

Winter Unit Study

*Science, Geography, History,
Cultures, Games, and more!*

Gypsy Gameschooler

How To Use This Unit Study

This unit study is designed as a fun learning interlude for the whole family. Many families find themselves overwhelmed during the busy holiday months, and many homeschoolers take a month or more off.

If you want to keep learning but want more fun, relaxation, and time for all the fun festivities, then this unit study is for you! Read the lessons on days when you have more time or energy for something formal. If you have time but want something fun, pull out one of the hands-on projects. There are coloring sheets your kids can do on their own or while you're reading to them about a holiday. And finally, the games and activities make great family time.

You probably won't get through everything—that's okay! It just means you'll have more you can use next year.

Happy learning!

Thank you for respecting the hard work I put into this unit study and not sharing it with others. Feel free to print as many copies of this for your own use as you'd like.

For more resources and freebies, make sure you check out [my shop](#).

Check out my book, *[Gameschooling on a Budget](#)*, for tips and games to play for less.

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I'm an affiliate for a few other programs. Every penny helps! One day, I hope to help support my family with my blog, so thank you!

If you want to share this printable with someone else—thank you! Please just send them to [my website](#) so they can purchase it for themselves.

Thanks again!

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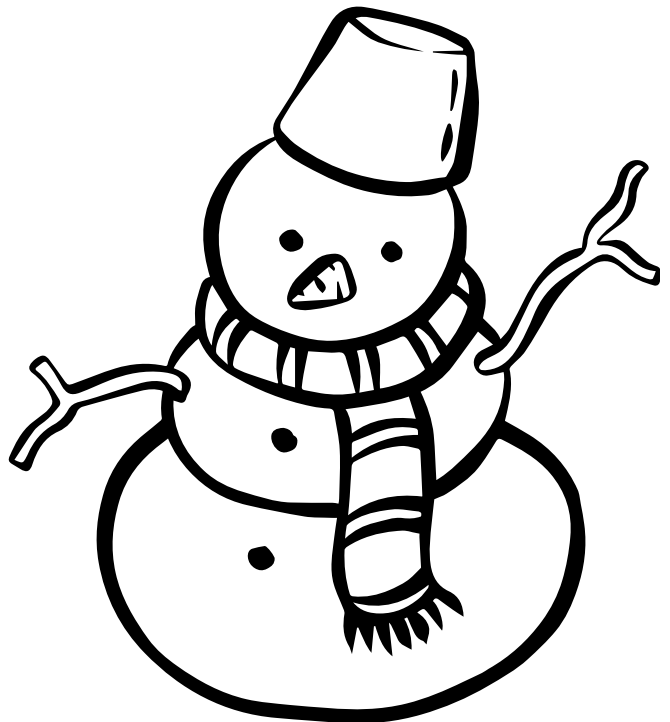
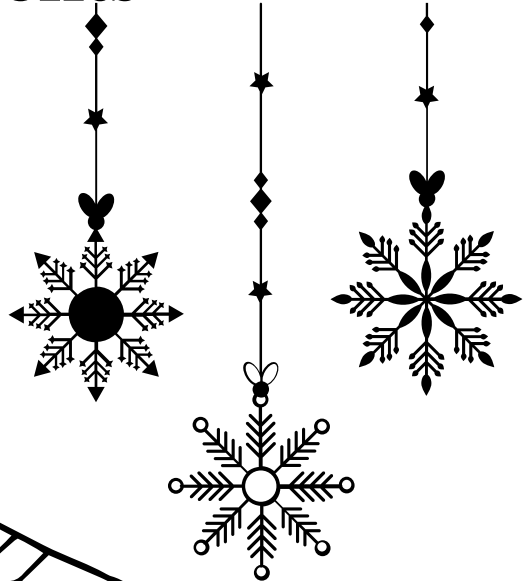
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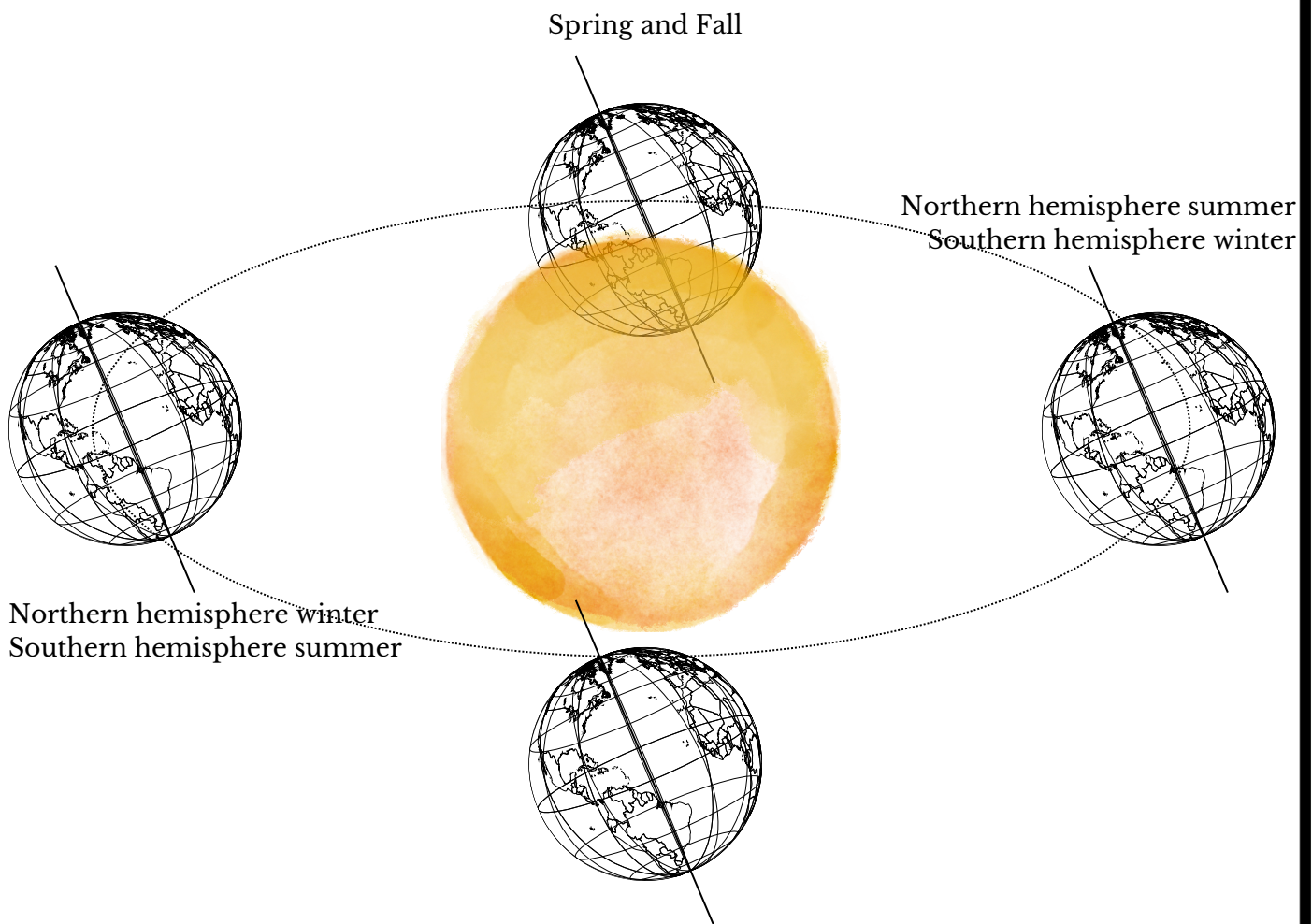


The Science of the Seasons

The seasons of the earth come down to the tilt on our axis. If the earth weren't tilted, we wouldn't have any seasons!

As the earth rotates around its axis, we get day and night. As it rotates around the sun, we get the seasons. However, summer and winter are actually when the earth is furthest from the sun! Our earth has an elliptical orbit (so not a perfect circle, but elongated) and spring and summer occur when the earth is closest to the sun. At this time, the earth's tilt is such that neither the northern nor the southern **hemisphere** gets more direct light. Summer and winter are when the earth is furthest from the sun and the tilt provides one hemisphere or another with more light.

The following diagram is not to scale, by any means. However, it does provide a good visual of the elliptical orbit and how we get seasons. You can also check out [this video](#) for a good visual.



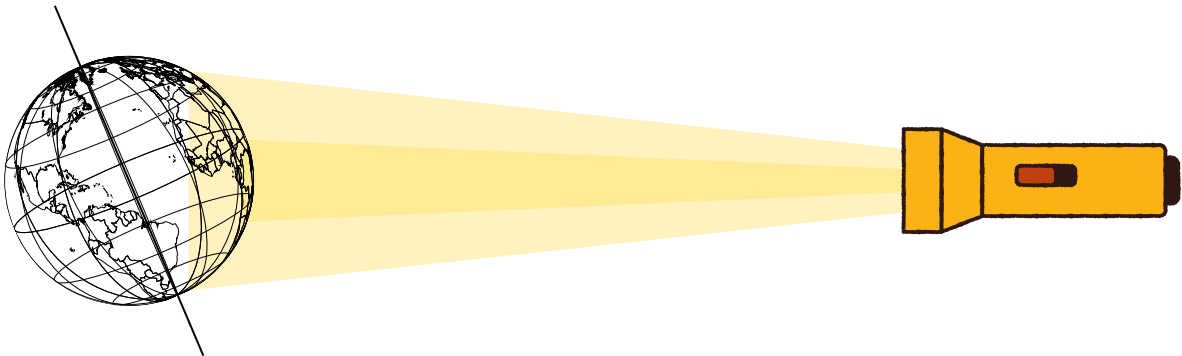
The Science of the Seasons: An Activity

Materials

- Globe
- Flashlight
- Darkened room

Most globes are set up with the proper tilt. You can still do this with something like a beachball globe, just make sure you set it up with a tilt similar to what's in the image on the previous page.

Turn off the lights in your room and turn on your flashlight. Keep your flashlight even with your globe, like in the image below.

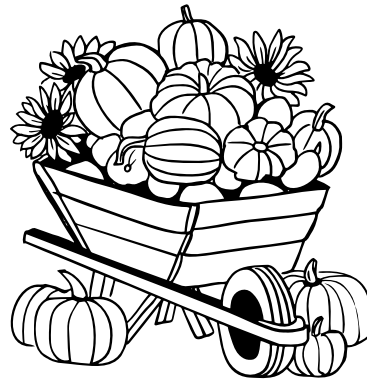
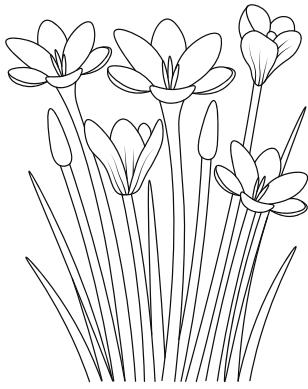


Do you notice how the light is more intense near the **equator** and biased toward the south? Places with a more direct angle of sunlight are warmer than places with a more indirect angle. So not only does the summer have longer days than the winter, but those longer days come with more direct, intense light.

Carefully rotate the globe to show how day and night happen, then try tilting the top of the globe away from the light and then toward it. Notice how the poles can either get lots of sunlight or almost none depending on which way the tilt is facing. This is why some places—especially far north or south—have very long days in summer and very long nights in winter.

This is tricky to do at home with only a flashlight and globe, but you can orbit the globe around the flashlight, making sure the flashlight stays focused on the globe. (It's easier to leave the globe stationary and move the flashlight around the globe, but that's less accurate.)

The tilt of the earth is called the **axial tilt**. Every planet has its own axial tilt; Earth's is about 23° . Without that tilt, we would still have day and night, but we wouldn't have seasons; every day would feel almost the same all year long.



Equinoxes and Solstices

The **equinoxes** and **solstices** relate to day length. On both equinoxes in both hemispheres, day and night are equal: both at 12 hours. (Think: equinox means equal; they share the same root of *equ*, which is Latin for “equal.”)

The following dates are approximate for each hemisphere (they vary):

Northern Hemisphere

- Winter Solstice: December 21st
- Spring Equinox: March 21st
- Summer Solstice: June 21st
- Fall Equinox: September 21st

Southern Hemisphere

- Winter Solstice: June 21st
- Spring Equinox: September 21st
- Summer Solstice: December 21st
- Fall Equinox: March 21st

The solstices are a little different. Winter solstice has the longest night and shortest day, while summer solstice has the longest day and shortest night. As you can see in the dates above, when the northern hemisphere has its winter solstice, the southern hemisphere has its summer solstice, and vice versa.

However, how long exactly solstice day or night is depends on a location's **latitude**. Areas close to the equator will have the least difference between day and night. The arctic and the antarctic, however, will have multiple days of darkness around their winter solstice and multiple days of light around their summer solstice.

These changes in daylight are all caused by Earth's tilt as it orbits the Sun. Because the planet leans to one side, different areas receive more or less direct sunlight at different times of year. Equinoxes happen when the tilt is “sideways” to the Sun, so neither hemisphere is leaning toward or away from it. Solstices happen when one hemisphere is leaning its farthest toward or away from the Sun. These extremes can lead to some pretty incredible adaptations in people, animals, and plants!

