Year's resolutions; eg.: "Mike Nicolson will stop smoking for good". But whatever the resolution, most of them are broken or forgotten by February.

Check your comprehension.

1. When is New Year celebrated in America?

2. What are masquerade balls?

3. What is Tournament of Roses Parade?

**Independence Day**

By the middle of the 1700s, the thirteen colonies that made up part of England's empire in the New World found it difficult to be ruled by a king 3000 miles across the Atlantic Ocean. They were tired of the taxes imposed upon them. But independence was a gradual and painful process. The colonists could not forget that they were British citizens, and that they owed allegiance to King George III.

A "tea party" and firing of the British soldiers into the crowd were two events that hurried destiny. These events united the colonists.

Virginia took the first step toward independence by voting to set up a committee to represent the colonies. This First Continental Congress met in September of 1774. They drew up a list of grievances against the crown which became the first draft of a document that would formerly separate the colonies from England. George Washington took command of the Continental Army and began fighting the British in Massachusetts. For the next eight years colonists fought strongly in the Revolutionary War.

Day is celebrated on July 4 because that is the day when the Continental Congress approved the Declaration of Independence. From July 8, 1776 until the next month, the document was read publicly and people celebrated whenever they heard it. The next year, in Philadelphia, bells rang and ships fired guns; candles and firecrackers were lighted. But the War of Independence went on until 1783, and in that year Independence Day was made an official holiday.

Every July fourth, Americans have a holiday from work. Communities have day-long picnics with favorite foods. The afternoon activities would not be complete without lively mu sic, a friendly baseball game, a pie-eating or a watermelon-eating contests. Children enjoy participating in three-legged races foot races, in which one person's left leg is tied to another person's right leg, and they must run on three legs. Some cities have parades with people dressed as the original founding fathers who march in parade to the music of high school bands. At night people in towns and cities gather to watch the fireworks display. Wherever Americans are around the globe, they will get together for a traditional 4th of July celebration.

Check your comprehension.

1. Why did they find difficult to be ruled by their King?

2. What state was the first to declare of independence?

3. How long did the Civil War last?

4. Why is June 4 celebrated as Independence Day?

## 2.Religious holidays: Easter, Christmas, Thanksgiving day.

**Easter**(A Sunday in March or April)

The world “Easter” is named after Eostre, the Anglo-Saxon goddess of spring and sunrise, and she got her name from the word east, where sun rises. People celebrate the holiday according to their beliefs. Christians commemorate Good Friday as the day that Jesus Chris died, and Easter as the day that He was resurrected. Protestant settlers brought the custom of a sunrise service, a religious gathering at dawn to the United States.

Easter comes on a Sunday between March and April. At Easter people buy new clothes to wear on Easter Sunday. There is a popular belief that wearing three things on Easter will bring good luck in the year. After church services many people like to take walks down the streets in their new Easter hats and suits. This colorful procession of people dressed in bright new spring clothes is called the “Easter Parade”.

At Easter people exchange presents which traditionally take the form of an Easter egg, a symbol of wealth. The ancient custom of dyeing eggs at Easter time is still very popular.

On Easter Sunday children wake up to find that the Easter Bunny has left them baskets of candy. The Easter Bunny is a rabbit-spirit. The rabbit is known to be the most fertile animal, that's why it became a symbol of fertility. The Easter Rabbit is used to hide the eggs that children decorated earlier. Children hunt for the eggs all around the house. Neighborhoods and organizations hold Easter egg hunts, and the child who finds the most eggs wins a prize. The custom of an Easter egg hunt began because children believed that hares laid eggs in the grass. Christians consider eggs to be "the seed of life" and so they are symbolic of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

British settlers brought the custom of rolling eggs down hills to America. This game has been connected to the rolling away of the rock from Jesus Christ's tomb when He was resurrected. In the United States, according to the tradition, the first Lady of the country invites the children of Washington to roll hardboiled eggs down the hilly lawn of the Capitol building.

Check your comprehension.

