

Summer Solstice



Actual Holiday: June 20, 21, or 22

First Celebrated: Unknown

Introduction

The summer solstice is the day when the North Pole is tilted toward the Sun. In the Northern Hemisphere, it is the longest day of the year as there are at least 12 hours of sunlight. It is the beginning of the season of summer. In the Southern Hemisphere, this day is the winter solstice and is the shortest day of the year. Celebrate this day in your classroom by having students learn about what the solstice is and then decide how they would spend a day when the Sun never set or never rose.

Materials

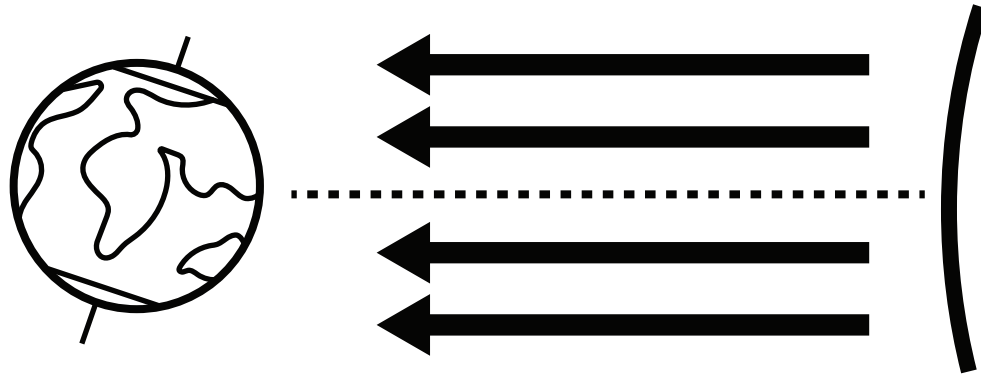
- *Midnight Sun or Polar Night* activity sheet (page 39)
- pencils

The Activity

- Tell students that today they will be celebrating the summer solstice. This is the first day of summer and the day that Earth in the Northern Hemisphere is tilted closest to the Sun.
- Let students know more about what the solstice means by sharing the following information:
 - Although it seems as though this is a day when Earth is the closest to the Sun, that's not true at all. The Northern Hemisphere of Earth is tilted toward the Sun more than usual. The planet itself is not any closer.
 - The word *solstice* means "Sun stand still" in Latin, because it seems as though the Sun is at the very same high point in the sky for a very long time.
 - The solstice is not actually the hottest day of the year. Although there is more sunlight, only the air has heated up. The ground and the water warm up more slowly. When the air, ground, and water have all heated up, our days are warmer.
 - In the Arctic Circle, there are places where the Sun never sets on the solstice at all. Some places, such as Norway, Finland, and Alaska, experience the midnight Sun, meaning that the Sun never sets at all for 24 hours. In Iceland, which is just south of the Arctic Circle, you can watch the Sun start to set, stop at the horizon, and then start to rise again. In Fairbanks, Alaska, there is a midnight Sun baseball game that begins before midnight and is played through the night.
 - While the Northern Hemisphere is experiencing warm days and lots of sunshine, it is the opposite in the Southern Hemisphere. This is the time of their winter solstice. The Sun does not shine on the southern pole at all during this time. If you happened to be in Antarctica, you would experience the polar night. For 24 hours, the Sun would not rise at all, and you would see stars all day long. You would also be very cold, so you would probably not want to be outside at all.
- Distribute the *Midnight Sun or Polar Night* activity sheet to students. Have them look at the diagram in order to see a visual representation of how the Sun shines on our planet on the summer solstice.
- Talk to students about what they would do with extra hours of sunlight or even an entire night of sunlight if they found themselves in the Arctic Circle. And discuss what they would do with a full day of darkness if they found themselves in Antarctica.
- Have students complete the activity by writing about what they would do and then deciding which experience they would rather have. Have a class discussion about their different opinions and different choices.

Name: _____

Midnight Sun or Polar Night



What would you do with your time if you were in the Northern Hemisphere and experienced the midnight Sun?

What would you do with your time if you were in the Southern Hemisphere and experienced the polar night?

Which experience do you think you would like better? Why?