Winter Adaptations in Plants and Animals

Every plant and animal adapts to the changing seasons differently.

Animals

Hibernation is the most famous and most commonly misapplied. Did you know that bears don't actually hibernate? True hibernation involves lowering the body temperature to nearly 0°C. Heartbeats and breathing slow to an almost imperceptible level. True hibernators appear dead while hibernating. True hibernation is limited to Chiroptera (bats), Insectivora (hedgehogs), and Rodentia (ground squirrels and marmots). Rodents will wake themselves every few weeks to eat from stored food, but all hibernators rely on accumulated fat and lowered metabolisms. In contrast, bears do not lower their body temperature much and are easily roused.

Brumation is similar to hibernation but not the same. It is common in reptiles and amphibians. Unlike hibernating mammals, brumating reptiles must stir occasionally to drink water. Brumating reptiles do not rely on stored body fat, but on glycogen. This helps them need less oxygen (which is how some species survive harsh winters by brumating on the bottoms of ponds).

Migration: Birds are famous for migrating, though not all do. The bird with the longest migration, going from pole to pole, is the arctic tern. Many species migrate only to the tropics for winter. Some species (like mountain chickadees) simply migrate down a mountain to a protected valley. Some mammals migrate, too, though it's mostly limited to bats and large ungulates (elk, caribou, etc). This is because walking is slow and energy intensive.

Limited lifespan: Some species only live for a few weeks or months during the growing season. This is common among invertebrates and called **diapause**. Many overwinter as eggs or larvae. Honeybees, in contrast, kick the males ("drones") out of the hive each fall and a cohort of female workers and their queen live through the winter. In bumblebees, a new queen hatches each fall. She alone overwinters, then starts her nest fresh in the spring.

Insulation is very common among mammals and birds. Down (fluffy underfeathers), insulating fur, and fat reserves help many animals stay warm and active all winter long. Many will hide and reduce their activity during winter, but they have to keep eating and warm.

Plants

Plants mostly fall into a few different categories. First, we have **annuals**. Annuals only live for one growing season (like many invertebrates) and must be replanted *annually* each spring. These plants do not have time to get woody stems; instead, their focus is on flowering and producing seeds for the next year.

Biennials usually live for two years. After the second growing season, they die and need to be replanted the next spring. Again, the seeds survive through the winter.

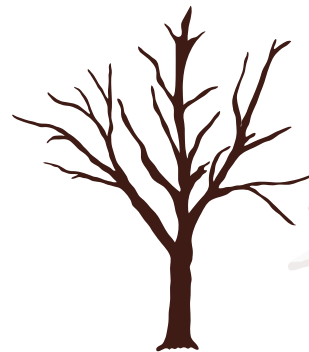
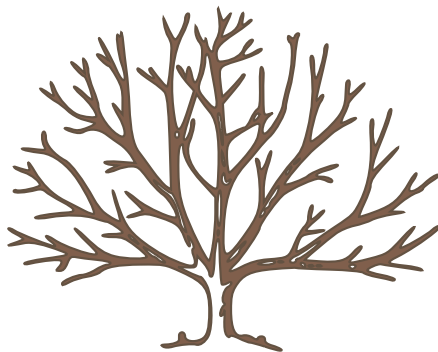
Perennials can live for multiple years in their correct environment. Many grasses will go dormant in the winter or even die down to their roots. Come spring, though, new grass grows up from the roots.

Deciduous plants lose their leaves each winter. The most famous of these, of course, are deciduous trees whose leaves turn brilliant shades of yellow, orange, and red. Losing their leaves conserves energy and prevents too much snow from building up on the leaves. Deciduous trees still lose branches in winter storms, but not as many as if they had all their leaves catching the wind and snow!

Many (but not all) **evergreens** are conifers. These are the famous pines, firs, and cedars. Their softer, more flexible wood can bend in the winds of winter storms and their straight needles have an easier time shedding the snow.

Many plants living in harsh environments are low-growing. The ancient bristlecone pines of the southwest usually grow to only 15 to 50 feet, even though their age can be in the thousands. Compare this to many trees of the milder Pacific Northwest that easily reach heights of 50 to 200 feet, and you can see how stunted trees can be in harsh climates.

Above a certain **altitude** or latitude, no trees will grow. This is called the **tree line** and the area above the tree line is the **alpine**. Plants in the alpine consist of grasses, annual herbs, and low-growing shrubs.



Winter Adaptations: Activities

1. **Informative writing assignment:** Consider the plants and animals in your area. How have they adapted to deal with your winter climate? If you live further south and your winters are mild, consider plants or animals from another location. Below are some suggestions you can use if you have a hard time coming up with your own ideas.

Plants

- Pine trees
- Fir trees
- Larch
- Wildflowers
- Rosemary
- Parsley

Animals

- Snowy owl
- Polar Bear
- Arctic tern
- Fox
- Deer
- Box turtle

Choose a plant or an animal (or both!) and research how they survive winters. What adaptations do they have? Do they migrate or hibernate? Use the writing pages to help you organize your findings. Write an informative essay, paper, or make an informative display.

2. **Creative writing assignment:** If you could have any winter adaptation, which would you choose? How would it impact your life? What other changes would you need to make to your body, physiology (how your body works), and lifestyle to accommodate your new adaptation?

3. How do people mimic animal adaptations in the winter?

4. Use materials around your house to further mimic animal adaptations. Can you create a den, a thick winter coat, an insulative layer of fat, or a store of food to last you through until spring?

5. Use your yard or a nearby park to pretend to migrate. Where, if at all, can you stop to rest or eat?

6. Look at a map and plan your dream migratory route. How would you get to your winter grounds? How long would it take you? How far would your migration be? How fast would you need to move? Remember: Speed is calculated as distance divided by time.

Evolution and Adaptations

Many people describe an adaptation as “to help an **organism** survive.” This is misleading, though, because that makes it seem like the animal chose its adaptations. Even the activities on the previous page encourage you to choose adaptations!

However, this is not the way **evolution** works. Evolution starts with random **mutations** in the gene pool. As an organism’s **genetic** material is replicated (DNA or RNA), mistakes are made. The wrong base is used, just occasionally. These copying errors are where we get random mutations from.

Mutation rates vary across genomes and across species, and estimates, even for the same portion of the genome for the same species, can vary pretty widely. However, all estimates are less than 1% (it can just vary a lot between 0.00001% and 0.001%).

Most of these mutations have no noticeable difference. They may be in a portion of the genetic sequence that doesn’t code for anything, or the substitution might not change the resulting protein noticeably. But some of these random genetic mutations do result in different traits.

In any given, healthy **population**, there will be a range of traits, all results of many random genetic mutations. In any given population, some organisms survive to **reproduce**, and some do not. If a mutation is beneficial for survival, then organisms with that mutation are more likely to pass it on to the next generation. A mutation that is not beneficial for survival is less likely to be passed on.

A famous example of evolution are the moths in London. The peppered moth, *Biston betularia*, is usually white with black speckles, and so are well-camouflaged against the lichen-covered tree trunks they rest on during the day. There are always some dark moths hatched (genetic mutation), but these are usually eaten by **predators** as they’re easy to see.

With the **industrial revolution** in the last half of the 1700s, pollution began to coat the trees with black soot. Within several decades, most of the moths were darker in coloration.

In the middle of the 1900s, **environmental controls** were enacted to limit pollution. The bark of the trees was soon cleaner, the lichen grew back, and frequency of the light-colored moths increased.

The Science of Winter

Now that you know how and why we have seasons, what about winter itself?

In the northern hemisphere, the winter solstice, the shortest day of the year, is around December 21st, which is often listed as the first day of winter. Shouldn't this be the middle of winter? Why is it that the coldest days are often in January or February?

You're probably aware that the earth has a lot of water—over 71% of the surface is covered by water! But there's also more water underground and in the air. Water is an excellent insulator because it takes a lot of energy to heat it up. This means that in many places of the world, there is a delay between the solstices and the seasons.

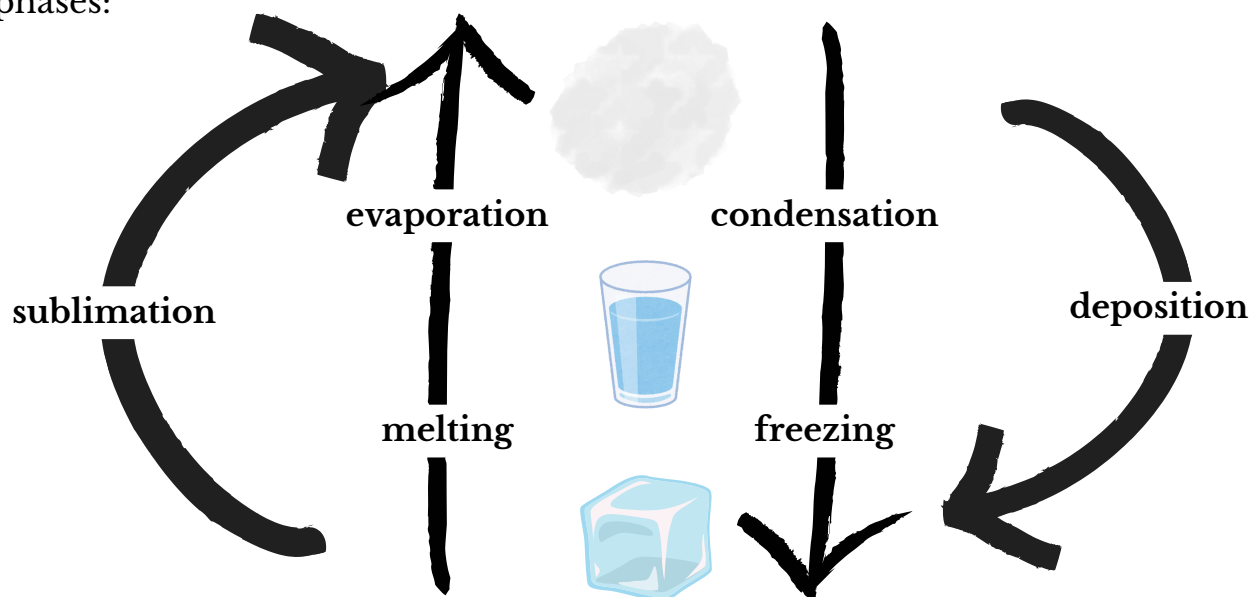
Similarly, drier places tend to have harsher winters than wetter ones (of similar latitude and altitude).

If you live somewhere that gets lots of snow or very cold winters, you can use this to have some fun with the science of freezing!

Phases of Water

All matter comes in three main phases (the fourth phase, **plasma**, is not as common here on earth and outside of a laboratory): **solid**, **liquid**, and **gas**. I'm sure you're familiar with the different phases of water; ice is solid water, water vapor is water in its gas form, and then there's liquid water.

You are probably also aware of what it is called when a substance changes phases:



Activity: Colored Ice Globes

Materials

Water balloons

Water

Food coloring

Methods

1. Fill each water balloon with water and a few drops of food coloring.
2. Tie them off.
3. Place outside so they freeze.
4. Once frozen solid, carefully peel off all the balloon pieces. Be very careful to collect and properly dispose of all pieces, as the small pieces of rubber are dangerous for many species of animals.
5. Enjoy the colored globes in your yard!

Activity: Frozen Bubbles

Materials

1 cup warm water

2 ½ Tbs corn syrup

2 Tbs sugar

2 ½ Tbs dish soap

1 straw

Methods

1. Use hot water from the tap, then add the other ingredients to your container. Mix well.
2. Dip a straw in and carefully blow your bubble. Try to place it on your preferred surface (the ground, a railing, etc.) before it disconnects from your straw.
3. Experiment with other techniques and ingredients. Many other recipes call for using glycerin. Remember to take notes and to only change one variable at a time. Record your experimentation and results using the pages at the end of the unit study.

Phases of Water

However, did you know that our temperature systems were designed around water? Water freezes at 0°C and boils at 100°C because people decided that's what those temperatures mean. Of course, those facts are really only true at the pressure of 1 **atmosphere**. That's what people decided to call the air pressure at sea level. As you go up into the mountains, the air pressure is reduced and so is the boiling point of water. However, the freezing point of water is higher at lower pressures!

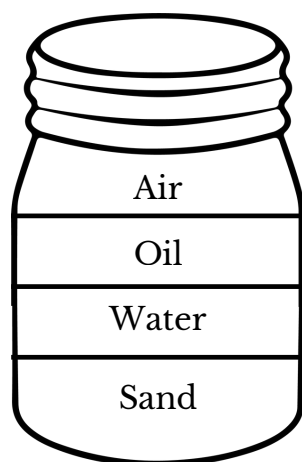
Why is that?!?

