

Discovery Theater



Recommended for
Ages 5 to 10
Grades K to 5



SEASONS OF LIGHT

A Reproducible Learning Guide for Educators

This guide is designed to help educators prepare for, enjoy, and discuss **Seasons of Light**. It contains background, discussion questions and activities appropriate for Ages 5-10.

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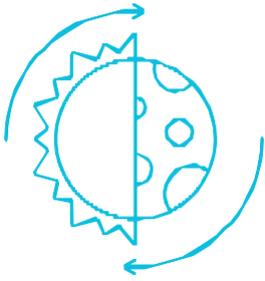
The Nora Roberts Foundation
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CELEBRATING LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS: THE SOLSTICE SEASON



People all over the world celebrate holidays at this time of year. Many of these holidays honor the harvest, signal the New Year, or bring families together to remember the past and look forward to the future. Many holidays are also rooted in the coming of the **shortest day of the year—the Winter Solstice (SOUL-stiss)**.

Today, we often enjoy holiday traditions without knowing where they came from. We sing songs, display colored lights, and repeat special activities with friends and family. Holly wreaths, chocolate coins, sharing special foods, giving gifts, candles lit in a row— these traditions all herald the ending of one year, and the renewal and hope of looking ahead to the next.

AFRAID OF THE DARK?

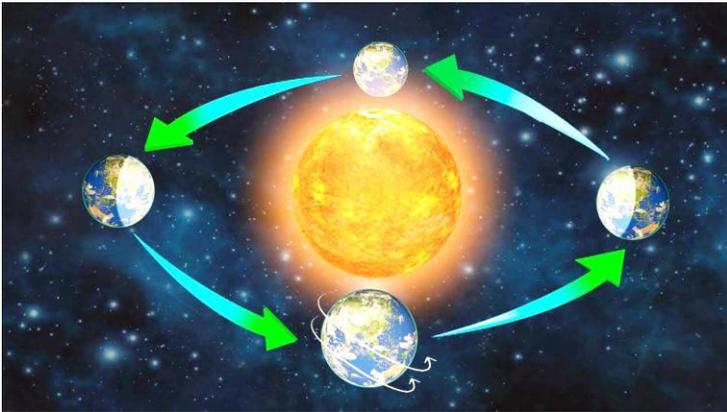
The Winter Solstice was a source of wonder and fear for primitive peoples. What if the days got shorter and shorter until warmth and daylight disappeared forever? What if the sun, the great fire in the sky that made the crops grow, vanished and never came back? What if the earth never recovered from the dark season?



All over the world, in almost every culture, ceremonies evolved to keep the sun alive at this dangerous time of the year. **People built huge fires that were kept burning through the night.** They hung branches of evergreens—miracle plants that stayed alive all year—inside their homes. And they gathered together to **renew their commitment to each other and their communities**, to ask the unseen forces of the spirit for blessings and protection, and to tell stories, sing songs, eat festive food, and perform the special rituals that had been handed down from their parents and grandparents.

The joy, warmth, and safety that came from these traditional gatherings kept the dark and cold at bay. They helped people understand that the sun would return and bring the promise of spring and a new year.

REASON FOR THE SEASONS



Seasons are not the same everywhere! In fact, the season in North America is different from the season that South America experiences on the other side of the equator. That is because of the earth's axis. The **axis** is the imaginary line that runs through the center of the earth.

The earth's axis is tilted slightly and as the earth orbits around the sun, the amount of light on a **hemisphere** differs. When it is winter above the equator, it is summer below the equator and vice versa!

Smithsonian Connection - Learn more about our solar system
[Solar System | National Air and Space Museum](#)

TRY IT OUT!

Rotation: Sun Dials

You can create a sundial with a paper plate and a pencil. When you put your sundial outside, you can see how the earth's rotation affects the light during the day.



Materials:

· Pencil · Paper Plate · Tape or Glue

Instructions:

1. In the center of the paper plate, poke a hole with the pencil. Just put the top of the pencil through the hole.
2. Use glue or tape to secure the pencil.
3. Place the sundial on the ground outside, the pencil will cast a shadow on the plate. It will move throughout the day!

Revolution: Pie Tin Orbit

This activity is a great way to see how the Earth and the other planets in our Solar System move, or orbit, around the sun.



Materials:

· Orange Playdough · Blue Ball · Pie Tin

Instructions:

1. Flatten the orange playdough (the Sun) in the center of the pie tin
2. Place the blue ball (the planet) in the pie tin.
3. Try and tilt the pie tin so that the planet orbits around the sun!

