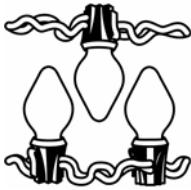


CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS



A *tradition* is a way of doing things in a family or a culture that is passed down through generations. Tradition is an important part of identity.



There are different traditions for observing Christmas around the world. Many of those traditions are followed in the United States. Most Christmas traditions that are followed in the United States began in Europe many hundreds of years ago. *Immigrants*, or people who have moved to a new country, brought these traditions to North America when they left Europe. Several of these European Christmas traditions are adaptations of other winter traditions, some of which are older than Christmas.



Of course, traditions vary among people. When people from different cultures join together, they may adopt or adapt each other's traditions. Traditions can also be modified according to a different generation's ideas, or to suit the weather, or for a dozen other reasons. Despite these variations, most people who observe Christmas in the United States follow some of the same traditions.



We decorate the insides and outsides of our houses with lights. We use evergreen trees for various several decorations, including wreaths and Christmas trees. We decorate the Christmas tree with special ornaments. We assemble nativity scenes and put on plays to retell the story of Christmas. Outside, we sing special Christmas songs in front of homes and churches. Inside, we watch movies and read books that celebrate the Christmas spirit. We spend time finding or making the perfect gift for our loved ones. We hang stockings by the fireplace and put presents under the Christmas tree.



CHRISTMAS WREATHS



Wreaths are used to decorate many homes in the United States during the Christmas season. Wreaths are usually round, are made with real or artificial evergreen branches, and are decorated with a simple bow, or with fruit, birds, and other ornaments. Wreaths are usually hung on the front door. They symbolize the celebration of Christmas in the home. Wreaths are also used to decorate stores, offices, and even streetlights in some cities, as part of the celebration of the season.

It is believed the Romans were the first to use wreaths on the front doors of their homes. These early wreaths symbolized victory in battle. Evergreens were also placed inside the homes to remind people of the coming spring.

One of wreaths used at Christmas is the Advent wreath. The Advent wreath is used in many religious ceremonies, and can be found in churches and homes. It is a circular wreath made of evergreens, with four candles. Traditionally, three of the candles are *violet*, or purple. The fourth candle, which is pink, represents rejoicing.

Wreaths can be found in any size. They are widely available in stores. Some families prefer to make their Christmas wreath each year as part of their Christmas celebration.

Name _____ Date _____

ANSWER THE QUESTIONS ABOUT *CHRISTMAS WREATHS*:

1. Wreaths are _____.
 - a. square
 - b. rectangular
 - c. round
 - d. none of these

2. Who does the article suggest were the first people to use the wreath on the front doors of their homes?
 - a. Asians
 - b. Americans
 - c. Christians
 - d. Romans

3. The Advent wreath is used for _____.
 - a. door decorations
 - b. tree decorations
 - c. religious ceremonies
 - d. victory celebrations

4. Wreaths placed on the front doors of homes today at Christmas represent _____.
 - a. the celebration of Christmas in the home
 - b. the coming spring
 - c. the dark winter
 - d. the celebration of a battle

1. Do you have a Christmas wreath at your house? If so, what does it look like? If not, what sort of wreath do you think you might like?

CHRISTMAS TREES



The Christmas tree is one of the most common symbols of Christmas. It is usually an evergreen tree that is decorated with ornaments and lights. Christmas trees come in all sizes and shapes. They can be live trees in pots, trees that have been cut down, or artificial trees. Whatever size or shape a family prefers, it is certain that many families across the United States will be looking for just the right Christmas tree at the end of November each year.

It is believed that the Christmas tree tradition began thousands of years ago. In ancient times, people brought evergreen branches into their homes. They thought the evergreens were magical, and that they symbolized life. These branches represented spring during the cold dark winters. In ancient Rome, people decorated their homes with evergreens during a special feast in December. During this time, schools were closed, no battles were fought, and people gave each other gifts.