There are two reasons. Have you ever tried to freeze a full water bottle? What happened? I'm betting it burst on you. This is because ice actually takes up more volume than water. This is contrary to most materials and important, but we'll get to that later. Anyway, back to air pressure. Since liquid water takes up less space than ice, higher air pressures favor the liquid state of water over the solid.

The other reason is that natural water is never pure H_2O ; we always have things dissolved in it. At higher air pressures, more air molecules (nitrogen and oxygen, among others) are dissolved in water. When there are more things dissolved in water, the freezing temperature is lower. This is also why salt water has a lower freezing temperature than fresh water. At lower air pressure, less air molecules are dissolved in the water, so the freezing temperature is raised.

Why is it important that ice takes up more volume than liquid water?

Well, when you talk about volume relative to mass, what do you get? That's right—**density**! You're probably aware of how the density of different materials determines what floats. If you're not, try combining sand, water, and oil in a jar. Secure the lid and shake it up well, then let it sit. What happens? You're going to get something like this:



You get these results because sand is more dense than water, water is more dense than oil, and oil is more dense than air. Less-dense materials float on top of more-dense materials.

Phases of Water

The same thing happens with ice, right? Add some ice to your above jar and what happens? (I actually had to try this myself because I hadn't had cause to combine ice and oil before.) Depending on the exact density of your oil, your ice should have about the same density as oil! I used vegetable oil when I tried. You can use the [science experiment pages](#) at the end of the unit study to test the buoyancy of ice in different oils.

So, why do we care if ice floats?

The **ecology** of many systems depend on the variable density of water at different temperatures. Not only do some animals rest on floating ice, but the buoyancy of ice means that animals can survive in unfrozen water below the frozen top. Have you ever been ice fishing? That's possible because ice is less dense than liquid water! If ice had a higher density than liquid water, even if it froze at the top, it would soon sink. Many aquatic animals rely on the relative safety underneath the ice to get through the winter.



Furthermore, the density levels of water actually helps to keep **nutrients** circulating! Imagine a deep lake. The top gets lots of sunlight, so aquatic plants grow in abundance. This depletes nutrient levels at the top of the water. During the summer, this water is warmer.

Water is most dense at 4°C (39°F), so this means that during summer, the warmer, nutrient-poor water stays at the top of the lake. The colder water at the bottom of the lake has more nutrients.

In the winter, this trend is reversed. Ice floats at the top, water near freezing is just under the ice, and 4°C water is at the bottom. During summer and winter, this **stratification** is stable and the water does not mix.

However, during spring and fall, the temperature of the lake is able to equalize and all of the water mixes. (In the fall, the warm water at the top cools until it can mix with the cooler water at the bottom. In the spring, the cold water at the top warms until it can mix with the warmer water at the bottom.) Not only does this turning over redistribute the nutrients within the water, but it also stirs up nutrients that have settled on the lake floor. This twice-yearly refresh is vital for the health of lake communities, and only possible because water is most dense at 4°C.

Winter Around the World

Winter is defined as from the winter solstice to the spring equinox. In the northern hemisphere, this is roughly December 21st to March 21st, while it's approximately June 21st to September 21st in the southern hemisphere. However, the hemispheres aren't the only way that winter varies around the world!

In the **tropics**, the weather is pretty consistent year-round. For example, in Ecuador (so named because it lies along the equator), the average highs and lows are within a few degrees of each other year-round.

In some areas, winter is actually the best growing season. Places like Florida or Arizona can be too hot in the summer for many crops, but cooler winter temperatures make farming easier. Meanwhile, heading closer to the poles or higher into the mountains means colder conditions. Some regions stay below freezing for months at a time.

In areas close to large bodies of water, like western Washington or Oregon, it's so wet that it doesn't usually get very cold. However, when the **humidity** drops, the insulating clouds go away, and the temperature drops below freezing. But because these cold snaps are so low in humidity, they don't usually get snow.

Winter can also depend on **elevation** and geography. Coastal regions often have milder winters because the ocean releases heat slowly. High-altitude areas such as the Andes or the Himalayas can feel like winter even when the valleys below are warm.

Some regions have very dry winters. **Deserts** like the Sahara or the Arabian Peninsula cool off at night, even if days stay warm. Parts of East Asia often have crisp, dry winter winds and clear skies. Other places, like the Mediterranean, have winter as their rainy season, even though temperatures remain fairly mild.

Daily life in winter differs from place to place. In colder regions, people may deal with short days, icy roads, and heavy layers of clothing. In mild-winter areas, the season might simply feel like a cooler stretch of regular weather. And near the equator, people may not notice much seasonal change at all.

No matter where you go, winter takes many forms. Each region of the world has its own kind of winter, whether that means icy winds, gentle rains, chilly nights, or almost no change at all.

Winter Through the Ages

Winter has always been a season that humans had to prepare for. Winter meant shorter days, colder temperatures, and fewer plants or animals available for food. But people all over the world developed clever ways to stay warm, store food, and keep going until spring.

Early Humans and Prehistoric Winter Survival

For early humans, winter was a serious challenge. Many groups followed herds of animals, moving to areas where food was more available in cold months. Natural shelters like caves helped block wind and snow, and early humans used animal skins and fur for clothing because those materials trap heat well.

Fire was one of the most important winter tools. It provided warmth, kept predators away, and allowed people to cook tougher foods that were more common in winter, like dried meat and roots. Stone tools also helped people scrape hides, build shelters, and prepare food for storage. An early snowshoe (C14 dated to between 3800 and 3700 BCE) in the Italian-Austrian Alps and the world's oldest skis (dated to about 6,000 BCE) in northern Russia show that people were already inventing ways to travel over deep snow.

Ancient Civilizations

As civilizations formed, people became more skilled at preparing for winter. Farming communities stored grain, smoked fish, dried fruit, and preserved vegetables in clay jars or underground pits. Ancient Egyptians didn't have cold winters, but northern cultures—like the ancient Chinese, Greeks, and Romans—planned carefully for the season.

Homes were built with thick walls, small windows, and central hearths. The Romans even invented heated floors called **hypocausts** by circulating warm air under stone tiles. In snowy regions like northern China and Scandinavia, people developed early versions of skis and sleds to move across snow and ice. Winter shaped daily routines, too: farmers repaired tools, wove cloth, and made pottery when it was too cold to work the fields.

Middle Ages

During the Middle Ages, winter could be especially tough. Many **medieval** villages depended on food stored from the fall harvest. People used root cellars

to keep vegetables cold but unfrozen, and salted or dried meat to make it last. Homes were heated with fireplaces or stoves made of clay or stone, though smoke often filled the rooms before chimneys became common.

In cold parts of Europe and Asia, people wore layers of wool and leather. Communities often gathered in large halls to share warmth, food, and stories during long winter evenings. Frozen rivers sometimes became winter roads, making travel easier in December and January than in muddy spring. In northern areas, sleds pulled by horses, dogs, or reindeer helped transport goods.

Early Modern

By the 1500s–1800s, winter life was changing. Many cultures had better tools, sturdier buildings, and more efficient ways to stay warm. Chimneys became widespread in Europe, and iron stoves—like the famous Franklin stove—helped heat rooms more evenly. Explorers in the Arctic learned survival skills from **Indigenous** peoples, such as building igloos, wearing layered fur clothing, and using dog sleds for transportation.

Winter still affected travel and trade. Canals and rivers in places like the Netherlands froze solid, turning them into winter highways for ice skates, sleds, and carts. In Japan, homes used charcoal braziers called **hibachi** to provide heat, while in Russia, large brick stoves called **pechka** kept families warm all night.

Modern

Today, winter is much easier to handle thanks to heating, electricity, and warmer materials for clothing. Insulated homes keep heat inside, and weather forecasting helps people prepare for storms. Snowplows, salt trucks, and winter tires make roads safer, and insulated coats, gloves, and boots help people stay warm longer.

But winter still shapes life in many places. Northern communities rely on traditions and knowledge passed down for generations, such as how to travel safely on ice or build shelters during storms. In some regions, winter is still a time for planning, repairing equipment, and gathering with family indoors.

Even though winter can be cold and challenging, humans have always found ways to adapt—using creativity, cooperation, and tools to make the season not just survivable, but often enjoyable.



Winter Holidays

When the days get shorter and the nights get longer, people all over the world start looking for ways to bring a little extra light and warmth into their lives. Long before electric lights or central heating, winter was a season that could feel dark, cold, and quiet. So communities created special celebrations to brighten those months. Many of these holidays—old and new—share similar themes even though they come from very different cultures.

Light is one of the most common symbols. From candles or lanterns to strings of twinkling lights, people use brightness to chase away the darkness of winter. Another big theme is togetherness. When the weather outside is chilly, gathering with family, neighbors, and friends feels especially comforting. And of course, many winter holidays mark important moments in the year, like the solstice or the start of a new year.

Some holidays are ancient, but others are surprisingly new. One modern example is Festivus, created by writer Dan O’Keefe in the 1960s and made famous by Seinfeld in 1997. Celebrated on December 23rd, it features the Festivus pole, the Airing of Grievances, and the Feats of Strength. Even though it began as a joke, many people now enjoy Festivus as a lighthearted winter gathering.

Even though the traditions, foods, and stories vary from place to place, all of these holidays help people feel hopeful during a season when the world can seem a little darker. Winter celebrations remind us that longer, sunnier days are on their way—and give us something cheerful to look forward to while we wait.

Suggested Activities

1. Research your family’s winter holiday customs. Interview family members about how different traditions were started and what their favorites are. Then, use the internet or your library to research how similar traditions were begun. Use the writing pages at the end of the unit study to organize your notes before you write.
2. Creative writing: Come up with your own winter holiday and winter traditions! What do you think is important about this time of year? What would you call your holiday? When would it take place?
3. Choose some of the holidays and traditions discussed in the next several pages to research further. Try some of the foods and other traditions.
4. Geography: Make a “Winter Holidays Around the World” map. Choose several winter holidays and mark the countries or regions where they are celebrated on a blank world map.

Winter Holidays Calendar: 2025

December

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1	2	3	4	5 Krampus Night	6 St. Nicholas Day
7	8	9	10	11	12	13 St. Lucia Day
14 Hanukkah	15 Hanukkah	16 Hanukkah Las Posadas	17 Saturnalia Hanukkah Las Posadas	18 Saturnalia Hanukkah Las Posadas	19 Saturnalia Hanukkah Las Posadas	20 Saturnalia Hanukkah Las Posadas
21 Yule Dongzhi Saturnalia Las Posadas	22 Saturnalia Hanukkah Las Posadas	23 Saturnalia Festivus Las Posadas	24 Las Posadas	25 Christmas	26 Kwanzaa Boxing Day Zartosht No-Diso	27 Kwanzaa
28 Kwanzaa	29 Kwanzaa	30 Kwanzaa	31 Kwanzaa Hogmanay Omisoka			

January

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1 Kwanzaa New Year	2	3
4	5	6 Epiphany	7 Distaff Day Ganna	8	9	10
11	12	13 Lohri	14 Makar Sankranti Pongal	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

Winter Holidays Calendar

November

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday

December

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday

Winter Holidays Calendar

January

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday

February

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday

List of Winter Holidays

Boxing Day: December 26th

Candlemas: February 2nd

Christmas: December 25

Distaff Day: January 7th

Diwali: 5 days, beginning from 2 days before the new moon in the month of Karthika of the Hindu calendar; usually late October or November

Dongzhi: Chinese Winter Solstice; around December 21st

Epiphany: January 6th

Festivus: December 23rd

Ganna: January 7th

Hanukkah: The 25th day of the month of Kislev of the Hebrew calendar; usually late November or December

Hogmanay: December 31st

Imbolc: February 1st

Krampus Night: December 5th

Kwanzaa: December 26-January 1

Las Posadas: December 16-24

Lohri/Bhogi: January 13th

Losar: 3 days, beginning on the first day of the Tibetan calendar

Lunar New Year: second new moon after the winter solstice; usually late January or February

Makar Sankranti: January 14th

New Year's Day: January 1st

New Year's Eve: December 31st

Omisoka (Shogatsu, Japanese New Year): December 31st

Pongal: January 14th

Ramadan: 9th month of the Islamic calendar; dates vary

Saturnalia: December 17-23

Shalakh: Zuni winter solstice; several days around December 21st

St. Lucia Day: December 13th

St. Nicholas Day: December 6th

Soyal: Hopi winter solstice

St. Basil's Day: January 1st

Thanksgiving: 4th Thursday of November (in the US; in Canada, it's the 2nd Monday in October)

Three King's Day: January 6th

Yalda: Iranian winter solstice

Yule: winter solstice; usually around December 21st

Zartosht No-Diso: December 26th

Suggested Reading

(All links on this page are affiliate links; I earn a small commission at no cost to you)