FESTIVALS OF LIGHT AROUND THE WORLD

Fire and candlelight continue to be symbols of hope for us even today. From India to Sweden to the United States, families share ancient traditions, molded by passing years to fit current ways of life. Their festivals have many things in common: candles and colored lights, making sweet treats to share with loved ones, giving gifts and decorating the home. As times change, new inventions like electric lighting help new traditions evolve from the old. The important parts remain, as we draw near to friends, family, and community to mark the end of one year and the beginning of the new.



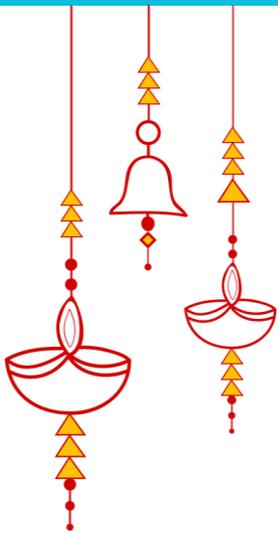
DIWALI (Dee-wah-lee)

Who: Hindus in India, Indian communities worldwide

When: 5 days in late October or early November

Why: To mark the New Year and commemorate the ancient story of King Rama and his wife, Sita, who was kidnapped and taken to a faraway island. Rama fought for fourteen years to rescue his wife. The night they returned was very dark, with no moonlight, so the people lit their houses and streets with candles to show the couple the way home. The word “Diwali” actually means “rows of lighted lamps.”

How: To celebrate this happy holiday, people clean their houses, wear colorful new clothes, eat delicious food and sweets, and set off fireworks! Some people illuminate their houses with oil lamps and electric lights to welcome Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity. Women and children decorate the ground outside their homes with colorful painted patterns, which are said to represent the goddess’s footsteps.



SANKTA LUCIA DAY (Sahnk-tah Loo-see-ah Day)

Who: Scandinavians (Denmark, Sweden and Norway)

When: December 13 (one of the coldest, darkest days of the year).

Why: Commemorates Saint Lucia, patron saint of light, who was said to have risen out of frozen lake to bring sweets to people working through a long, cold winter.

How: Early in the morning, a family’s oldest daughter puts on a crown of lighted candles and gathers her sisters. In a procession, they take sweet saffron buns to their parents, while singing traditional carols.



CHANUKAH (Hah-noo-kah)

Who: Members of the Jewish religion

When: Eight days in December.

Why: Commemorates an ancient miracle of light. Jewish tradition tells that more than 2000 years ago, in 165 BCE, the holy temple was rescued from an intolerant Greek leader. The temple lights had only enough oil left to burn for one day. The people hurried to make more oil, a process that took them eight days. Yet, when they returned, they were astounded to find the lamps had stayed lit, even though there had not been enough oil.

How: Today, Jews remember this miracle by lighting candles in a special candelabra called a menorah, which holds eight candles, with a ninth one in the middle. They gather family and friends to share special meals and gifts, sing songs, and play special games.



CHRISTMAS / LAS POSADAS (Lahs Poh-sah-dahs)

Who: Christians and others around the world.

When: Around December 25th. In some countries the holiday lasts for many days.

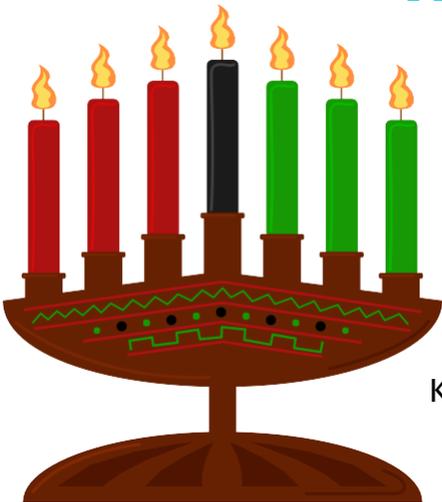
Why: Celebrates the Christian anniversary of the birth of the baby Jesus Christ.

How: People gather their family and friends for feasting, singing of carols, gift-giving, and to decorate the Christmas tree.



In our show, we present Las Posadas, a Mexican celebration that marks the travels of Jesus' parents, Mary and Joseph, who searched in the night looking for a place to stay. On December 16th, friends and families re-enact this journey by knocking on their neighbor's doors and asking, "Do you have lodging?" The neighbors tell them, "Go away, there's no room." In the end, the neighbors realize this is the Holy Family and invite them in. Children receive little bags filled with treats and toys, and adults sip fruit drinks mixed with brandy or rum. Traditionally, the celebration ends with more food, drink, dancing, and the breaking of a piñata.

