

Holidays Around the World

A Reading A-Z Level T Leveled Reader
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Holidays Around the World



Written by Peter C. Montin

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Holidays

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A note on spelling:

To ease student reading of names and terms, this book uses spellings that are as close as possible to phonetic English. You may wish to review words such as *Koran* and *Hanukkah* and introduce their traditional spellings.

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Level T Leveled Reader
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Written by Peter C. Montin

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Festive holidays fill the months between November and March.

Introduction

People all around the world love to celebrate special holidays. As each month comes to an end, we turn our calendars and look for the holidays that will come during the new month. It seems that there is no time of the year that holds more holiday excitement than the time between November and March. It is a season of holidays.

Holidays during this season are usually filled with **traditions**. Traditions are things that people do because the people before them did those same things. Traditions are passed down from one **generation** of people to another. Holidays are usually happy times. They are times when friends and family get together. People celebrate with song, dance, and lots of good food. In this book, you will read about many of the different holidays that kids just like you, from all around the world, celebrate during this season of holidays.



During most holidays, families come together.



Two Moslem boys in Indonesia read the Koran during Ramadan.

Ramadan

Each year, people who belong to a faith called Islam set aside an entire month to celebrate a holiday called Ramadan. Islam uses a calendar that is based on the moon. Ramadan, the ninth month of the calendar, begins with the sighting of the new moon. During this month-long holiday, people read the Islam holy book, the Koran. They also pray and fast.

Muslims who fast do not eat or drink during the day. According to Islamic tradition, people cannot eat as long as there is enough light to see the difference between a black thread and a white thread. Each morning before the sun rises, most people eat a small meal. At sunset, the fast is often broken with a fruit called dates, followed by sunset prayer, and then dinner. Friends and relatives often eat together. The biggest day of celebrating comes after the last day of Ramadan. Families and friends join together for large meals, and cities hold festivals.



Muslim family members break their fast at the end of Ramadan.

The tradition of fasting serves many purposes. It helps remind the more fortunate people of Islam that there are people who are always hungry. It reminds them to give thanks for what they have. It also reminds them to be generous and share their good fortune with those who are not as fortunate. Ramadan is a time to think about one's life and to do good deeds for others.

Do You Know?



One Ramadan tradition began with a king who would go out to look for the new moon that begins the holiday. Children went out with the king, carrying colored lanterns and singing songs to guide the way. In some places today, children carry colorful lanterns into the night and sing songs at the start of Ramadan.



Muslim women and children during prayer at the end of Ramadan.



A Jewish family enjoys a Hanukkah meal.

Hanukkah



Hanukkah is a holiday celebrated by Jewish people, who practice a faith called Judaism (JOO-dee-is-um). Judaism also uses its own calendar, and Hanukkah falls in the third month. This eight-day holiday begins in late November or in December.

Hanukkah is known as the “Festival of Lights.” During each of the eight nights of Hanukkah, Jewish families light candles held in a special candle holder called a **menorah** (meh-NOR-ah). The entire family gathers each night for the lighting of the menorah.

A menorah holds nine candles—one for each night of Hanukkah, and one to light the other eight candles. The ninth candle, called the **shamash**, sits taller than the others. On the first night of Hanukkah, only one candle

and the shamash are lit. On each of the next nights, one more candle is lit, until on the last night, all of the candles are burning.



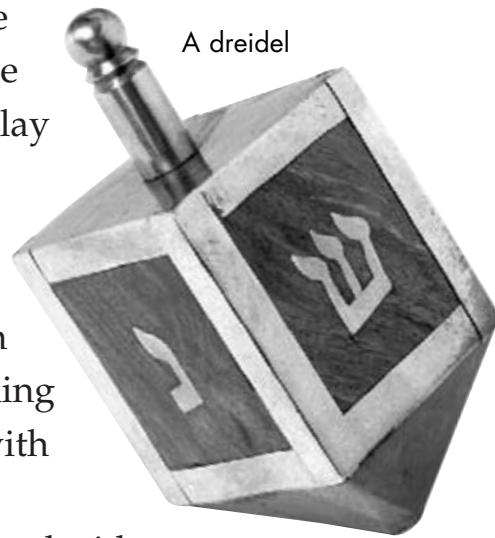
A menorah

As part of the Hanukkah tradition, people also give and receive gifts throughout the eight days. Usually, children get one

small gift and a little money each night. They are encouraged to give at least part of the money to others who are less fortunate.