Martin Luther was a monk who lived from 1483 to 1546. According to a legend, he was coming home one dark night during the winter. Luther saw a tree with the stars shining through it. He was so amazed by this sight that he went home and told his family about it. He wanted to share this sight with them, so he cut down a small fir tree and brought it inside. Once it was indoors, he decorated the tree with candles. The candles were like the stars he had seen shining through the tree that dark night. This decorated fir tree was the first Christmas tree. The use of the Christmas tree spread quickly throughout Germany and the rest of Europe. The people who came to the United States from Europe brought this tradition with them. Christmas trees are still a tradition in Europe, and have become a tradition in the United States as well.

ANSWER THE QUESTIONS ABOUT *CHRISTMAS TREES*:

1. Christmas trees can be _____.
 - a. living
 - b. dead
 - c. potted
 - d. all of the above

2. Who are believed to be the first people to use the evergreens as a decoration of their homes?
 - a. Asians
 - b. Americans
 - c. Christians
 - d. Romans

3. Which of the following things are similarities between the Roman winter celebration and modern-day Christmas?
 - a. Schools are closed and people exchange gifts.
 - b. People exchange gifts and sing bawdy songs.
 - c. People go to church and decorate homes with evergreen.
 - d. People celebrate battles and eat traditional foods.

4. The story about Martin Luther's Christmas tree _____.
 - a. is about his "I Have a Dream" speech
 - b. explains the origin of the use of candles on Christmas trees
 - c. is from the Bible
 - d. is from ancient Rome

5. Do you have a Christmas tree at your house? If so, what does it look like? If not, what sort of tree do you think you might like?

CHRISTMAS STOCKINGS



The Christmas stocking is one of the most popular Christmas symbols in the United States. A Christmas stocking can be a real stocking or sock, but it is often a specially made and decorated sock shape that would only fit on a giant's foot. Each person in the family (or sometimes each child) has one Christmas stocking; they may use the same stockings every year. The stockings are hung up before Christmas, often by the fireplace. The stocking is then filled with many different treats and gifts, usually at night on Christmas Eve. It is enjoyed on Christmas Day. Some people say that Santa Claus fills the stocking. Different families have different traditions about what goes in the stocking, although coins, chocolate, and fruit—especially oranges—are common.

There are several different *legends*, or traditional stories, of how the Christmas stocking became part of our Christmas celebration. One of the most popular legends is of a nobleman whose wife had died, leaving him to raise their three daughters. He had lost all of his money, and so had nothing to give his daughters as a *dowry*, or money or property so that they could marry.

One night, the daughters hung their stockings on the fireplace to dry. The next morning, St. Nicholas had filled their stockings with gold.

Many people believe that Dutch people brought the tradition of the Christmas stocking to America. Children in Holland would leave their wooden clogs filled with straw for the reindeer on Christmas Eve. Santa would replace the straw with treats for the children to find on Christmas morning.

ANSWER THE QUESTIONS ABOUT *CHRISTMAS STOCKINGS*:

1. Christmas stockings are _____.
 - a. usually real socks
 - b. in pairs, like socks
 - c. often large and decorated
 - d. a tradition from ancient Rome

2. What is one possible origin of the tradition of Christmas stockings?
 - a. Girls who didn't have dowries had their stockings filled.
 - b. Stockings were used to decorate houses in Germany.
 - c. Reindeer like to eat socks.
 - d. A giant stayed the night in the house over the holidays.

3. Which of the following is a similarity between the Dutch tradition and the modern-day Christmas stocking?
 - a. Both involve feeding reindeer.
 - b. Both involve small gifts in footwear.
 - c. Both are only for children.
 - d. Both involve stockings.

4. Which items are mentioned as being popular stocking stuffers?
 - a. coins, chocolate, and fruit
 - b. candles, toy cars, and CDs
 - c. pencils, calculators, and jewelry
 - d. books, cameras, and video games

5. Do you have a Christmas stocking? If so, what does it look like? If not, what sort of stocking do you think you might like?

Reading Comprehension/ Holidays

ANSWERS TO CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS:

1. b
2. a
3. c
4. answers will vary

ANSWERS TO CHRISTMAS WREATHS:

1. c
2. d
3. c
4. a
5. answers will vary

ANSWERS TO CHRISTMAS TREES:

1. d
2. d
3. a
4. b
5. answers will vary

ANSWERS TO CHRISTMAS STOCKINGS:

1. c
2. a
3. b
4. a
5. answers will vary