December is a SEASON OF LIGHT

- Christians light candles for advent.
- Jews light candles on the menorah for Hanukkah.
- Buddhists celebrate light on Bodhi Day.
- People of African heritage light candles on the kinara for Kwanzaa.
- People of Iranian heritage celebrate the triumph of light over darkness during Yaldā.
- Those of Mexican or Latin-American heritage walk in a candle-lit procession for Las Posadas

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Not everyone celebrates the same holidays.

It's fun to learn about the different holidays people celebrate during the holiday season.

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Learning about and celebrating holidays of different religions and cultures is a beautiful way to spread light and love this holiday season.

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Saying
"Happy Holidays"
is a respectful way to wish everyone a happy holiday season, especially if you don't know the holidays they celebrate.

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Did you know there are a lot of different holidays celebrated by people in the United States in the month of December?

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Holidays in December

December 7 - 15: Hanukkah

December 8: Bodhi Day

December 13: St. Lucia Day

December 16 - 24: Las Posadas

December 21: Yaldā Night / Chelleh Night

December 25: Christmas

December 26-Jan 1: Kwanzaa

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So many holidays in December
Here's a poem to help you remember
First they're Chanukkah, Festival of Lights
A Jewish tradition that lasts eight nights
In Sweden we have Saint Lucia's Day
The girls in white serve buns on trays
Travel to Mexico for Las Posadas
With fiestas, parades, food, and pinatas
Now for a holiday celebrated by Christians in the USA
Lots of kids excited for Christmas Day
With Christmas trees, presents, lights on the wall
Goodwill to men and peace to all
This next holiday will end December
A time that African Americans remember
At Kwanzaa presents are made by hand,
Candles are lit, on a mat they stand.
That's the end of our December
Hope this helps you to remember.

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St. Lucia Day

Also called the Feast of Saint Lucy, St. Lucia Day is a day to honor Lucia of Syracuse, one of the earliest Christian martyrs. It is celebrated on December 13 and is meant to bring hope and light during the darkest time of the year.

Celebrated by those of Swedish or Scandinavian descent.

Las Posadas

Celebrated yearly from December 16 - 24, Las Posadas is a religious festival traditionally held in Mexico and parts of Latin America.

Las Posadas is celebrated as part of the Christmas festivities for those of Mexican or Latin American descent.

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St. Lucia Day

Also called the Feast of Saint Lucy, St. Lucia Day is a day to honor Lucia of Syracuse, one of the earliest Christian martyrs.

It is celebrated on December 13th. The story of St. Lucia was originally told by Monks who first brought Christianity to Sweden.
St. Lucia was a young Christian girl who was martyred or killed for her faith, in 304. St. Lucia spent her time bringing food to Christians who were being persecuted in Rome. She would put candles on her head so that she could see, but still had free hands to carry the food.

St. Lucia's Day is now celebrated by girls wearing a white dress with a red sash around their waist along with a crown of candles on their head. Young girls wear candles that are electric. When girls turn around 12 years of age, they begin to use real candles.

It is celebrated on December 13 and is meant to bring hope and light during the darkest time of the year.

Celebrated by those of Swedish or Scandinavian descent.

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Yaldā Night / Chelleh Night

A winter solstice festival celebrated on the longest and darkest night of the year, December 21.

Celebrated by those of Iranian descent.

Christmas

Christians celebrate Christmas on December 25th to honor the birth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Christians believe He was born about 2000 years ago to redeem mankind and give eternal life.

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Hanukkah

- December 7 - Dec 15
- Eight-day Festival of Lights
- A celebration of the rededication of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem.
- Celebrated with a nightly menorah lighting, special prayers and songs, fried foods, and playing dreidel.

A candle is a small thing. But one candle can light another. And see how its own light increases, as a candle gives its flame to the other. You are such a light.

- Moshe Davis

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Hanukkah

In the second century BCE, the Holy Land was ruled by the Seleucids (Syrian-Greeks), who tried to force the people of Israel to accept Greek culture and beliefs instead of mitzvah observance and belief in G-d. Against all odds, a small band of faithful but poorly armed Jews, led by Judah the Maccabee, defeated one of the mightiest armies on earth, drove the Greeks from the land, reclaimed the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, and rededicated it to the service of G-d.