1. What kind of a holiday is Easter?

2. What is Easter Parade?

3. What does the Easter bunny symbolize?

**Christmas** (December, 25)

Christmas ['kristmǝs]-Рождество

Jesus Christ ['dzi:zǝs kraist]-Иисус Христос

Santa Claus ['sæntǝ klǝ:z] - - Дед Мороз

Christmas is a joyful religious holiday when Christians all over the world celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. There are a lot of traditions connected with Christmas but perhaps the most important one is giving and receiving presents.

Immigrant settlers brought Father Christmas, whose name was gradually changed to Santa Claus, to the United States.

American gave Santa Claus a white beard, dressed him in a red suit and made him a friendly old gentleman with red cheeks and a twinkle in his eye.

American children believe that Santa Claus lives in the North Pole with his wife. All year he lists the names of children, both those who have been good and those who have been bad. On December 24, Christmas Eve, Santa hitched his eight reindeer to a sleigh, and loads it with presents. The reindeer pull him and his sleigh through the sky to deliver presents to children all around the world, that is if they had been good all year. Children leave a long stocking at the end of their beds on Christmas Eve, hoping that Santa Claus will come down the chimney during the night and bring them small presents, fruit and nuts.

Christmas is a traditional family reunion day. Going home for Christmas is a most cherished tradition of the holiday. No matter where you may be the rest of the year, being at home with your family and friends for Christmas is "a must". This means that the house will be full of cousins, aunts and uncles that might not see each other during the year. Everyone joins in to help in the preparation of the festivities. Some family members go to choose a Christmas tree to buy and bring home. Others decorate the house, or wrap presents. And of course, each house hold needs to make lots of food. Each family has a big Christmas dinner in the afternoon or in the evening. They usually eat roast turkey or goose and Christmas pudding.

On the Sunday before Christmas many churches hold a carol service where special hymns are sung. Sometimes carol-singers can be heard on the streets as they collect money for charity. Schools have Christmas parties. Children sing carols and recite Christmas poems.

Another important custom of Christmas is to send and receive Christmas cards, in which people wish each other 'A Merry Christmas' and 'A Happy New Year'.

Check your comprehension.

1. What kind of a holiday is Christmas?

2. What does reunion day mean?

3. What presents do people traditionally exchange on Easter?

**Thanksgiving day** (Fourth Thursday in November)

The American Thanksgiving holiday began as a feast of thanksgiving in the early days of the American colonies almost four hundred years ago.

In 1620 a boat filled with more than one hundred people sailed across the Atlantic Ocean to settle in the New World. The Pilgrims settled in what is now the state of Massachusetts. Their first winter in the New World was difficult. They had arrived too late to grow many crops; and without fresh food half the colony died from disease, cold and lack of food. The following spring the Iroquois Indians taught them how to grow corn (maize), a new food for the colonists. They showed them other crops to grow in the unfamiliar soil and how to hunt and fish.

In the autumn of 1621, plentiful crops of corn, barley, beans and pumpkins were harvested. The colonists had much to be thankful for, so a feast was planned to thank the Indians for teaching them how to cook those foods. Without the Indians, the first settlers would not have survived. They invited the local Indian chief and ninety Indians. The Indians brought deer to roast with the turkeys and other wild game offered by the colonists. The feast lasted for a week. The colonists fired а cannon as a salute. That was the first celebration of their thankfulness, giving thanks to God for their survival in the new land, Thanksgiving, and to this day the occasion is celebrated by all families.

Nowadays Thanksgiving Day is a family holiday. Family members usually gather for a reunion at the house of an older relative. All give thanks together for the good things that they have. They have a big family dinner- roast turkey, corn pudding, a pumpkin pie and cranberry jelly. In the spirit of sharing, civic groups and charitable organizations offer a traditional meal to those in need, particularly the homeless. They often have a big football game on that day.

Cheeck your comprehension.

1. How did the American Thanksgiving holiday begin?

2. Who taught the first settlers to survive in the New World?

3. How do people celebrate Thanksgiving Day today?

**3.Fun days: Valentine’s day, Halloween.**

**Valentine’s day** (February, 14)

St. Valentine's Day has roots in several different legends that have found their way to us through the ages. One of the earliest popular symbols of the day is Cupid, the Roman god of Love, who is represented by the image of a young boy with bow and arrow.