People decorate their homes in blue and white. They play traditional games, including the game of **dreidel** (DRAY-del), which is played by spinning a four-sided top with different Hebrew letters written on each side.



A dreidel

Winning the game depends on which letter is showing when the dreidel stops spinning. Families and friends sing songs and eat delicious, rich foods made with or cooked in oil. Potato pancakes and jelly-filled pastries are among the favorites.

Do You Know?

Latkes (LAT-kuhs) are one of the traditional foods of Hanukkah. They are pancakes made from grated potatoes mixed with eggs, onions, and flour. They are fried in vegetable oil until they are crispy on the outside and soft inside. Latkes are served hot, and many people like to dip them in applesauce or sour cream.



A Mexican-American girl celebrates Las Posadas, a nine-day Mexican Christmas celebration. Participants recreate Mary and Joseph's search for lodging on the night of Jesus's birth by going door to door and asking to be invited inside.

Christmas

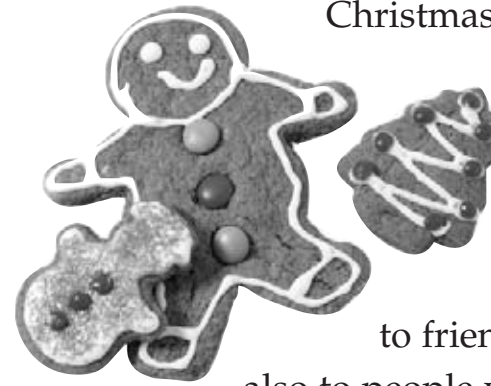
Christmas is a special holiday celebrated by people of the Christian faith. While it is officially celebrated on December 25, it has become filled with activities that begin well before that day. In this way, Christmas is really a holiday season that lasts for days or even weeks. It is the biggest Christian holiday of the year.



Most people who celebrate Christmas bring a pine tree into their homes and decorate it with lights and **ornaments** a week or two before Christmas Day. They place brightly wrapped gifts under the tree. They open the gifts either the night before Christmas or on Christmas morning. People also hang little lights in and around their homes and decorate with red, green, and white.



Christmas trees and lights decorate many Christian homes.



Christmas is a time for many traditions and activities. The Christmas season is a season of giving, not only to friends and family, but

also to people who are poor or in need. Toys, clothing, and food are collected and given to those who have very little. Many cities and towns have fairs, celebrations, and parades. On Christmas



Day, Christians visit with family and friends, open presents, and eat special foods, especially sweets. Many Christians go to church on Christmas Day or the night before. They sing songs and pray that others will be safe, healthy, and happy during the holiday season.



Kwanzaa



Each year from December 26 until January 1, many African Americans celebrate Kwanzaa. It is not a holiday connected to a specific faith. Instead, it celebrates African-American history and the many contributions of Africans and African Americans. Many of the traditions of Kwanzaa come from harvest celebrations on the continent of Africa.

Kwanzaa is seven days long. At the beginning of the holiday, families set up a table or shelf with a special mat, candles, and a bowl or basket of vegetables. These vegetables celebrate a good harvest and other accomplishments during the year. Families also display one ear of corn for each child.

Homes are decorated with streamers, balloons, and flowers of black, red, and green.



This Kwanzaa table includes the kinara, the unity cup, and harvest vegetables.



One candle in the kinara is lit for each night of Kwanzaa.