When they sought to light the Temple's Menorah (the seven-branched candelabrum), they found only a single cruse of olive oil that had escaped contamination by the Greeks. Miraculously, they lit the menorah and the one-day supply of oil lasted for eight days, long enough until new oil could be prepared under conditions of ritual purity.

To commemorate and publicize these miracles, the sages instituted the festival of Chanukah (also spelled Hanukkah).

Chanukah means "dedication" in Hebrew and is also known as the Festival of Lights.

- www.chabad.org

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Bodhi Day

- December 8
- A celebration of the day Buddha reached enlightenment
- Many celebrate the day by meditating and studying, lighting candles, decorating Bodhi trees, and performing kind acts and good works

Thousands of candles can be lit from a single candle, and the life of the candle is not shortened. Happiness never decreases by being shared.

- Buddha

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Bodhi Day

- December 8
- A celebration of the day Buddha reached enlightenment.
- Many celebrate the day by meditating and studying lighting candles, decorating Bodhi trees, and performing kind acts and good works.

> Whatever words we utter should be chosen with care for people will hear them and be influenced by them for good or ill.
>
> - Buddha

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Bodhi Day

Over 2500 years ago, there lived a wealthy prince called Siddhartha Gautama. He lived in a beautiful palace in Nepal. Siddhartha married and had children but stayed within the palace walls.

One day, he decided to see what was outside the palace and immediately he saw people suffering with old age, illness and death. This caused him great concern, as he did not understand how people could live with such things. He then saw a man who looked calm and content with nothing but a begging bowl. Siddhartha was puzzled by what he had seen.

It was then Siddhartha decided to give up all his wealth and meditate on these problems under a fig tree. He meditated for a long time until he understood all there was to know about life and how people can help themselves when they are suffering. He reached a high level of understanding and wisdom, which is known as reaching enlightenment.

After Siddhartha reached enlightenment, he became the Buddha and began teaching others how to meditate and understand how to change the way they view life and suffering to ease their minds.

- www.twinkl.com

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Kwanzaa

- December 26 - Jan 1
- A celebration of African culture and heritage.
- Each day of Kwanzaa focuses on one value: self-determination, unity, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, and faith.

Kwanzaa is a special time to remember the ancestors, the bridge-builders, and the leaders.

- Dorothy Winbush Riley

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Kwanzaa

During the week of Kwanzaa, families and communities come together to share a feast, to honor the ancestors, affirm the bonds between them, and to celebrate African and African American culture.

Each day they light a candle to highlight the principle of that day and to breathe meaning into the principles with various activities, such as reciting the sayings or writings of great Black thinkers and writers, reciting original poetry, African drumming, and sharing a meal of African diaspora-inspired foods.

The table is decorated with the essential symbols of Kwanzaa, such as the Kinara (Candle Holder), Mkeka (Mat), Muhindi (corn to represent the children), Mazao (fruit to represent the harvest), and Zawadi (gifts).

One might also see the colors of the Pan-African flag, red (the struggle), black (the people), and green (the future), represented throughout the space and in the clothing worn by participants. These colors were first proclaimed to be the colors for all people of the African diaspora by Marcus Garvey.

- National Museum of African American History and Culture

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Las Posadas

- December 16 - 24
- Commemorates the journey Mary and Joseph made while searching for shelter in Bethlehem.
- Each night a candle-lit procession goes door to door asking if there is room for them to stay. They are turned away until the last house.

Although Las Posadas holds deep religious meaning for some, for others, it is a treasured holiday tradition, just like putting up a Christmas tree.

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Los Posadas

Los Posadas commemorates the journey that Joseph and Mary made from Nazareth to Bethlehem in search of a safe refuge where Mary could give birth to the baby Jesus.

It begins on December 16th and lasts for nine nights, symbolizing the nine months of Mary's pregnancy with baby Jesus.

Each evening during the festival, a small child dressed as an angel leads a procession through the streets of the town. The procession is primarily made up of children dressed in silver and gold robes carrying lit candles and images of Mary and Joseph riding a donkey. Adults, including musicians, follow the procession, which visits selected homes and asks for lodging for Joseph and Mary. Traditionally, the procession is always refused lodging, though the hosts often provide refreshments. At each stop, passages of scripture are read and Christmas carols are sung. At the last stop, the final home allows them entry. Here there is a piñata filled with toys and candy.

The last night of the festivities is December 24th which concludes with Christmas Mass at midnight.