Valentine, a Christian priest, who didn't believe in the Roman god, had been thrown in prison for his teachings. On February 14, Valentine was beheaded, not only because he was a Christian, but also because he had performed a miracle. He supposedly cured the jailer's daughter of her blindness. The night before he was executed, he wrote the jailer's daughter a farewell letter, signing it, "From Your Valentine".

Another Valentine was an Italian bishop who was imprisoned because he secretly married couples, contrary to the laws of the Roman emperor. Some legends say he was burned at the stake.

February 14 was also a Roman holiday, held in honor of a goddess. Young men randomly chose the name of a young girl to escort to the festivities. The custom of choosing a sweetheart on this date spread through Europe in the Middle Ages, and then to the early American colonies.

Whatever the odd mixture of origins, St. Valentine's Day is now a day for sweethearts. It is the day when you show your affection to your friend or loved one. You can send candy or roses, the flower of love. Most people send "valentines", greeting cards. Valentines can be sentimental, romantic and sincere. They can be funny and friendly. These are coloured greeting cards with pictures of hearts, or words "I love you" and "Guess who". They often contain verses; ex: "I'll be your sweetheart, if you are mine, all of my life I'll be your Valentine"; or "Roses are red, violets are blue, you know how much I love you". If the sender is shy, valentines can be anonymous with a sign: "Your Secret Admirer".

Americans of all ages love to send and receive valentines. In elementary schools children make valentines for their classmates and put them in a large decorated box, similar to a mailbox. On February 14, the teacher opens the box and distributes the valentines to each student. After the students read their valentines, they have a small party with refreshments.

St. Valentine's Day is a time to let people know how much you love and appreciate them. It is a day, that makes everyone feel romantic and happy.

Check your comprehension.

1. When is St. Valentine's Day celebrated?

2. What kind of a holiday is St. Valentine's Day now?

3. What do people usually write on their greetings cards?

**Halloween.** (November, 1st)

November 1st is a religious holiday known as All Saints' Day or All Hallows' Day. The day before the holy day is known as All Hallows' Eve. The word Halloween comes from that form.

October 31st was the eve of the Celtic New Year. The Celts were the ancestors of the present-day Irish, Welsh and Scottish people. Halloween originated as a celebration connected with evil spirits. Witches flying on broomsticks with black cats, ghosts, goblins and skeletons have all evolved as symbols of Halloween. People thought that on that day the spirits of all those who had died during the last year would be wandering around in the search of living bodies. To save themselves from the spirits people lit bonfires, dressed up in a ghoulish manner and walked around the village making noise to frighten away dead souls. Much later, when Christianity spread throughout Ireland, and October 31 was no longer the last day of the year, Halloween became a celebration mostly for the children. Nowadays people do not believe in evil spirits. They mark this holiday by costume balls or fancy-dress parties. More and more adults celebrate Halloween. They dress up like historical or political figures and go to masquerade parties. Teenagers enjoy costume dances at their schools, and the more shocking the costume the better.

At Halloween parties children play traditional games. One of the most popular is called pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey: one child is blindfolded and spun slowly. Then the child must find a paper donkey hanging on the wall and try to pin a tail onto the back. Another game is bobbing for apples. One child at a time has to get apples from a tub of water without using hands. How? By sinking his or her face into the water and biting the apple.

Children like to visit houses and ask the traditional question "Trick or treat?" If the people in the house give the children a "treat", usually money or sweets, then the children will not play a trick on them.

Pumpkins are also a symbol of Halloween. Carving pumpkins for

jack-o’lantern is a Halloween custom also dating back to Ireland. A legend grew up about a man named Jack who was so stingy that he was not allowed into heaven when he died. His spirit was doomed to wander around the countryside, holding a lantern to light his way. The Irish people carved scary faces out of pumpkins and lit a candle inside, representing "Jack of Lan- tern" or Jack-o'lantern. Today jack-o'lanterns in the windows of a house on Halloween night let costumed children know that there are goodies waiting if they knock and say "Trick or Treat".

Check your comprehension.

1. What kind of a holiday is the 1st of November?

2. What does the word ‘Halloween’ mean?

4. What are the symbols of Halloween?