

December 23

Christmas Lights Invented



Christmas lights were introduced to the public on this day in 1882. Thomas Edison invented the first Christmas lights three years after the lightbulb was invented. They were first used in the home of Mr. Edison's friend, Edward Johnson. The lights were red, white, and blue. They flashed while the tree rotated.

In the beginning, Christmas lights were too expensive for most families to own. Some just rented the lights. They were dangerous because they got so hot. Outdoor Christmas lights didn't come along until 1927. Many of the first Christmas lights were blown in molds used to make glass ornaments and then painted by toy makers.

General Electric was the first company to offer prewired Christmas tree lights. Before that, they had to be hand wired onto the tree. Their lights were not patented, so it wasn't long until the market was flooded with Christmas lights. Carl Otis is credited with inventing the bubble light that became so popular. Today, Christmas lights are available in just about any size, shape, or color imaginable.

Response

Predict the next fad in Christmas lighting. In the past, bubble lights were a fad, and not long ago icicle lights became a fad.

Other Events This Day

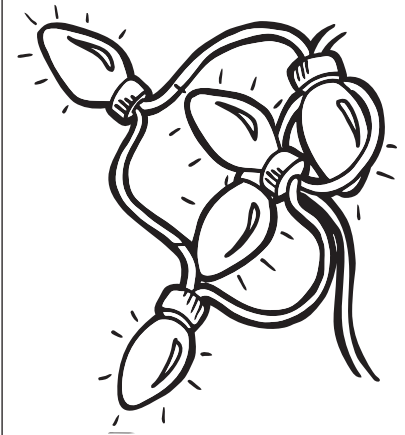
- Lincoln Tunnel in New York opened to traffic (1937)
- "Chipmunk Song" hit number one on the charts (1958)

Fascinating Factoid: The bell-shaped lights were first designed in 1932 for use in model train stations.

Word Play

Many people decorate lavishly for the holidays. Can you determine which "decoration" word belongs with each clue?

1. l i g h t s (icicle type are pretty)
2. _____ (twinkle, twinkle)
3. _____ (bright and shiny)
4. _____ (can't burn them at both ends)
5. _____ (come give me a kiss)
6. _____ (a girl's name)
7. _____ (pretty flower)
8. _____ (fill me up, Santa)
9. _____ (pretty rope)
10. _____ (door hangers)
11. _____ (ring-a-lings)



Activities

- List several major holidays and design appropriate lights to use for decorations on these holidays.
- Design a winning entry for a holiday decoration contest for your front yard. Draw and explain your design.

December 24

“Silent Night” Written



There are varying stories about the origin of the Christmas carol “Silent Night.” A manuscript discovered in 1995 authenticated that it was written by Reverend Joseph Mohr in 1816 and that Franz Gruber composed the music in 1818.

One popular version of the story is that in the winter of 1818 in Obendorf, Austria, at St. Nicholas Church, the organ was broken: there was no way that it could be repaired and operational for the special Christmas service. Mr. Mohr was forced to improvise and came up with the last-minute idea of setting a poem to music that he had written two years before. On December 24, he asked Franz Gruber, the church organist, to compose music for a guitar accompaniment for his poem “Silent Night.” Although it was a last-minute creation, the resulting music was wonderful. Mr. Mohr and Mr. Gruber sang the new song on December 25, 1818, at St. Nicholas Church.

The song’s popularity did not spread until after 1825 when the organ was being rebuilt. The repairman found the handwritten sheet music and took it home with him. It soon became a favorite of traveling singers. Some accounts of the story suggest that mice ate the bellows of the organ, while others say Mr. Gruber broke the organ, and still others say that the organ rusted because of flooding. An entirely different version says that Mr. Mohr simply wanted a new carol to be sung with guitar accompaniment because he liked guitar music.

Response

Which account of the broken organ do you believe? Explain.

Fascinating Factoid: An off-screen choir at the end of the 1951 film *A Christmas Carol* sang “Silent Night.”

Word Play

“Silent Night” is one of the most beautiful Christmas carols, although many others have been written. Supply the name for each serious Christmas carol with a “not-so-serious” description.