KWANZAA (Kwahn-zah)



Who: African-Americans

When: Seven days beginning December 26th.

Why: Kwanzaa is non-religious celebration of family, community, and seven ethical principles to live by, much like the Christian Ten Commandments. Invented in the 1960s, Kwanzaa is rooted in harvest celebrations practiced in various cultures in Africa.

Kwanzaa is a week to remember and recommit to seven principles: *unity, self-determination, collective responsibility, cooperation, purpose, creativity, and faith*

To help do this, families light candles, sing, feast, and give thanks for a bountiful harvest. Objects such as an ear of corn and a libation cup are used during Kwanzaa to symbolize the seven principles. For instance, each of the seven candles stands for one principle. A new candle is lighted each day; the person who lights the candle explains what the principle is, and that becomes the topic of discussion for that day. All the special objects are arranged on a Mkeka (M kay kah), or Kwanzaa mat. *(To make your own Mkeka, see the Activities section!)*

TRY THESE CRAFTS AT HOME!

MAKE A DIWALI RANGOLI

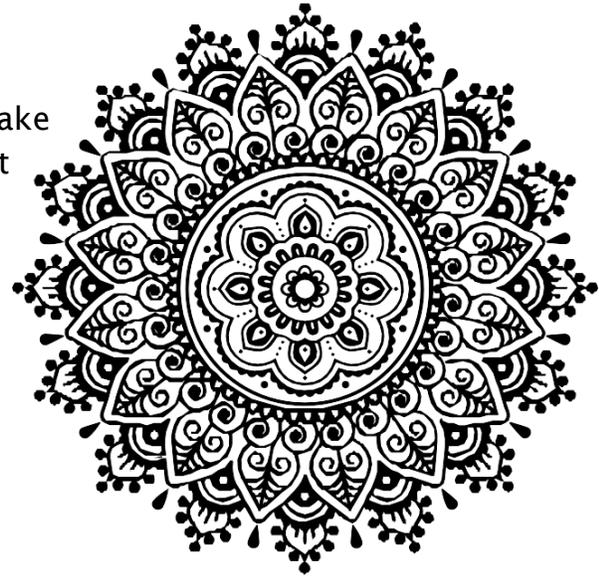
In some parts of India, during Diwali, women and children make beautiful patterns on the ground, called Rangoli, to represent the footsteps of the goddess of good fortune.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

· Construction paper · Tape · Chalk, markers, or crayons

DIRECTIONS:

1. Tape construction paper to the floor.
2. Draw your own lucky patterns!



Access printable Rangoli patterns here: [Rangoli Decorating Pages](#)

Smithsonian Connection - Learn more - [Diwali - National Museum of Asian Art](#)

MAKE A KWANZAA MAT (It's called a Mkeka!)

MATERIALS NEEDED:

· Black, red, and green construction paper · Scissors · Ruler · Tape or glue



DIRECTIONS:

1. Cut several one-inch strips of red and green paper.
2. Cut seven lines, like slits, an inch apart across the black paper, leaving a one-inch margin all around the edges.
3. Weave alternating red and green strips through the sheet of black paper.
4. Secure the ends with tape or glue.

Smithsonian Connection - Learn more about Kwanzaa:
[Kwanzaa | National Museum of African American History and Culture](#)

MAKE A HOLIDAY QUILT!

What holiday are you?

What winter holidays do you and your family celebrate?

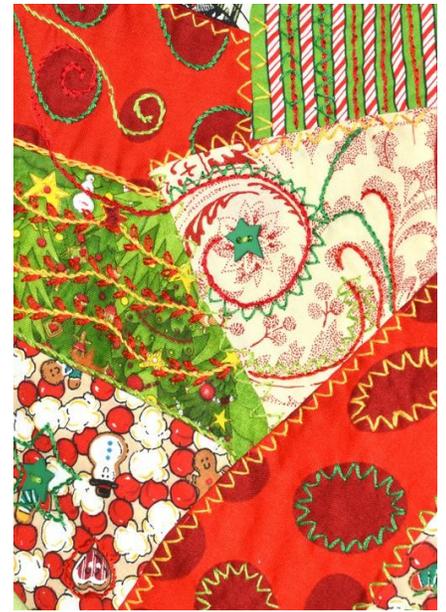
What traditions of your holiday do you like best?

How are the holidays celebrated by the kids in your class alike?

