

Best time of the year!

Every year in Venezuela, we really look forward to December. It is really special because we celebrate the birth of Jesus. It is also the month of eating hallacas and "pan de jamón", the month of listening to "gaitas" on the radio (and everywhere you go!), the month of waiting for "el Niño Jesús" to bring gifts (although now it is Papá Noel), the month to show off new clothes, and it is the month of having tons of reasons to get together and enjoy all this.



Christmas usually starts early for us, early days of November and ends towards the end of January when we take down all the decorations. Most houses decorate their Christmas tree but a lot of them also put a "Nacimiento" (Nativity scene) or a "Pesebre". The "pesebre" is different because it represents an entire region with mountains, hills, houses and of course the central point is the manger at Bethlehem with Joseph, Mary, the three Wise men, the shepherd and the animals. They are all really beautiful!! The only figure you don't put is baby Jesus because he hasn't been born yet. You can set up a small "nacimiento" or "pesebre" in the classroom with your students. You can make it with paper or even use play dough. Kids will have fun doing it!



Photo taken from El Universal

Families get together on the 24th to celebrate Christmas and on the 31st for New Year's. We usually prepare big meals with our famous hallaca, "pan de

jamón" (ham bread), chicken salad and pork leg. For dessert we have our delicious "dulce de lechoza" and our "torta negra" (black cake). The hallaca is a corn dough stuffed with a stew of beef, pork or chicken and other ingredients that will depend on the region where you live. I will just say that I



love my mother's hallacas which is a recipe that has been passed down from generations. We stuff them with a stew with pork and beef and add raisins, plum, onions, olives, sweet peppers, and pickled vegetables. We fold them in plantain leaves, tie them with strings and boil them. It is hard work but at the same time we have fun just talking and laughing while preparing them. And when we are all around opening that first hallaca, just wanting to taste it and after we do, we look at each other, then we know it was worth it!

While we are together we listen to Christmas songs or "gaitas". There are many great songs but one of the children's favorite is "Mi Burrito Sabanero" written by Hugo Blanco. Here are the lyrics and a link so you can listen to it: https://youtu.be/Q5wnRmXw1_4. It is really easy to learn so you can sing the song with your students.

Con mi burrito sabanero
voy camino de Belén
Con mi burrito sabanero
voy camino de Belén

Si me ven, si me ven
voy camino de Belén
Si me ven, si me ven
voy camino de Belén

Con mi cuatrico voy cantando
y mi burrito va trotando
Con mi cuatrico voy cantando
y mi burrito va trotando

Si me ven, si me ven
voy camino de Belén
Si me ven, si me ven
voy camino de Belén

El lucerito mañanero,
ilumina mi sendero.
El lucerito mañanero,
ilumina mi sendero.

Si me ven, si me ven
voy camino de Belén
Si me ven, si me ven
voy camino de Belén

Tuqui Tuqui Tuquituqui
Tuquituqui Tu qui Ta
Apúrate mi burrito
que ya vamos a llegar

Tuqui Tuqui Tuquituqui
Tuquituqui Tu qui Ta
apúrate mi burrito
vamos a ver a Jesús

Now on New Year's Day we also get together and have a great meal while we wait for the 12 bells at midnight. On this day we have some very unusual traditions. After the last cannon, people go out with empty suitcases and just walk up and down the street with them. We believe that we will travel a lot this New Year by doing this. Another thing we do here is put on yellow underwear for luck or keep money in our pockets to bring prosperity. And the most popular one is eating the twelve grapes. We eat them one by one as each bell rings and for each one, we ask for a wish that we want to fulfill during the New Year. In class you can have your students write about their twelve wishes for the New Year.

So if you happen to be in Venezuela or just celebrating New Year's Day with a Venezuelan family, be sure to have your twelve wishes ready, put on yellow underwear, have money in your pocket and get your suitcase ready to have wishes, prosperity, luck and a lot of travelling this New Year.

We wish you a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!!

Geovanna Delgado