On each night of Kwanzaa, someone in the family, often the youngest child, lights one candle in a special holder called a **kinara** (KEE-nah-rah). The candles are red, green, and black, to match the colors of the African flag. On the sixth day of Kwanzaa, family and friends come together for a big meal. They pass a special cup around the table. Families tell a traditional African-American story or share something about African-American history or culture before everyone takes a sip. Gifts are often exchanged, and children usually receive a book, toy, or video that teaches something important about life.



Chinese New Year

Many Chinese people celebrate a 15-day-long holiday known as Chinese New Year. The holiday is based on the Chinese calendar and begins on the first new moon of the new year.

During the 15-day Chinese New Year celebration, people do many things they hope will bring them good luck during the coming year. They clean their homes from top to bottom, decorate with flowers, and put out a special tray of candies.



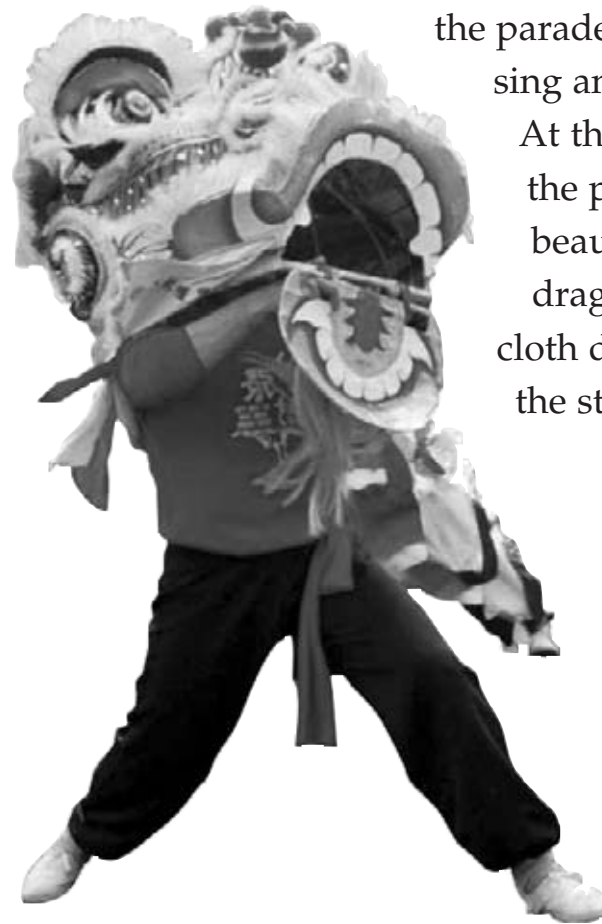
Red money envelopes

Red and orange are the lucky colors for Chinese New Year. People wear red clothes and eat foods such as oranges. They decorate their homes with red pieces of paper printed with good-luck sayings. They also give gifts of money in red paper envelopes.

The biggest celebration comes on the fifteenth night. In cities and towns, people play games and light fireworks. Dancers in costumes perform the flashy Lion Dance. Friends visit each other and wish each other well in the coming year. At the end of the celebration comes the Dragon Parade.

Everyone gathers to watch the parade, and people sing and dance.

At the end of the parade, a beautiful, lucky dragon made of cloth dances down the street.



The Lion Dance is wild and colorful.



Relatives sing songs and celebrate the Chinese New Year together.

Families celebrate Chinese New Year in a variety of ways. Some families honor members who have died. They have a large dinner for the spirits of the dead and for those still living in order to honor family unity. All of the festivals and traditions of Chinese New Year welcome the coming of spring.

Do You Know?

Traditionally, Chinese people celebrated everyone's birthday at the same time. According to Chinese tradition, everyone turns a year older on the first day of the new year. So everyone celebrates his or her birthday on the same day!

Holi



Holi is a holiday celebrated by people of the Hindu (HIN-doo) faith. Most Hindus live in the country of India. Holi is celebrated during the first part of March on the first day after the full moon.

Holi is the festival of colors, and it celebrates the return of spring. It is a time filled with games, sports, and mischief. Everyone is allowed to break the rules, play pranks, and have fun. Bright colors play a big part in the holiday festivities, and they cover everything in sight. People wear brightly colored clothing and decorate their homes with colorful fabrics, powders, and dyes.