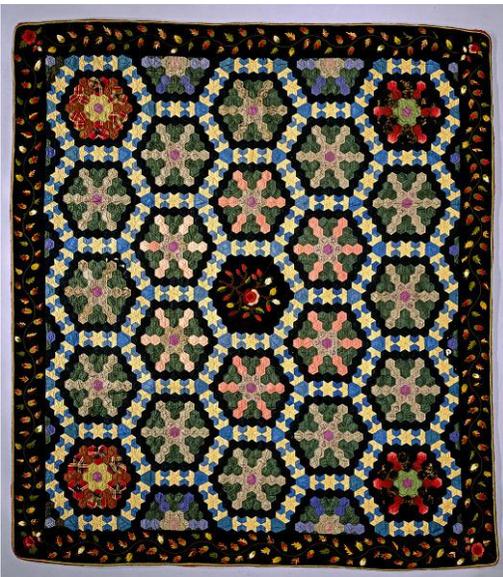
What do they have in common?

On a square of construction paper, draw your favorite part of your holiday. (If lots of kids in your class celebrate the same holiday, each should draw a different tradition from that holiday.)

Put all the squares together to show all the different traditions celebrated by your class.



Smithsonian Connection - 1840-1860 Hexagon Silk Quilt



Date Made: 1840 – 1860

Maker: Unknown

Location: National Museum of American History Collections

Material: Silk

Link to object: [National Museum of American History](#)

RELATED READING

Winter's Gifts: An Indigenous Celebration of Nature, by Caitlin Curtice, 2023. A young girl discovers all the things winter can teach her (Ages 3-7)

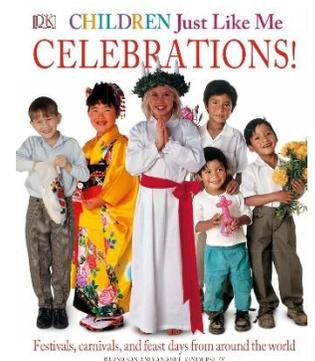
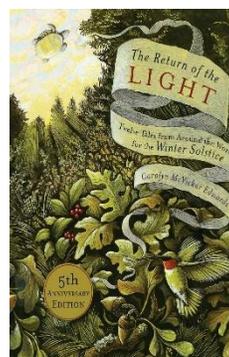
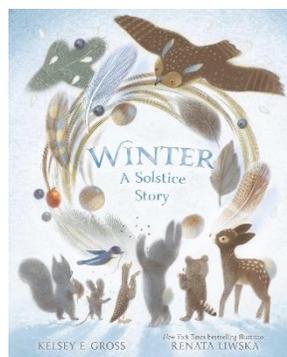
Winter: A Solstice Story, by Kelsey Gross, 2023. A group of animal friends celebrate the magic of the Winter Solstice. (Ages 4-8)

The Return of the Light: Twelve Tales from Around the World for the Winter Solstice by Carolyn McVickar Edwards. Marlowe & Co., 2000. A dozen traditional stories from Polynesia to Scandinavia, retold for all ages.

Celebrations! by Barnabas and Anabel Kindersley. DK Publishing, 1997. A UNICEF look at children celebrating holidays in 18 countries. (Ages 8-12.)

www.officialkwanzaawebsite.org/ - All about Kwanzaa.

<https://dc.library.northwestern.edu/items/12531652-50d5-473b-bf1f-ca54c10e875d> - Learn more about Te'tsina Wittiva (pgs. 132-141)



Discovery Theater



Since 1979, Discovery Theater, the unique, DC-based museum theater has served as a gateway to Smithsonian exhibitions, collections, and themes. Through the joy of live stage performances, students from pre-K through 6th grade are immersed in global cultures, eco-science, living history, and traditional arts. Discovery Theater performances are created to complement students' classroom-based learning; to enrich audiences' knowledge of the arts, history, sciences, and cultures of the world; to foster a love of live theater; and to provide entertaining, educational museum-based interactive experiences.

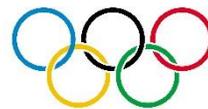
Don't miss...

Going the Distance

Tues – Fri, February 3rd – 6th, 2026

10:15 a.m. and 11:30 a.m.

Recommended for Ages: 6 to 12 / Grades 1 – 6



Mother Earth and Me

Tues – Fri, April 28th- May 1st and Tues – Wed, April 29th -30th, 2026

10:15 a.m. and 11:30 a.m.

Recommended for Ages: 5 to 10/ Grades K – 5



Check out our website to get your tickets now or arrange to bring these shows to your school.

www.DiscoveryTheater.org