Picture Books and Coffee-Table Books: lots of pictures, fun for everyone

Title	Author	Genre
<u>The Shortest Day: Celebrating the Winter Solstice</u>	Wendy Pfeffer	Nonfiction
<u>The Grumpy Reindeer: A Winter Story About Friendship and Kindness</u>	DK	Fiction
<u>Winter: Discover the Magic of Winter!</u>	MEHCO by Design	Nonfiction
<u>Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening</u>	Robert Frost	Poetry
<u>Diwali</u>	Hannah Eliot	Nonfiction
<u>Fancy Nancy: No Day Like a Snow Day</u>	Jane O'Connor	Fiction
<u>Hanukkah Bear</u>	Eric A. Kimmel	Fiction
<u>The Story of Diwali: Rama & Sita</u>	Jan Anika	Fiction
<u>Diwali: The Magical Diyas</u>	Anitha Rathod	Fiction
<u>Together for Kwanzaa</u>	Juwanda G. Ford	Nonfiction
<u>My First Kwanzaa</u>	Karen Katz	Nonfiction
<u>We Celebrate Kwanzaa</u>	Seed of Melanin, Dante Hill, & Anjoli Hill	Nonfiction
<u>Weiwei's Winter Solstice: A Dongzhi Story</u>	Michelle Jing Chan	Fiction
<u>Lucia Morning in Sweden</u>	Ewa Rydaker	Fiction
<u>The Night of Las Posadas</u>	Tomie dePaola	Fiction
<u>'Twas Nochebuena</u>	Roseanne Greenfield Thong	Poetry
<u>Hogmanay: A Tale of Two Girls Visiting Oban for "The Bells"</u>	Ira Theobold	Fiction
<u>Holidays Around the World: A Winter Adventure</u>	Dustin Sparks	Nonfiction
<u>Lights of Winter: Winter Celebrations Around the World</u>	Heather Conrad	Nonfiction
<u>Night of Yalda</u>	Anahita Tamaddon	Fiction
<u>The Legend of St. Nicholas: A Story of Christmas Giving</u>	Dandi Daley Mackall	Fiction

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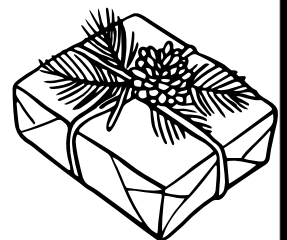
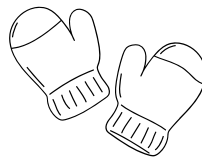
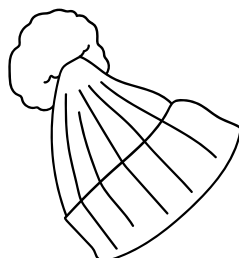
(All links on this page are affiliate links; I earn a small commission at no cost to you)

Early Reader Books

Title	Author	Genre
<u>Pete the Cat: Snow Daze</u>	James Dean	Fiction
<u>Snow</u>	P.D. Eastman	Fiction
<u>Ty's Travels: Winter Wonderland</u>	Kelly Starling Lyons	Fiction
<u>Merry Christmas, Amelia Bedelia</u>	Peggy Parish	Fiction
<u>All About Winter</u>	Wander Will	Nonfiction
<u>Is It Hanukkah Yet?</u>	Nancy Krulik	Fiction

Chapter Books, Easier First Then Harder

Title	Author	Genre
<u>Christmas Stories for Kids 8-12</u>	Bernard Tate	Fiction
<u>Max E. James: Winter Wipeout</u>	J. Ryan Hersey	Fiction
<u>School Freezes Over!</u>	Jack Chabert	Fiction
<u>Celebrating Diwali</u>	Anjali Josi	Nonfiction
<u>My Family Celebrates Kwanzaa</u>	Lisa Bullard	Nonfiction
<u>The Winter Solstice Festival: Dongzhi Festival</u>	Jade Lotus	Nonfiction
<u>Winter Tales: Stories and Folktales From Around the World</u>	Dawn Casey	Fiction
<u>The Little Book of Christmas and Hogmanay: Scotland's Festive Traditions</u>	Anna Marshall	Nonfiction



Recipes

Yule

- Yule Log Cake
- Pork Pie

Christmas

- Chocolate Chip Mint Meringue Cookies
- Baked Squash with Stuffing

Hanukkah

- Latkes
- Sufganiyot

Diwali

- Samosa Chaat
- Ras Malai Rose Ice Cream

Kwanzaa

- Jamaican Oxtails
- Double Cornbread Muffins

St. Nicholas Day

- St. Nicholas Cheese Coins
- Crêpe Wrapped Asparagus

St. Lucia Day

- Swedish Saffron Buns
- Glogg (for parents!)

Dongzhi

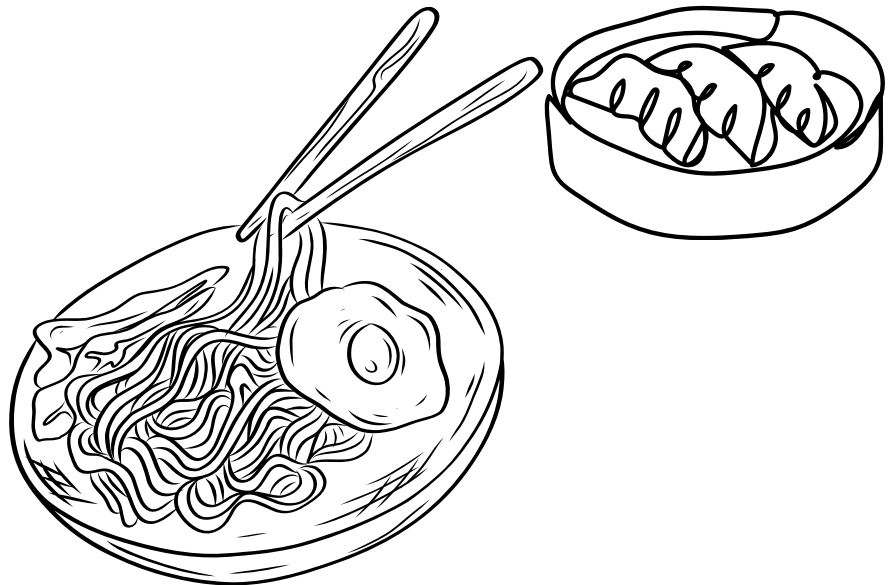
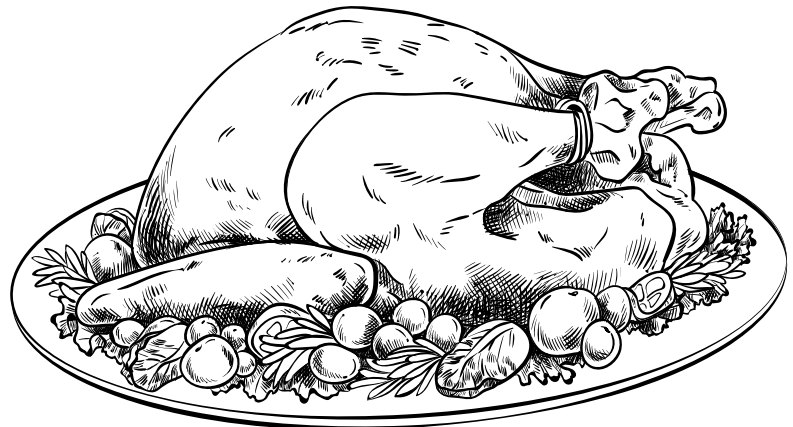
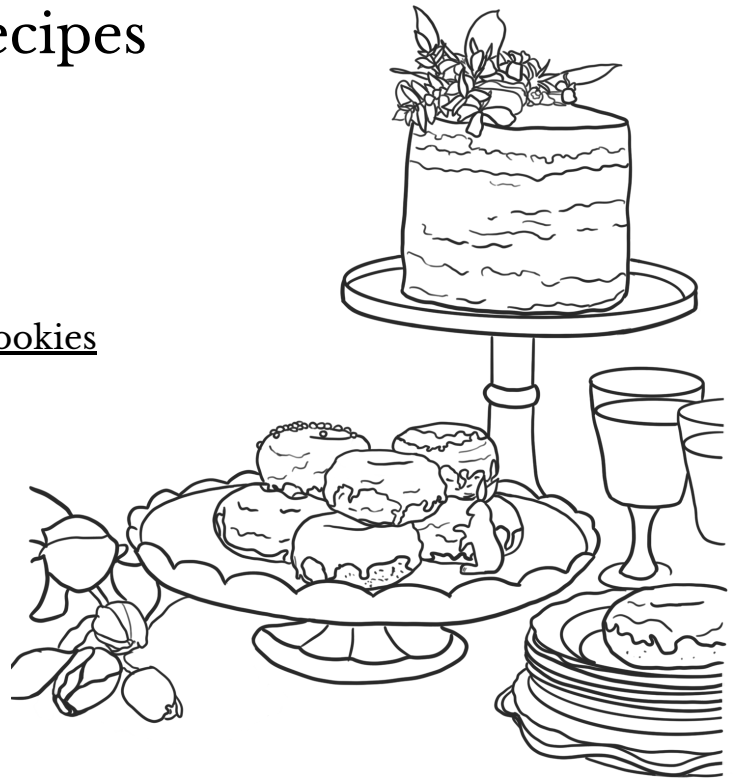
- Tang Yuan
- Jiaozi

New Year's Eve

- Dauphinoise Potatoes
- Cock-a-Leekie Soup

Lunar New Year

- Deep-Fried Mantou
- Longevity Noodles



Yule

Yule is one of the oldest winter celebrations in the world, with roots stretching back thousands of years across northern Europe. It was traditionally observed around the winter solstice when days are shortest and nights longest. For people living in places like Scandinavia and other northern regions, this marked an important turning point: after the solstice, sunlight slowly returned.

Long before modern holidays existed, Germanic and Norse peoples honored Yule with feasting, storytelling, and community gatherings. Families burned large Yule logs carved with protective symbols to bring light into the darkest season. These logs could burn for days, and keeping the flame alive was seen as a sign of good fortune. Evergreen branches were brought indoors because they stayed green through winter, symbolizing life that endures even in the coldest months.

Yule was closely tied to nature and winter survival. Animals such as boars and goats played roles in Norse stories and seasonal rituals, and the “Yule Goat” remains a familiar symbol in Scandinavia today. Families shared preserved foods, enjoyed music, and welcomed the lengthening days with hope.

In ancient Rome, a similar celebration dates back to the 5th century BCE. **Saturnalia** honored Saturn, the Roman god of agriculture, and lasted from December 17th to December 23rd. During this period, public banquets, market fairs, and large gatherings filled the city. Temples were decorated with greenery, and people lit candles, visited friends, and exchanged small gifts such as figurines, sweets, or tokens of good luck.

One of the most famous features of Saturnalia was the temporary relaxation of social rules and daily routines. Work paused, courts closed, and schools took a break. People wore colorful clothing instead of their usual togas, and a “Saturnalian prince” or “Lord of Misrule” was sometimes chosen to preside over games and light-hearted activities. Households and communities took part in feasts, singing, role-reversals, and lively entertainment, making Saturnalia one of the most energetic and widely enjoyed festivals of the Roman calendar.

Today, Yule is still celebrated by modern Pagans and people who enjoy honoring older winter traditions. Many continue lighting candles, decorating with greenery, or burning a small Yule log. Others enjoy a log-shaped cake called a *Bûche de Noël*, which has roots in the original solstice fires.

Although Yule and Saturnalia come from different cultures, both share the same spirit: bringing light to the darkest days of the year and celebrating the promise of the sun’s return.