Family members decorate each other for the Holi festival.



Before the bonfire, the ground is brightly painted.

The night before Holi begins, people build big bonfires, sing, and dance. All throughout Holi, children and adults alike play rowdy games. People chase each other and try to spray each other with colored powder or water. Boys and girls split up and have contests with each other. Many people wear white clothing so that the splashes of color will show up. Enemies try to forget their fights and be happy together.



Fireworks greet the new year.

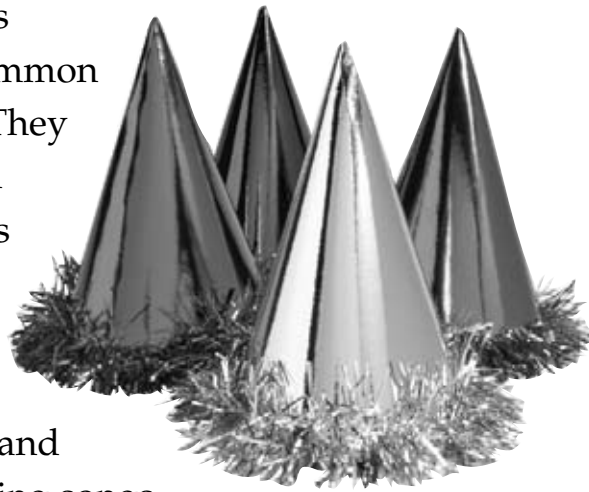
New Year



People all over the world celebrate the new year. No matter what country you live in or what religion you belong to, the new year is the time when you celebrate the passing of the old year and the coming of the new. On New Year's Eve, many people stay up until midnight to greet the new year. They count down the last seconds of the old year and greet the new one with exploding fireworks, shouting, songs, and all sorts of **merriment**.



New Year's parties are common everywhere. They are filled with colorful pieces of paper tossed into the air, noisemakers, and hats. People sing songs



and wish their friends good luck in the coming year.

It is also a time when people make **resolutions**, or promises to themselves, that they will do something good for their health and well-being.



Conclusion

People around the world celebrate many different holidays. No matter what the place, faith, or culture they come from, all holidays have many things in common. They all celebrate family, friends, sharing, and love.



A Native American medicine man of the Tohono O'odham tribe in prayer on winter solstice

Do You Know?

Many other cultures around the world celebrate the winter solstice—the day when the sun is the farthest north in the sky. In the Northern hemisphere, it is the shortest day of the year. In the Southern hemisphere, it is the longest day. Native Americans, ancient Europeans, and hundreds of other cultures celebrate the winter solstice as part of honoring the cycles of nature.



Holiday	Time	Faith or Nationality	Events
Ramadan	9th month of Islamic calendar	Islam	Fasting during the day Giving to those less fortunate
Hanukkah	25th day of Jewish month of Kislev (late Nov. or Dec.)	Judaism	Lighting the menorah Playing dreidel Eating foods with oil
Christmas	December 25	Christianity	Giving gifts Decorating a tree Giving to those less fortunate
Chinese New Year	The first new moon of the year	Chinese	Wearing and decorating with red Fireworks and parades
Holi	Late February	Hindu	Wearing bright colors Games and pranks
New Year	January 1	All	Staying up until midnight Fireworks, songs, and noise

Glossary

- dreidel** a four-sided top used in a Hanukkah game (p. 11)
- generation** all the people who are born and live at about the same time; parents are one generation, and their children are the next generation (p. 5)
- kinara** a special candleholder for Kwanzaa candles (p. 16)
- merriment** fun and happiness (p. 22)
- menorah** a special candleholder that holds eight candles plus the lighting candle of Hanukkah (p. 9)
- ornaments** small hanging decorations (p. 13)
- resolutions** promises to oneself to do good things (p. 23)
- shamash** the candle in a menorah used to light the other candles (p. 10)
- traditions** customs handed down through generations (p. 5)