1. _____
(small lad percussionist)
2. _____
(stored in a hay bin)
3. _____ , _____

(small place in Israel)
4. _____ (the original Christmas)
5. _____
(Sir Walter Raleigh with laryngitis)
6. _____
(Martin Luther, Nat Cole, Lear)
7. _____

(12:00 P.M. on a starlit night)
8. _____ , _____

(listen, divine messengers are making musical noise)

Other Events This Day

- Fire devastates Library of Congress in Washington DC, destroying 35,000 volumes (1851)
- Walt Disney’s *The Aristocats* released (1970)



Activity

- Research your favorite holiday song and the story surrounding its creation. If you can’t locate the history of your song, improvise and write one of your own.

December 25

Christmas Celebrations

Christians celebrate December 25 as the birthday of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. It is time of worship, family gatherings, tree decorating, gift giving, scrumptious dinners, and caroling.

In 1870, Christmas was declared a national holiday in America. Celebrations and traditions come from traditions around the world, in addition to some innovations of our own. A *Christmas Carol*, written by Charles Dickens, was published in 1843. It was a story about the importance of charity and goodwill toward mankind.

Fireplace traditions probably came from Norway and their Yule log. The custom of decorating evergreen trees has always been a part of the German winter tradition. The beautiful poinsettias seen at Christmas originally came from Mexico. The idea of Christmas greeting cards, eating plum pudding, and caroling are English holiday customs that we embrace. Celtic people have long used mistletoe.

While many countries have a figure similar to our Santa Claus, it was from the poem by Clement Moore, "A Visit from St. Nicholas," that we get our modern image of Santa Claus as a jolly, round man in a red suit who leaves gifts for good little boys and girls.

Response

How does something become a tradition?

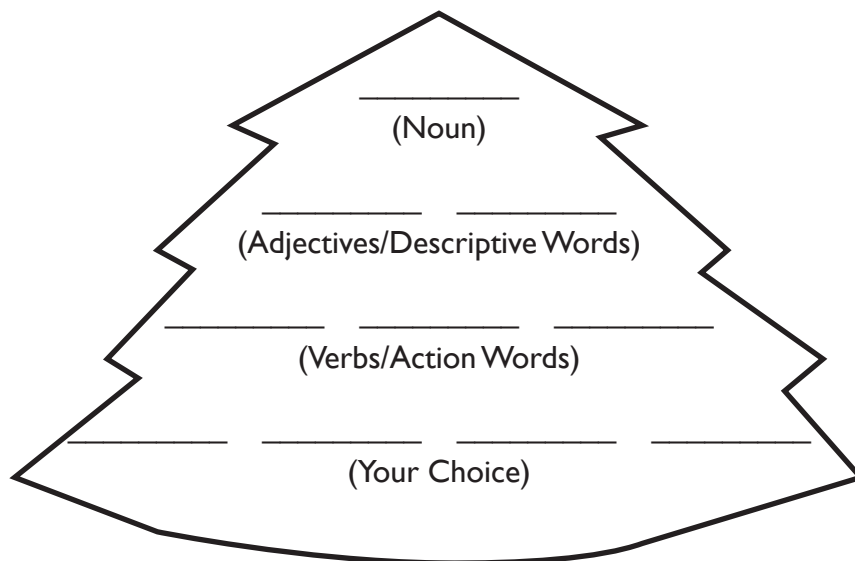
Other Events This Day

- George Washington crossed the Delaware River and surprised the Hessians (1776)
- President Andrew Johnson granted unconditional pardon to all involved in the Southern rebellion that resulted in the Civil War (1868)

Fascinating Factoid: The idea of a celebration on December 25 originated in the 4th century CE.

Word Play

Complete the pyramid using words associated with the Christmas holiday. When you have completed this pyramid, make one of your own on the back of this sheet using another category of words (e.g., other holidays).



Activities

- Design and make holiday greeting cards for family and friends.
- Write a recipe for a Very Happy Holiday. Put in all of the ingredients and amounts of each, as well as the directions for mixing. Include such things as family, gifts, decorations, etc.