Christmas

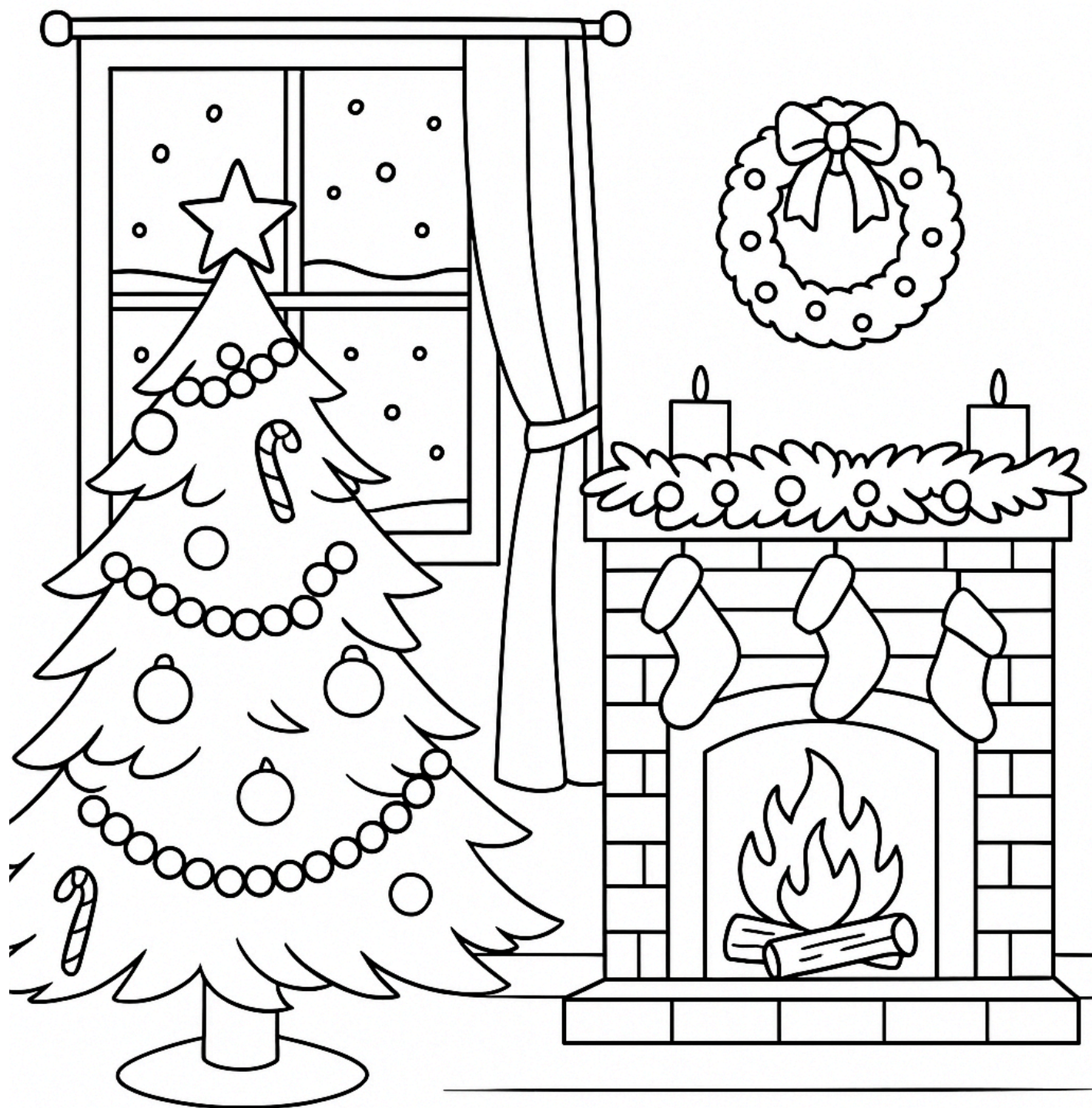
Christmas is celebrated on December 25th to honor the birth of Jesus Christ, even though the date, or even the year, was and is unknown. Early Christians did not know the exact date, so for the first few centuries, different communities celebrated at different times. In 336 CE, Constantine chose December 25th, partly because it fell near the winter solstice and overlapped with well-loved Roman festivals such as Saturnalia. Holding Christmas during this season helped establish a new Christian celebration at a time of year when people already gathered, feasted, and exchanged gifts.

Many Christmas traditions grew from older winter customs. Bringing evergreens indoors was common in northern Europe long before Christmas existed, and decorated trees became especially popular in Germany in the 1500s. Gift-giving and candlelight were also part of Roman midwinter festivals, when families exchanged small presents and celebrated with days of feasting. Over time, these customs blended with Christian practices and spread across Europe and beyond.

Christmas looks different around the world. In Latin America, Las Posadas reenacts the journey of Mary and Joseph. In the Philippines, Simbang Gabi features early-morning or evening church services followed by sweet holiday foods. Iceland's Jólabókaflóð centers on giving books and reading on Christmas Eve. In Ethiopia, Ganna is celebrated on January 7th with church services, white clothing, and community games. Despite their differences, most traditions focus on family, food, music, and sharing light during the darkest part of the year.

Christmas has also changed dramatically over time. During the Middle Ages in Europe, it was often loud, rowdy, and full of public revelry. Feasts lasted for days, people sang in the streets, and celebrations sometimes became so wild that city leaders tried to control them. When English Puritans rose to power in the 1600s, they strongly opposed these noisy traditions. They believed Christmas had become too unruly and too connected to older festivals, so they banned Christmas in England for several years. In parts of colonial America, Puritans also discouraged or outlawed Christmas celebrations.

By the 1800s, Christmas began transforming into the holiday many people recognize today—family-centered, gift-focused, and full of traditions like decorated trees, stockings, and special meals. Writers such as Charles Dickens helped shape this newer style of celebration. Today, Christmas continues to blend ancient customs, cultural traditions, and new ideas, making it one of the most widely celebrated winter holidays in the world.



Hanukkah

Hanukkah, also known as the Festival of Lights, is an eight-day Jewish holiday that usually takes place in November or December. It celebrates a moment in history nearly 2,200 years ago, when the Jewish people in Judea regained control of the Temple in Jerusalem after it had been taken over by the Seleucid Empire. When the Jewish group who led the revolt entered the Temple, they found only one small jar of oil left to light the menorah, the sacred lampstand. The oil was enough for just one day, but it miraculously burned for eight days, giving them enough time to find more. Hanukkah commemorates both this victory and the miracle of the oil.

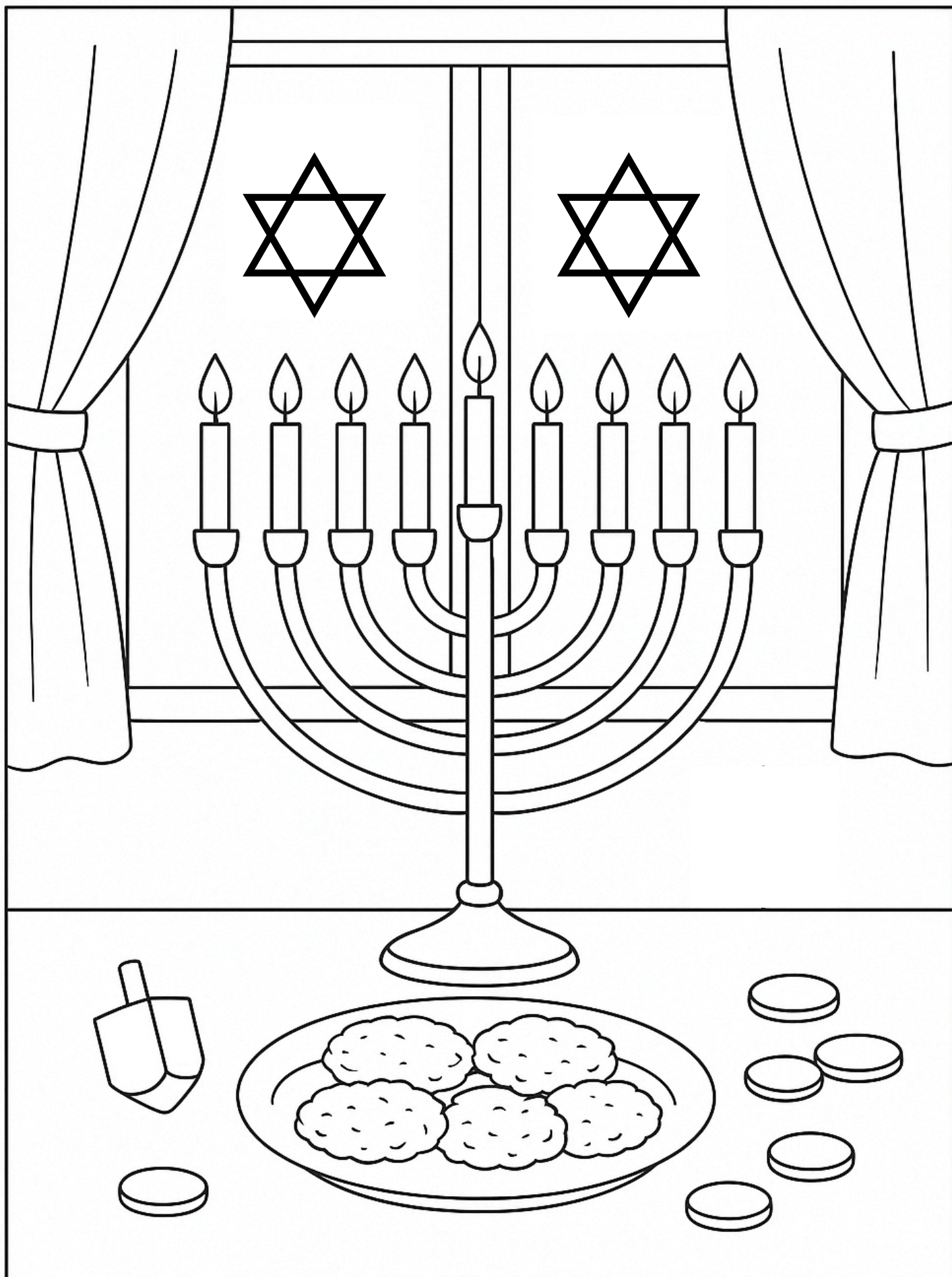
Today, the most familiar Hanukkah tradition is lighting the *menorah*. One candle, the *shamash* (helper candle), is used to light one additional candle each night until all eight are glowing on the final evening. Families often place the *menorah* in a window to share the light with the community. Many people also recite blessings or sing songs during the candle-lighting.

Food plays an important role, especially dishes fried in oil to remember the ancient miracle. In many Jewish households, people enjoy *latkes*, or potato pancakes, often topped with applesauce or sour cream. In other places, *sufganiyot*, jelly-filled doughnuts, are a favorite treat. Children frequently play *dreidel*, a spinning top game with Hebrew letters that stand for the phrase “A great miracle happened there.” Small gifts or chocolate coins called *gelt* are also common.

Like many holidays, Hanukkah has changed over time. In the 1800s and 1900s, Hanukkah began to take on a larger role in Jewish communities in Europe and North America, partly because it falls close to Christmas. Some families started exchanging more gifts or decorating their homes, creating new traditions while still keeping the holiday’s original meaning.

Around the world, Hanukkah celebrations vary by culture. In Israel, public candle-lighting ceremonies and outdoor concerts are widespread, and *sufganiyot* bakeries are busy for weeks. In the United States and Canada, families often blend long-held customs with modern ones, such as giving themed gifts or hosting community latke parties. In Argentina, public *menorah* lightings in city squares have become a popular community tradition. Although, it’s summer in Argentina and the kids are on summer holiday!

Wherever it is celebrated, Hanukkah centers on bringing light into the dark winter season, remembering resilience, and sharing joy with family and community.



Diwali

Diwali, also called Deepavali, is one of the most important festivals in India and is celebrated by millions of people around the world. Although it usually occurs in October or November, the exact date changes each year because it follows the Hindu lunar calendar. Diwali is often called the “Festival of Lights,” and at its heart, it celebrates the triumph of light over darkness and good over evil.

The origins of Diwali come from several ancient stories and traditions. In many parts of India, it marks the return of Rama and Sita to Ayodhya after defeating Ravana, when people lit lamps to welcome them home. In other regions, Diwali honors Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, and signals the start of a new financial year. Some communities also connect the festival to Krishna’s victory over the demon Narakasura. Although the stories differ, they all emphasize hope, renewal, and the triumph of good.

One of the most recognizable Diwali traditions is lighting *diyas*, small clay lamps filled with oil. Families place *diyas* around homes, windows, rooftops, and doorways to brighten the night. People also decorate floors with colorful *rangoli* designs made from powdered chalk, sand, flour, or flower petals. Many households perform *puja* (prayer rituals), especially to honor Lakshmi. Fireworks and sparklers are common, adding to the cheerful atmosphere.

Food plays a huge role as well. Families prepare sweets such as *ladoo*, *barfi*, and *jalebi*, along with savory treats. New clothes are often worn, and exchanging gifts or visiting relatives is a beloved part of the celebration.

Over time, Diwali has continued to grow and change. In the past, celebrations were smaller and centered on simple lamps and family rituals. Today, in many cities, Diwali includes large festivals, electric light displays, community events, and organized fireworks shows. Many people also focus on eco-friendly celebrations by using fewer fireworks and choosing reusable decorations.

Diwali is celebrated in many countries beyond India. In Nepal, it is known as Tihar and includes honoring animals like crows, dogs, and cows. In Singapore, Malaysia, and South Africa, communities host street festivals, parades, and cultural performances. Even in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, Diwali celebrations have grown, with citywide events, temple gatherings, and family traditions that bring people together.

Across all these places, Diwali continues to shine as a joyful celebration of light, hope, and new beginnings.



Kwanzaa

Kwanzaa is a cultural holiday that celebrates African American heritage, history, and community. It is observed every year from December 26th to January 1st. Instead of being a religious celebration, Kwanzaa focuses on values that help strengthen families and neighborhoods. The name comes from the Swahili phrase *matunda ya kwanza*, meaning “first fruits,” referring to traditional African harvest celebrations that honor hard work, unity, and the sharing of bounty.

Kwanzaa was created in 1966 by Dr. Maulana Karenga, a professor and activist. During the civil rights movement, he wanted African Americans to have a holiday that emphasized their cultural roots and encouraged pride, learning, and community building. Karenga drew inspiration from harvest festivals across many African societies, combining familiar ideas into a new celebration designed specifically for African American communities in the United States. Over the decades, Kwanzaa has grown, and today people of all backgrounds may join in to show appreciation for African culture and contributions.

