

Winter Holidays

Do you and your family celebrate a special winter holiday? You may decorate a Christmas tree and sing Christmas carols, or perhaps you light the candles on a menorah during Hanukkah, or maybe you eat sweet tangerines and light the seven candles of a kinara for Kwanzaa.

Many people celebrate different winter holidays. Nevertheless, several of these holidays have a lot in common: They are a time for friends and families to gather together; they are a time to make special foods and desserts; and often gifts and cards are given as reminders of how much people care about one another.

Some of the winter holidays celebrated each year are Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, and the Winter Solstice. Christmas commemorates the birth of Jesus, Hanukkah recalls the re-dedication of the temple of Jerusalem after the victory of the Maccabees, Kwanzaa is a non-religious holiday that honors African-American people and their heritage, and the Winter Solstice celebrates the sun and the end of winter.

Most winter holidays revolve around an important object of light: the Christmas lights on a Christmas tree, the nine candles on a Hanukkah menorah, the seven candles on a Kwanzaa kinara, the sun during the Winter Solstice, and the four candles on a Christmas Advent wreath.

Have you noticed that during the winter months, there are colder temperatures and less sunlight? Consequently, we turn on lights so that we may see and function indoors. We also make fires to keep us warm and protected from the winter cold. Isn't it interesting how most winter holidays also focus on light? Light certainly brings a cheerful and bright glow to the snow and darkness outside on those cold winter nights.

There is much anticipation and preparation as the excitement for the winter holidays draws near. Many families make special foods and drinks such as eggnog, potato latkes, Christmas cookies, and hot apple cider. Often, friends and families will gather together for a feast and celebration of their holiday. For Hanukkah, children may spin the dreidel and eat yummy potato pancakes called latkes. For Christmas, children may hang stockings, decorate Christmas trees, and eat plum pudding. For Kwanzaa, children may eat delicious fruit and make special bracelets and necklaces for family and friends.

All of these holidays have traditions that have been passed down from one generation to another. Hopefully, in the future, you will continue to pass down your family's customs to your own children.

The winter holidays are a time to be creative, generous, and thankful. It is also a time to look forward to good times ahead. What do you enjoy doing most during the winter holidays?

Winter Holidays Vocabulary Worksheet

Draw a line from the definition to the word on the right that best matches.

Used during Kwanzaa, this wooden candleholder holds seven candles. One black candle is in the middle, four red candles are placed to the left, and four green candles to the right.

FEAST

A song of joy and cheer usually sung around Christmas time.

MENORAH

To be giving of gifts, donations, time.

ADVENT WREATH

A large meal prepared for many people.

ANTICIPATE

Played during Hanukkah, a toy that looks like a top and is used for playing a game of chance.

HERITAGE

To expect or hope for something to happen; to suspect.

KINARA

An evergreen wreath with four candles encircling it: each candle represents a Sunday of Advent. There are three purple candles and one pink candle. Some have a white candle in the center that is lit on Christmas Day.

DREIDEL

A celebration of the sun during the longest night in winter.

LATKE

A hot potato pancake often eaten with applesauce and sour cream. It is a special treat associated with Hanukkah.

CAROL

A candleholder of nine candles. There are eight candles, one for each night of Hanukkah. The ninth candle is the Shamash, and is used to light the other candles.

WINTER SOLSTICE

A tradition or something that is passed down from one's ancestors.

GENEROUS