

MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS  
IN A MODERN WORLD

# relating

## 5 FAMILY TRADITIONS FROM AROUND THE WORLD WORTH TRYING

By Betsy Rubiner

1

### Give a bright start to school, the German way.

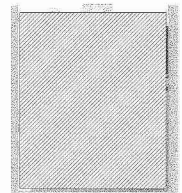
The kickoff to first grade is a big deal in Germany, as my American family learned while living in Berlin. The week-end before our daughter started first grade, we joined a celebration called *Einschulung*. Her school welcomed students with an assembly; afterward, families gave the children *Schultüten*—large paper or plastic cones filled with school supplies and sweets. When we moved back to the United States, we replicated *Einschulung* for my son. We invited our family over and asked them to bring a small school-related gift, like a notebook or pen. We made him a *Schultüte*, and the older kids put on a play about what school is like. It makes the children feel responsible, grown-up, and proud to be going to school.

**SARA ZASKE** IS THE AUTHOR OF *ACHTUNG BABY: AN AMERICAN MOM ON THE GERMAN ART OF RAISING SELF-RELIANT CHILDREN*. SHE LIVES IN MOSCOW, IDAHO.



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**2**  
**Honor ancestors, the Japanese way.**

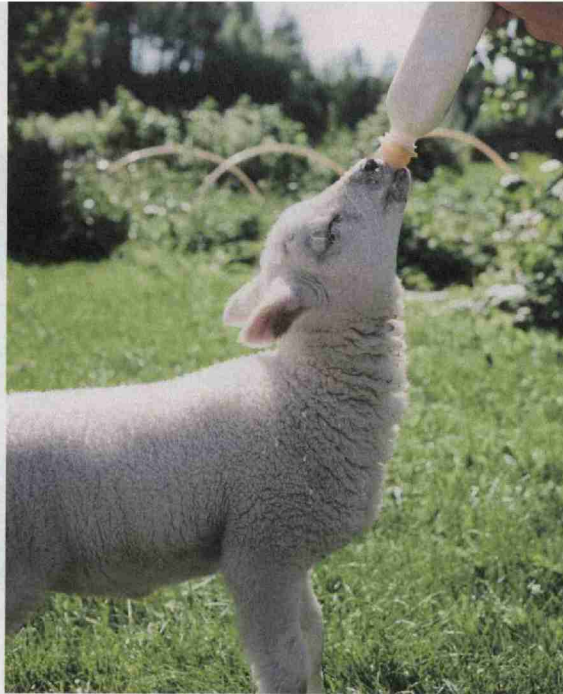
Traditional Japanese homes have a small family altar, or butsudā, as a sign of respect for elders who have passed away. When I go back to my family's home in Japan, I still feel a spiritual connection to my ancestors as I make offerings at the butsudā—a bowl of rice, flowers for my grandmother, a can of beer for my grandfather. It feels truly healing. To set up a memorial, pick a quiet spot, put out photos, flowers, and other offerings, and tell kids about their ancestors. If we don't mark our history, we may lose an important part of who we are.

**CANDICE KUMAI** IS A CHEF AND THE AUTHOR OF *KINTSUGI WELLNESS: THE JAPANESE ART OF NOURISHING MIND, BODY, AND SPIRIT*. SHE LIVES IN BROOKLYN, NEW YORK.

**3**  
**Share your culture through stories, the Trinidadian way.**

In Trinidad and Tobago, where I grew up, storytelling happens anytime, anywhere—not just at bedtime. We might be driving to the beach or walking to my grandmother's house. People often tell folk stories about mythical creatures called jumbies to help explain things people don't understand, such as a sudden illness. Regardless of where you come from, there is a benefit to telling traditional stories. At some point, I realized my kids, who were growing up in the U.S., had no idea what our folklore was, so I started telling them jumbo stories. Telling these stories helps the children preserve their culture.

**TRACEY BAPTISTE** IS THE AUTHOR OF *JUMBIES*, PART OF A FANTASY SERIES FOR MIDDLE SCHOOLERS. BORN IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO, SHE NOW LIVES IN NORTHERN NEW JERSEY.



Go to [realsimple.com/familytree](https://realsimple.com/familytree) for ways to find out more about your cultural heritage.

**4**  
**Appreciate all animals, the Indian way.**

To show gratitude to animals, families in southern India feed cows and birds during the annual Hindu harvest festival of Thai Pongal. Children learn that all species are interconnected and interdependent. I've followed this tradition in both India and the United States with my daughters. In Bangalore, I used to take my young daughters to a nearby shed to feed the cows. We also fed birds by placing fruits and grains on banana leaves and putting them out on our terrace—something we also did surreptitiously at our New York City apartment. Pick a day for an annual visit to a petting zoo, butterfly garden, family-friendly farm, or horse stable where you can feed the animals or help care for them. It's a way to teach children about having compassion for all beings.

**SHOBA NARAYAN** IS THE AUTHOR OF *THE MILK LADY OF BANGALORE: AN UNEXPECTED ADVENTURE*. SHE LIVES IN BANGALORE, INDIA.

**5**  
**Exchange personal poetry, the Dutch way.**

In the Netherlands, families exchange not only gifts but also poems during Sinterklaas, the Dutch winter holiday season. Older children and adults each draw a name and write a poem about the recipient. The poem usually has puns and is funny—the more mischievous and personal, the better. On "gift night," people sit in a circle with hot drinks, and everyone reads the poem they receive out loud. I've learned that the real gift is the love that goes into the poem. You're taking time to compose something special, letting someone know what they mean to you.

**RINA MAE ACOSTA** IS A WRITER, PHOTOGRAPHER, AND COAUTHOR OF *THE HAPPIEST KIDS IN THE WORLD: BRINGING UP CHILDREN THE DUTCH WAY*. SHE LIVES IN DOORN, THE NETHERLANDS.

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