The celebration lasts seven days, and each day focuses on one of the Seven Principles, called the *Nguzo Saba*. These values are: *Umoja* (Unity), *Kujichagulia* (Self-Determination), *Ujima* (Collective Work and Responsibility), *Ujamaa* (Cooperative Economics), *Nia* (Purpose), *Kuumba* (Creativity), and *Imani* (Faith). Families often talk together about how to practice that day’s principle at home, school, or in the community.

There are several meaningful symbols used throughout Kwanzaa. The *kinara* is a candleholder that holds seven candles—one black, three red, and three green. The colors represent different ideas: black for the people, red for their struggles, and green for the future. One candle is lit for each day of the holiday. Other symbols include fruits and vegetables, representing harvest and productivity; a unity cup for sharing; and a mat on which the symbols are placed.

Kwanzaa traditions vary, but they often include music, poetry, storytelling, African drums and dance, feasts, and crafts. On the last day, families celebrate a big feast called *Karamu*, which may feature African, Caribbean, or Southern foods. Some families also give small gifts that encourage learning, creativity, or cultural awareness.

Kwanzaa continues to evolve while keeping its core purpose: to celebrate African heritage, honor shared values, and build a strong sense of community as the new year begins.



St. Nicholas Day

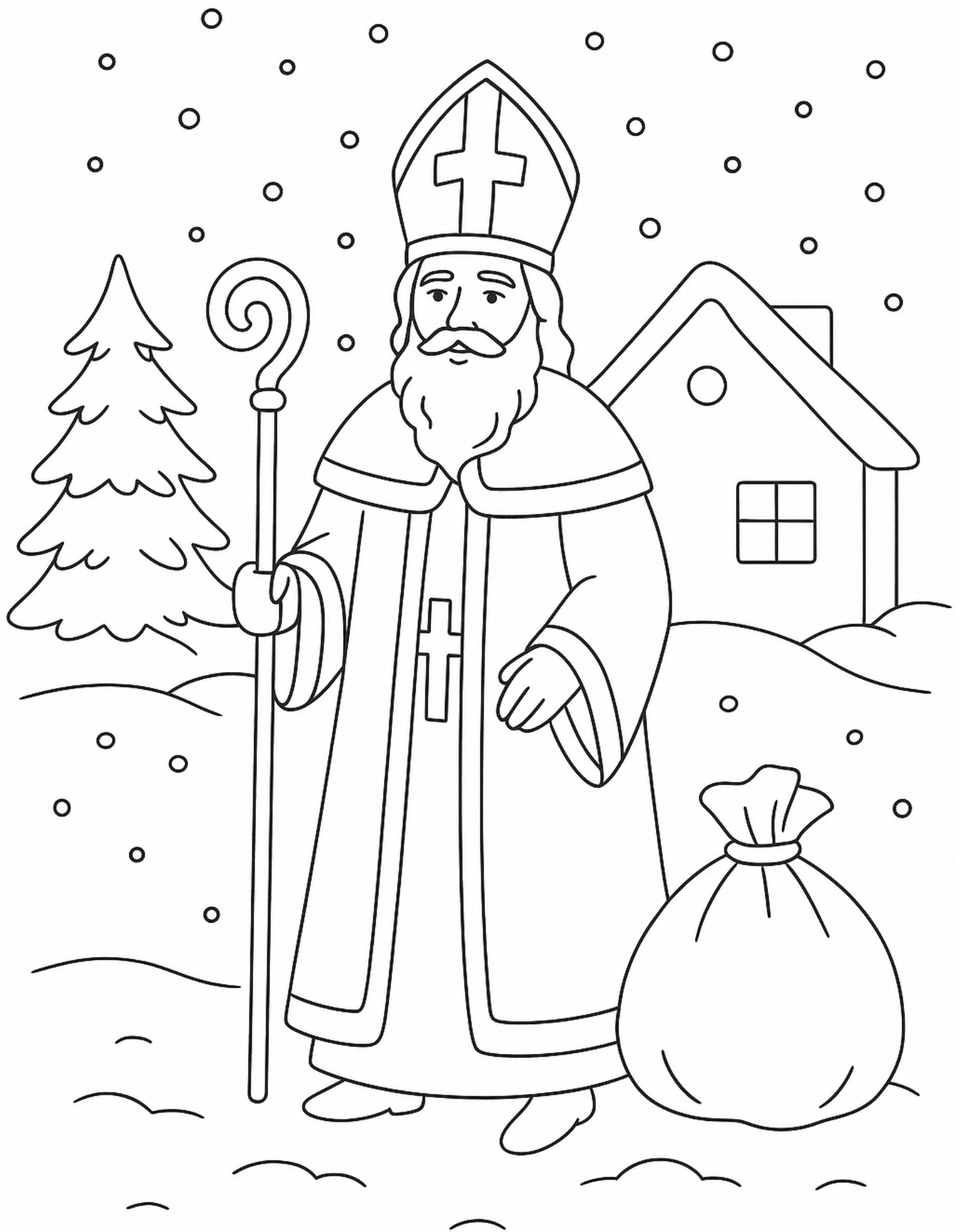
St. Nicholas Day is a winter holiday that celebrates the life and kindness of St. Nicholas, a Christian bishop who lived during the 3rd and 4th centuries in what is now Turkey. Known for his generosity—especially toward children and those in need—he became one of the most beloved saints in Europe. His feast day is celebrated on December 6th (or December 19th in some Eastern Christian traditions that follow a different calendar). While the holiday is not as widely observed in the United States today, it is still a major celebration in many European countries and communities around the world.

St. Nicholas was the bishop of Myra and was famous for performing secret acts of charity. One of the most well-known stories tells how he secretly delivered bags of gold to a poor family in need, dropping them through a window—or into stockings drying by the fireplace, depending on the version. Because of tales like this, he became known as a protector of children, sailors, merchants, and travelers. Over time, legends about him blended with local customs and winter traditions, inspiring many of the gift-giving ideas now connected with Christmas.

Many families who celebrate St. Nicholas Day begin the night before, on December 5th, by placing shoes, socks, or boots outside their door or near a fireplace. While they sleep, St. Nicholas is said to come by and fill the footwear with treats such as oranges, nuts, candies, chocolate coins, or small toys. Sometimes children leave out carrots, hay, or drawings for St. Nicholas's horse or donkey. When they wake up in the morning, they discover what surprises have arrived.

Different countries have their own special traditions. In Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Austria, and parts of France, St. Nicholas may arrive in person to visit homes, schools, or town squares. He often wears a bishop's red robe and hat and carries a staff. In the Netherlands and Belgium, he is called Sinterklaas—a name that played a major role in the creation of the modern Santa Claus in the United States. In some regions, he is accompanied by helpers who remind children to behave kindly and responsibly.

St. Nicholas Day continues to be a holiday focused on kindness, generosity, and helping others, just as St. Nicholas did in his lifetime. Whether through simple treats, community events, or charitable giving, families use this celebration to encourage doing good and spreading joy during the winter season.



St. Lucia Day

St. Lucia Day is a beautiful winter celebration observed each year on December 13th, mainly in Sweden, as well as in Norway, Finland, and some communities with Scandinavian heritage around the world. It honors Saint Lucia (or St. Lucy), a young Christian martyr from the 3rd or 4th century who was known for bringing food and comfort to persecuted Christians hiding in the dark underground tunnels of Rome. According to legend, she wore a wreath of candles on her head so she could keep both hands free to carry supplies. Her name, Lucia, comes from the Latin word for “light,” making her a perfect symbol for brightness and hope during the darkest days of winter.

Before calendars were updated in the 1500s, December 13th was believed to be the winter solstice, the longest night of the year. In the far north, winter nights can feel especially long and cold, so St. Lucia's Day became a joyful reminder that light will return. The holiday combines Christian stories of Saint Lucia with older Scandinavian traditions that welcomed the coming of brighter days.

One of the most recognizable traditions is the St. Lucia procession. Each year, girls dress as Lucia in long white dresses with red sashes symbolizing courage and crowns of candles (now often electric for safety). One girl is chosen to represent St. Lucia, leading the procession while singing traditional songs. Behind her may follow other girls carrying candles and boys dressed as “star boys” wearing tall pointed hats decorated with stars. Some processions take place at school, in churches, or even in homes early in the morning.

Food is also an important part of the celebration. Many families enjoy *lussekatter*, or St. Lucia buns—sweet, golden rolls flavored with saffron and shaped like curled cat tails or other swirls. Coffee, hot drinks, and other treats are often served to brighten the morning. In some areas, children bring Lucia buns to their parents or to elderly relatives and neighbors as an act of kindness.

While St. Lucia Day is especially beloved in Sweden, it has also spread to families with Scandinavian heritage in countries like the United States and Canada. The holiday continues to focus on the encouraging message that even in the darkest season, a little light can make a big difference. Through songs, warm food, glowing candles, and caring gestures, St. Lucia Day brings brightness, generosity, and community into the heart of winter.





Dongzhi

Dongzhi is a traditional East Asian holiday that celebrates the winter solstice—the shortest day and longest night of the year in the Northern Hemisphere. It usually falls on December 21st or 22nd. The name Dongzhi means “arrival of winter,” and this festival has been observed in China and nearby regions for more than 2,000 years. It was officially recognized during the Han Dynasty as a holiday connected to astronomy and the changing seasons.

Long ago, people believed the winter solstice was a turning point. Even though it marked the deepest part of winter, it also meant that daylight would begin to grow again. Ancient Chinese philosophy taught about the balance between *yin* (darkness, cold) and *yang* (light, warmth). On Dongzhi, people celebrate the return of *yang* energy, which symbolizes hope, strength, and longer days ahead.

Food plays a very important role in Dongzhi traditions, and different regions celebrate in different ways. In southern China, families gather to make and eat *tangyuan*—small glutinous rice balls. *Tangyuan* are sometimes filled with sweet ingredients like sesame or red bean paste. They are round to represent unity and harmony, and usually served as a soup.

In northern China, many families eat dumplings, especially those filled with meat and vegetables. This tradition is said to date back to a famous doctor named Zhang Zhongjing. According to legend, he made dumplings to help villagers stay warm and healthy during harsh winter weather. Because of this, many people believe eating dumplings at Dongzhi helps protect ears, noses, and fingers from freezing temperatures.

Dongzhi is also a time to honor ancestors. Visiting family graves, cleaning tombs, and leaving offerings are meaningful traditions in some communities. Paying respect to loved ones who have passed away helps families feel connected across generations, even during the coldest time of year.

Though Dongzhi began in China, it is now celebrated in places with large Chinese and East Asian communities, including Taiwan, Hong Kong, Vietnam, South Korea, and around the world. Even today, the festival remains a reminder that winter won't last forever. Families gather, share warm food, and look forward to the slow but steady return of sunlight.





New Year's Eve

New Year's Eve is celebrated on December 31st, the final night of the Gregorian calendar year. Cultures around the world mark this important moment with excitement and reflection. The tradition of celebrating the new year goes back thousands of years; ancient Babylonians welcomed the new year in March during spring planting festivals. Over time, different calendars and religions shifted the focus to winter. When the Gregorian calendar became widely used starting in 1582, January 1st officially became New Year's Day for many nations.

On New Year's Eve, people look back on the past 12 months and prepare for a fresh beginning. It is a time of countdowns, fireworks, parties, and traditions that symbolize good fortune for the year ahead. Many also make New Year's resolutions, personal goals meant to encourage positive change.

Celebrations differ across the globe. In Spain and parts of Latin America, eating 12 grapes at midnight is believed to bring luck for each month of the coming year. In Japan, Buddhist temples ring bells 108 times to wash away negative thoughts. In the United States, crowds gather in New York City's Times Square to watch the famous ball drop. Cities such as London, Dubai, and Sydney are known for spectacular fireworks displays that welcome the new year with dazzling lights.

One of the most unique and famous celebrations is Hogmanay in Scotland. Hogmanay traditions are deeply influenced by ancient Norse and Gaelic winter festivals that honored the sun's return after the darkest days of the year. Many Scottish towns host torchlight processions, fireball swinging, and lively street dances to symbolically drive away evil spirits. A beloved Hogmanay ritual is first-footing: the first guest to cross a home's threshold after midnight brings good fortune, often carrying gifts such as coal, shortbread, or whisky. And of course, the singing of "Auld Lang Syne," a Scottish song based on Robert Burns' poem, has become one of the best-known New Year customs throughout the English-speaking world.

The celebration continues on New Year's Day, January 1st. This day focuses on rest, renewal, and family. Some people enjoy special meals believed to bring luck—like noodles for long life in East Asia or collard greens and black-eyed peas in the southern United States. Parades and sporting events, such as the Rose Parade and football games, are also common traditions.

Together, New Year's Eve and New Year's Day remind us that every ending brings a new beginning, filled with hope, gratitude, and the promise of what comes next.



Distaff Day

Once upon a time (any time before the Industrial Revolution, actually), the making of cloth and clothing was a continual, mostly-woman's task. In early spring, just before lambing, the sheep were shorn. It was important to get the ewes (female sheep) shorn before they gave birth so they would stay inside the barns rather than leave their lambs in the cold.