- Britannica.com

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Yaldā

- December 21
- A winter solstice festival celebrated on the longest and darkest night of the year.
- Celebrates the triumph of light over darkness, with pomegranates, poetry, and sacred rituals with family and friends.

While Christmas and Yalda are celebrated just a few days apart, the celebrations hold similar traditions and values. Family, love, resilience, rebirth and a triumph of light over dark.

- Pardis Mahdavi

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Yaldā

Celebrated by Iranians and Persians around the world to remember the victory of light over darkness and the rebirth of the sun.

A winter solstice festival, it is celebrated on the longest night of the year.

The ancient Persians believed that the longest night of the year was the unlucky night where Ahriman, the Evil Spirit, was the most powerful. So, people gathered with friends and family and stayed awake all night. They told stories, read famous Iranian poetry, ate delicious food, and celebrated the victory of light over darkness. People believed that Ahriman had been defeated because days were getting longer as the spring approached.

Similar traditions are carried out today to celebrate Yaldā. Eating pomegranates and watermelons are an important part of the celebrations as they are believed to bring good fortune and symbolize the sun and new life.

- Zoroastriankids.com

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Lunar New Year

- **February 10, 2024**

- **Marks the arrival of spring and the beginning of a New Year on the Lunisolar calendar. Also known as the Spring Festival.**

- **The biggest holiday for many people across Asia and those of Asian descent and is a time for family reunions, feasting, and gift-giving.**

On the 15th day of Lunar New Year is the Lantern Festival. People light lanterns to symbolize driving out darkness and bringing hope to a new year.

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Lunar New Year

Lunar New Year is a celebration of the arrival of spring and the beginning of a new year on the lunisolar calendar. It is also named Chinese New Year because it is a traditional festival from China. Lunar New Year is used more often as a more inclusive term for the holiday as many Asian countries and communities around the world celebrate the holiday. It is the most important holiday in China and many Asian countries.

While the official dates encompassing the holiday vary by culture, those celebrating consider it the time of the year to reunite with immediate and extended family.

Commonly known as the Spring Festival in China, Lunar New Year is a fifteen-day celebration marked by many traditions. At home, families decorate windows with red paper cuttings and adorn doors with couplets expressing auspicious wishes for the new year. Shopping for holiday sundries in open-air markets and cleaning the house are also beloved traditions.

The Lunar New Year's Eve reunion dinner is the highlight that kicks off the holiday, a feast with a spread of symbolic dishes, such as a whole fish representing abundance, that bring good luck and fortune.

The fifteenth and final day of the holiday is the Lantern Festival, during which people have tangyuan, or sweet glutinous rice balls, and children carry lanterns around the neighborhood at night to mark the end of the celebration.

- National Museum of Asian Art

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Win a Book!

Answer our quiz or color one of the coloring pages and drop it in the box in the office labeled Winter Holidays, for a chance to win the book "*The Trees of the Dancing Goats*" by Patricia Polacco.

Winner will be drawn randomly.

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Win a Book!

For a chance to win *The Trees of the Dancing Goats* by Patricia Polacco:

For those in grades 3-6: Answer our quiz and drop it in the box in the office labeled Winter Holidays "Win a Book" Drawing.

For those in grades K- 2nd: Color one of the coloring pages and drop it in the box in the office labeled Winter Holidays "Win a Book" Drawing.

Two winners, one for the coloring pages and one for the quiz, will be drawn randomly.

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Winter Holidays Quiz

Name:

1. **What holiday celebrates the rededication of the holy Temple in Jerusalem?**
2. **What holiday do people sometimes decorate ficus trees with stringed lights?**
3. **Which holiday celebrates 7 values, one for each day of the holiday?**
4. **Which holiday is celebrated on the longest and darkest night of the year?**
5. **Which holiday lasts nine days?**

Bonus: What do Hanukkah, Kwanza, Bodhi Day, Yaldā, and Las Posadas all have in common?

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Winter Holidays

"Win a Book" Drawing

HANUKKAH

Name:

THE UNDAUNTED FOUNDATION

BODHI DAY

Name:

THE UNDAUNTED FOUNDATION

KWANZA

Name:

THE UNDAUNTED FOUNDATION

Name:

LAS POSADAS

YALDĀ

Name:

Name:

CHUN JIE LUNAR NEW YEAR