After shearing, wool must be sorted and picked. There are all sorts of parts of a fleece that are not good to use, plus sticks, hay, burrs, and any number of assorted things that must be removed. Next, the wool is usually scoured, which removes dirt and lanolin (the sticky, waxy substance). However, some fiber artists leave the lanolin in, but it's always best to remove dirt.

At this point, wool can be spun, but it is often carded first. Carding helps all the fibers go the same direction, making spinning easier. Finally, the wool is spun. After a single is spun, it is often plied with other singles, making a stronger, more stable yarn of multiple strands.

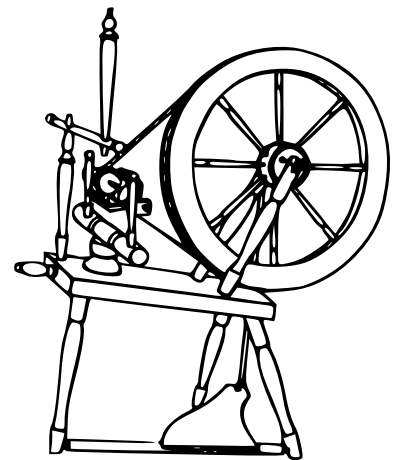
Once yarn or thread is made, it can be woven, knitted, or crocheted. All of this work is very labor-intensive and would be done by anyone whenever they had a spare minute, but most especially by women. Can you imagine being responsible for keeping your family clothed?

However, there were specific times when this work was supposed to stop. One of these times were the winter holidays. Depending on the time and the culture, that could mean from the solstice or from Christmas. In Iceland, it was said that a Yule Cat would come eat children who did not receive a new article of clothing (indicating that not all the fiber work had been finished).

A distaff is not as commonly used any more, but it is a stick on which flax was wound. Flax has very long strands (often more than a couple of feet), so they easily tangle and must be kept organized on a distaff. It is also possible to use a distaff with wool, though not as necessary.

So Distaff Day, or Rock Day, was the day (in England, either January 7 or the Tuesday after Epiphany on January 6) on which this work was taken back up again after the winter holidays.

Today, many fiber artists use the day to celebrate their craft. Spinning and weaving guilds often host get-togethers and in some places, you can find public demonstrations.





Lunar New Year

Lunar New Year is one of the most widely celebrated holidays in the world, observed by millions of people across East and Southeast Asia and in communities around the globe. Instead of being based on the Gregorian calendar, Lunar New Year follows the lunar calendar, meaning the date shifts each year but usually falls between late January and mid-February. The holiday marks the beginning of a new year and the arrival of spring, symbolizing fresh starts, good fortune, and time spent with family.

The holiday has deep roots dating back thousands of years in ancient China. One famous legend tells of Nian, a fearsome beast that would appear at the end of each year to attack villagers. To protect themselves, people used bright lights, loud noises, and the color red—traditions that continue today in the form of fireworks, lanterns, and red decorations. Over time, Lunar New Year became a celebration tied closely to agriculture, honoring ancestors and welcoming prosperity for the year ahead.

While often called Chinese New Year, the holiday is celebrated by many cultures, each with its own customs and names. In China, it is known as the Spring Festival. In Vietnam, it is Tết. In South Korea, it is Seollal. In Tibet, it is Losar. All share a focus on family gatherings, honoring elders, and wishing for health and good luck.

Lunar New Year celebrations usually last for 15 days, beginning with family reunions and ending with the Lantern Festival. One of the most important traditions is the reunion dinner on New Year's Eve, often featuring symbolic foods. Dumplings may represent wealth, rice cakes can symbolize growth, and long noodles stand for a long life. Homes are decorated with red banners, paper cuttings, and symbols of the Chinese zodiac animal for the new year. Children often receive red envelopes filled with money as blessings for the year ahead.

Parades and performances fill the streets with excitement. Dragon and lion dances, drums, and fireworks are believed to chase away bad spirits and bring joy to the community. Many people also visit temples to pray for good fortune.

Even far from Asia, Lunar New Year is celebrated in cities worldwide, including San Francisco, Toronto, Sydney, and London, where large festivals highlight cultural traditions. Whether people celebrate with a huge parade or a quiet meal at home, Lunar New Year is a joyful time that honors heritage, strengthens community, and looks forward with hope to the year to come.



Suggested Activities

- 1) Build a gingerbread house! There are kits you can get from the store, you can try the graham cracker and milk carton method I used in school as a child, or you can be really awesome and make one from scratch like my childhood neighbor did every year. Gingerbread houses are popular in Germany.
- 2) Conduct an experiment to see how temperature affects the solubility of cocoa and sugar. Remember learning about how things dissolved in water causes ice to freeze at a higher temperature? Well, temperature impacts how much of something can dissolve, too! Use the science experiment sheets in the back of the unit study to record your findings.
- 3) Use one of the tables in the science experiment sheets to record your daily winter weather. Record sunrise and sunset times, temperature, and precipitation. Is the weather cloudy, windy, stormy, rainy, or snowy? Make sure you include the date so you can determine when the winter solstice is!
- 4) Write a poem about winter! Choose whether you want it to rhyme or follow a specific meter. Maybe you'll write a haiku. Give it a title and maybe an illustration.

Games

Access your copy of my Winter-Themed Escape Room [here](#).

The only holiday game my family has tried is Santa Cookie Elf Candy Snowman. However, it's a hilarious game that always leaves us laughing.

If you have younger kids, (affiliate link) Don't Break the Ice is supposed to be good.

Dreidel is a traditional Jewish game.

(Affiliate link) Reindeer Poop looks to be a fun, holiday-themed card game.

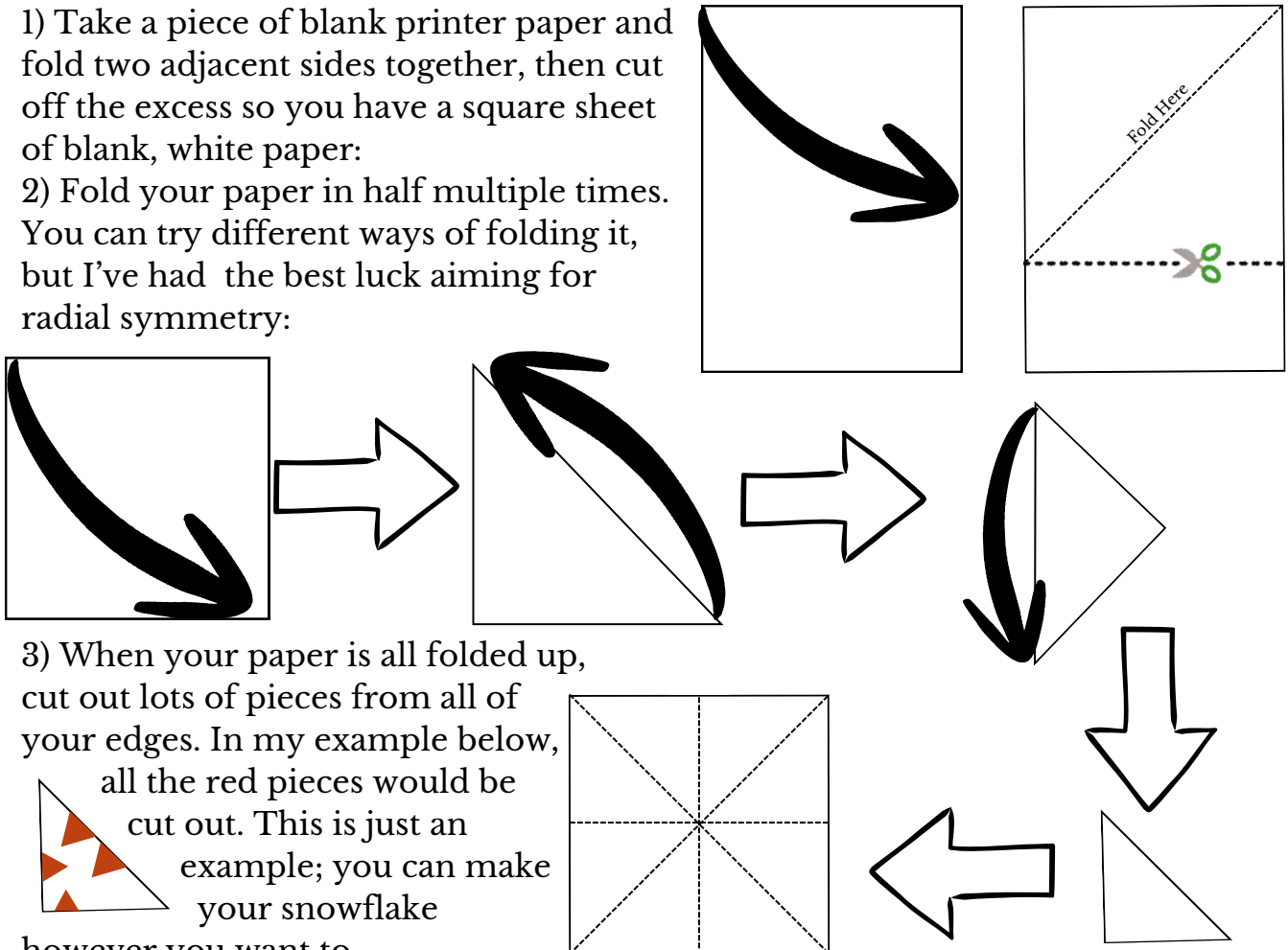
Many families enjoy classic games during get-togethers, like Charades, Scattergories, or my family played Sequence.

Crafts

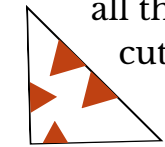
Snowflakes

1) Take a piece of blank printer paper and fold two adjacent sides together, then cut off the excess so you have a square sheet of blank, white paper:

2) Fold your paper in half multiple times. You can try different ways of folding it, but I've had the best luck aiming for radial symmetry:



3) When your paper is all folded up, cut out lots of pieces from all of your edges. In my example below, all the red pieces would be cut out. This is just an example; you can make your snowflake however you want to.



4) Unfold your snowflake to reveal the beautiful pattern!

Homemade Ornaments

If you put up a tree (or garland!), there are numerous ways you can decorate it with homemade ornaments.

1) Purchase empty ornaments (I prefer plastic, but glass are also available). You can fill them with natural objects like pine needles, seeds, or herbs. You can use glitter if your family hasn't banned it from the house. You could even fill with small toys like LEGO bricks!

2) Glue a picture of yourself or other family members on a flat surface (like a clean, dry can lid that's not sharp, or a popsicle-stick frame). Decorate with paint, glitter, pipe cleaners, or other items.

Salt Dough Ornaments

Salt dough requires only three ingredients: flour (cheap, all-purpose white flour is best, but whole-wheat works), salt, and water. Use two parts flour to one part salt, and about one part (or a little less) water. Stir it together well and knead it a bit.

If you roll your salt dough out between two sheets of parchment paper, it won't stick to your rolling pin.

Then, you can cut them out using whatever cookie cutters you want. You can even leave them as a thicker circle and make handprint ornaments.

Once your ornaments are dry, you can paint them and glue on other decorations. To help them last, use mod podge or another sealant once the paint is dry.

Luminarias

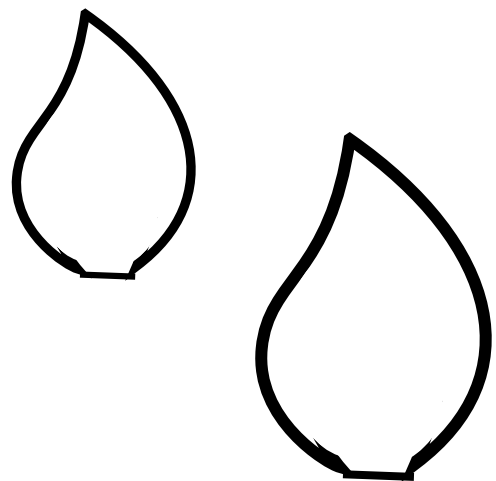
Luminarias, paper lanterns, are used during Las Posadas to line the walkways as people make their way to their midnight mass. Originally, they were bonfires, but later began using Chinese paper lanterns. Now, most people use paper bags, so it's easy for your kids to create their own.

You can use any paper bags, but white ones are especially nice. The bags are often plain with a small tea light inside, but you can decorate them, too. You can use crazy scissors or fancy punches, and battery-operated tea lights make them safer.

Paper Bonfire

Lohri is an Indian harvest festival celebrated on January 13th that is commonly celebrated with big bonfires across India. To make your own bonfire, use this template to cut out colored tissue paper "flames" in red, yellow, and orange.

Glue your flames around the edge of a battery-operated tea light.



Vocabulary

Cut out the vocabulary words on this page and glue them next to the definitions on this page and the next two.

Adaptation	Diapause	Hibachi	Nutrients
Alpine	Ecology	Hibernation	Organism
Altitude	Elevation	Humidity	Pechka
Annual	Environment	Hypocaust	Perennial
Atmosphere	Equator	Indigenous	Population
Axial tilt	Equinox	Industrial revolution	Predator
Biennial	Evaporation	Insulation	Reproduce
Brumation	Evergreen	Latitude	Solid
Condensation	Evolution	Liquid	Solstice
Deciduous	Freezing	Medieval	Stratification
Density	Gas	Melting	Sublimation
Desert	Genetic	Migration	Tree line
Deposition	Hemisphere	Mutation	Tropics

a substance that does not flow perceptibly under moderate stress, has a definite capacity for resisting forces which tend to deform it, and under ordinary conditions retains a definite size and shape

a unit of pressure equal to the pressure of the air at sea level or approximately 14.7 pounds per square inch (101,325 pascals)

passing the winter in a torpid state, in which body temperature, metabolism, heartbeat, and respiration are lowered to nearly imperceptible levels

the factors and influences that affect the growth, health, progress, functioning, etc., of something

either of the two points on the ecliptic at which its distance from the celestial equator is greatest and which is reached by the sun each year about June 21 and December 21

modification of an organism or its parts that makes it more fit for existence under the conditions of its environment

circle of the earth or a celestial body that is everywhere equally distant from the two poles and divides the surface into the northern and southern hemispheres

change from a liquid to a vapor

to pass directly from the solid to the vapor state

continuing or lasting for two years

the total of individuals occupying an area or making up a whole

a relatively permanent change in hereditary material that involves either a change in chromosome structure or number

changing phase directly from a gas to a solid

of, relating to, or growing in the biogeographic zone including the elevated slopes above timberline

the mass of a substance per unit of volume

cumulative inherited change in a population of organisms through time leading to the appearance of new forms

a charcoal brazier used in Japan

substances or ingredients that promote growth, provide energy, and maintain life

half of a spherical or roughly spherical body (such as a planet)

passing, usually periodically, from one region or climate to another for feeding or breeding

material used to prevent transfer of heat

an animal that survives by eating other animals

a fluid (such as air) that has neither independent shape nor volume but tends to expand indefinitely

the angle between the planet's rotational axis and its orbital axis

having foliage that remains green and functional through more than one growing season

a living being

an ancient Roman central heating system with underground furnace and tile flues to distribute the heat

an area of land receiving less than 25 cm of precipitation annually

changing phase from gas to liquid

a rapid major change in an economy (as in England in the late 18th century) marked by the general introduction of power-driven machinery

the amount of water vapor in the air

angular distance north or south from the earth's equator measured through 90 degrees

living for only a few weeks or months during the growing season

the process of being formed into layers

a fluid that has no independent shape but has a definite volume

persisting for several years, usually with new herbaceous growth

of, relating to, or descended from the earliest known inhabitants of a place and especially of a place that was colonized

changing phase from liquid to solid

the vertical elevation of an object above a surface (such as sea level or land) of a planet or natural satellite

changing phases from a solid to a liquid

area on the earth near the equator, from 23.5° N to 23.5° S, where the climate is uniformly warm and humid

the period in Europe between the 5th and the 15th centuries

a large brick stove used in Russia

to produce new individuals of the same kind by a sexual or asexual process

the height above the level of the sea

the elevation above which trees do not grow

inherited from one's parents through DNA or RNA

falling off or shed seasonally or at a certain stage of development in the life cycle

day and night are equal in length everywhere on earth

the totality or pattern of relations between organisms and their environment

completing the life cycle in one growing season or single year

a state or condition of sluggishness, inactivity, or torpor exhibited by reptiles during winter or extended periods of low temperature

Science Experiments

There are three important parts of any science experiment. Controlling variables, multiple trials, and recording results.

A variable is anything that can be different. Temperature, pressure, humidity, ingredients, time, and bubble-blowing technique are all different variables that could impact an experiment. Some variables are difficult for most people to control for (I don't know about you, but I don't have an environment in which I can control temperature, pressure, or humidity). However, if you conduct multiple trials on the same afternoon, that's pretty good. At least if you record these different data points, you can use that information to determine if any changes were made.

As you conduct your experiments, make sure as many variables as possible are kept constant, except for one. The variable you are changing is what you are testing.

This is where multiple trials come in. They can help to mitigate variations in your environment and human error. One way to have multiple trials is to have a larger sample size. A big experiment conducted by a scientist in a lab might have several thousand samples. That's beyond the scope of what we can do, but we can have at least a few samples.

Finally, recording your results makes it so you can share the information with others and they can reproduce your work (which adds to the multiple trials aspect).

Print as many of the following pages as you need to properly record the experiments you conduct during this unit study.

Experiment Title: _____

Background Information: _____

Question: _____

Hypothesis: _____

Materials (specifics): _____

Methods (specifics): _____

[illegible][illegible]

Results: _____

Conclusion: _____

Writing Assignments

Pick any holiday, culture, winter event, related historical event, or anything else related and write about it. You can write an informative paper about your chosen topic, a short story, or maybe a persuasive paper expressing an opinion.

Creative Writing Brainstorming

The next page is for brainstorming and developing elements of a story. Use it to help get your ideas organized and fleshed out before writing your story.

Writing an Outline

1. Pick a topic
2. Choose your three main points.
3. These three main points go under the Introduction a., b., and c. and under the Conclusion a., b., and c.
4. Also write these three main points at 2., 3., and 4.
5. Find three supporting points for each of your main points, and place them at a., b., and c. under 2., 3., and 4.

Using Your Outline

Each of your main number points (1., 2., 3., 4., and 5.) is a separate paragraph. Each of your subpoints (a., b., and c.) should be one sentence. When you are finished fleshing out your outline into your full essay, each paragraph will be 3-5 sentences long.

Creative Writing Brainstorming

Character Descriptions: _____

Setting Description: _____

Challenge or Problem: _____

Resolution: _____

Essay Topic: _____

1. Introduction

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

2. _____

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

3. _____

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

4. _____

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

5. Conclusion

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

Subjects Covered

Throughout this unit study, your student has covered:

Math: Cooking, time

Science: Physics, ecology, evolution, experiments, vocabulary

Reading: Subject-matter in science, history, and cultures, suggested reading

Writing: Suggested activities, writing assignments

History: History of winter survival, history of holidays

Geography: Holidays, suggested activities

Art: Coloring pages, crafts

P.E.: Winter adaptations activities

Grading Rubrics

What your child produces will depend on their capabilities. Use this as a rough guide, but don't be afraid to modify it to meet your child's needs.

Early Elementary

- Very basic; write 1-2 sentences OR
- Dictate a more complicated story/essay to parents that you, the parent, write down
- Correct mechanics with your child.

Mechanics: spelling, punctuation, and grammar

Late Elementary				
	Length	Organization	Mechanics	Content
4 points	3+ paragraphs; 4-5 sentences/ paragraph	There is an introduction, body, and conclusion	Up to 2 mechanical errors	The topic is clearly defined and there are 3 or more supporting points
3 points	3 paragraphs, 3 sentences/ paragraph	There is a clear beginning, middle, and end	3-5 mechanical errors	The topic is defined and there are 2-3 supporting points
2 points	2 paragraphs, 2-3 sentences/ paragraph	There is some organization of supporting points	6-10 mechanical errors	The topic is loosely defined and there are 1-2 supporting points
1 point	1 paragraph, 3 sentences/ paragraph	There is little organization	More than 10 mechanical errors	The topic is barely defined with little or no supporting points

Grading Rubric

What your child produces will depend on their capabilities. Use this as a rough guide, but don't be afraid to modify it to meet your child's needs.

Mechanics: spelling, punctuation, and grammar

Middle School					
	Length	Organization	Mechanics	Content	Style
4	5 paragraphs; 5 sentences/ paragraph	There is an introduction, 3 body paragraphs, and conclusion	Up to 2 mechanical errors	The topic is clearly defined and there are 3 or more supporting points	Clear voice and style, consistent throughout
3	4 paragraphs, 4 sentences/ paragraph	There is a clear beginning, middle, and end	3-5 mechanical errors	The topic is defined and there are 2-3 supporting points	Voice and style is mostly consistent
2	3 paragraphs, 3 sentences/ paragraph	There is some organization of supporting points	6-10 mechanical errors	The topic is loosely defined and there are 1-2 supporting points	Voice or style is somewhat present
1	2 paragraphs, 3 sentences/ paragraph	There is little organization	More than 10 mechanical errors	The topic is barely defined with little or no supporting points	Voice and style are not developed

Grading Rubric

What your child produces will depend on their capabilities. Use this as a rough guide, but don't be afraid to modify it to meet your child's needs.

Mechanics: spelling, punctuation, and grammar

High School					
	Length	Organization	Mechanics	Content	Style
4	1-3 pages, 7+ paragraphs	There is an introduction, 5+ body paragraphs, and conclusion	Up to 2 mechanical errors	The topic is clearly defined and there are 5 or more main supporting points	Clear voice and style, consistent throughout
3	5 paragraphs, 5 sentences/ paragraph	There is a clear beginning, middle, and end	3-5 mechanical errors	The topic is defined and there are 4 supporting points	Voice and style is mostly consistent
2	4 paragraphs, 4 sentences/ paragraph	Supporting points are mostly organized into paragraphs	6-10 mechanical errors	The topic is loosely defined and there are 3 supporting points	Voice or style is somewhat consistent
1	3 paragraphs, 3 sentences/ paragraph	There is some organization of supporting points	More than 10 mechanical errors	The topic is loosely defined and there are 1-2 supporting points	Voice or style is somewhat present

Vocabulary: Answers

(No need to print these pages)

Solid: a substance that does not flow perceptibly under moderate stress, has a definite capacity for resisting forces which tend to deform it, and under ordinary conditions retains a definite size and shape

Atmosphere: a unit of pressure equal to the pressure of the air at sea level or approximately 14.7 pounds per square inch (101,325 pascals)

Hibernation: passing the winter in a torpid state, in which body temperature, metabolism, heartbeat, and respiration are lowered to nearly imperceptible levels

Environment: the factors and influences that affect the growth, health, progress, functioning, etc., of something

Solstice: either of the two points on the ecliptic at which its distance from the celestial equator is greatest and which is reached by the sun each year about June 21 and December 21

Adaptation: modification of an organism or its parts that makes it more fit for existence under the conditions of its environment

Equator: circle of the earth or a celestial body that is everywhere equally distant from the two poles and divides the surface into the northern and southern hemispheres

Evaporation: change from a liquid to a vapor

Sublimation: to pass directly from the solid to the vapor state

Biennial: continuing or lasting for two years

Population: the total of individuals occupying an area or making up a whole

Mutation: a relatively permanent change in hereditary material that involves either a change in chromosome structure or number

Deposition: changing phase directly from a gas to a solid

Alpine: of, relating to, or growing in the biogeographic zone including the elevated slopes above timberline

Density: the mass of a substance per unit of volume

Evolution: cumulative inherited change in a population of organisms through time leading to the appearance of new forms

Hibachi: a charcoal brazier used in Japan

Nutrients: substances or ingredients that promote growth, provide energy, and maintain life

Hemisphere: half of a spherical or roughly spherical body (such as a planet)

Migration: passing, usually periodically, from one region or climate to another for feeding or breeding

Insulation: material used to prevent transfer of heat

Predator: an animal that survives by eating other animals

Gas: a fluid (such as air) that has neither independent shape nor volume but tends to expand indefinitely

Axial tilt: the angle between the planet's rotational axis and its orbital axis

Evergreen: having foliage that remains green and functional through more than one growing season

Organism: a living being

Hypocaust: an ancient Roman central heating system with underground furnace and tile flues to distribute the heat

Desert: an area of land receiving less than 25 cm of precipitation annually

Condensation: changing phase from gas to liquid

Industrial revolution: a rapid major change in an economy (as in England in the late 18th century) marked by the general introduction of power-driven machinery

Humidity: the amount of water vapor in the air

Latitude: angular distance north or south from the earth's equator measured through 90 degrees

Diapause: living for only a few weeks or months during the growing season

Stratification: the process of being formed into layers

Liquid: a fluid that has no independent shape but has a definite volume

Perennial: persisting for several years, usually with new herbaceous growth

Indigenous: of, relating to, or descended from the earliest known inhabitants of a place and especially of a place that was colonized

Freezing: changing phase from liquid to solid

Altitude, Elevation: the vertical elevation of an object above a surface (such as sea level or land) of a planet or natural satellite

Melting: changing phases from a solid to a liquid

Tropics: area on the earth near the equator, from 23.5° N to 23.5° S, where the climate is uniformly warm and humid

Medieval: the period in Europe between the 5th and the 15th centuries

Pechka: a large brick stove used in Russia

Reproduce: to produce new individuals of the same kind by a sexual or asexual process

Elevation, Altitude: the height above the level of the sea

Tree line: the elevation above which trees do not grow

Genetic: inherited from one's parents through DNA or RNA

Deciduous: falling off or shed seasonally or at a certain stage of development in the life cycle

Equinox: day and night are equal in length everywhere on earth

Ecology: the totality or pattern of relations between organisms and their environment

Annual: completing the life cycle in one growing season or single year

Brumation: a state or condition of sluggishness, inactivity, or torpor exhibited by reptiles during winter or extended periods of low temperature