December 26

Kwanzaa Began

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Ron Karenga, also known as Ron Everett, created Kwanzaa. The first Kwanzaa took place from December 26, 1966, through January 1, 1967. Kwanzaa is a unique celebration that is neither political nor religious in nature. It is not intended as a substitute for Christmas. It is simply a time of reaffirming African-American people, their ancestors, and culture. Kwanzaa comes from a phrase in Swahili that means “first fruits.”

During Kwanzaa, homes are decorated in red, green, and black with a Kinara and other symbols of Kwanzaa prominently displayed. The Kinara holds seven candles that reflect seven principles that are the foundation of Kwanzaa. Gifts can be given at any time during the weeklong event, but traditionally are presented on January 1. A feast (Karamu), usually a cooperative event, is traditionally held on December 31.

It is believed that in 2004 around 28 million joined in Kwanzaa celebrations. Families may celebrate Kwanzaa in their own way, but celebrations often include songs and dances, African drums, storytelling, poetry reading, and a large traditional meal. On each of the seven nights, in a family gathering, one of the candles on the Kinara is lit. The first night the black candle in the center is lit and the principle (unity) it represents is discussed. The next candle is lit the following night with the appropriate principle being discussed. Each night another candle is lit and another principle discussed.

Response

What holiday tradition does your family have?

Other Events This Day

- Marie and Pierre Curie announced isolation of radium (1898)
- *Time* magazine’s Man of the Year given to non-human—the personal computer (1982)

Fascinating Factoid: In 1997, the U.S. Postal Service released its first Kwanzaa stamp.

Word Play

Match each African word with its meaning. Hint: Each one is a principle of Kwanzaa.

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|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| _____ 1. Umoja | a. collective work and responsibility |
| _____ 2. Imani | b. unity |
| _____ 3. Ujamaa | c. purpose |
| _____ 4. Kujichagulia | d. self-determination |
| _____ 5. Kuumba | e. cooperative economics |
| _____ 6. Nia | f. creativity |
| _____ 7. Ujima | g. faith |



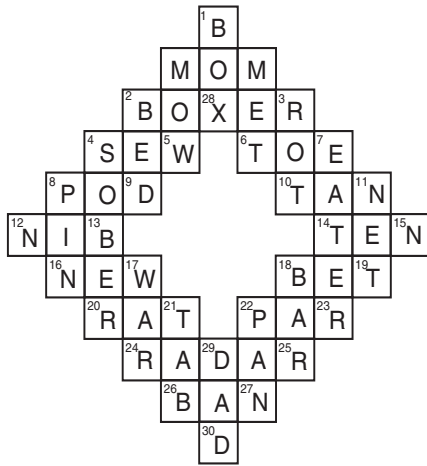
Activities

- Make an *mkeka* (em-kay-kah), a special placemat. Weave strips of red, green, and black paper or ribbon together. Research to learn the significance of this item to Kwanzaa.
- Create your own new holiday. Give details of what the holiday will celebrate, symbols involved, traditions to become a part of it, who will celebrate it, etc.

Word Play Answer Key *(cont.)*

December Answers *(cont.)*

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Page 184

Answers will vary.

Page 185

1. lights
2. stars
3. tinsel
4. candles
5. mistletoe
6. holly
7. poinsettia
8. stocking
9. garland
10. wreaths
11. bells

Page 186

1. "Little Drummer Boy"
2. "Away in a Manger"
3. "Oh, Little Town of Bethlehem"
4. "The First Noel"
5. "Silent Night"
6. "We Three Kings"
7. "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear"
8. "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing"

Page 187

Answers will vary.

Page 188

1. b
2. g
3. e
4. d
5. f
6. c
7. a

Page 189

1. *The Muppet Show*
2. *The Flintstones*
3. *Sesame Street*
4. *Teletubbies*
5. *Clifford, the Big Red Dog*
6. *Arthur*
7. *Barney & Friends*
8. *Dragon Tales*
9. *The Wiggles*
10. *Jay Jay, the Jet Plane*

Page 190

1. g
2. a
3. f
4. h
5. c
6. d
7. e
8. b

Page 191

1. Young Women's Christian Association
2. National Aeronautics and Space Administration
3. American Association of Retired Persons
4. Better Business Bureau
5. Automobile Association of America

6. Mothers Against Drunk Driving
7. Occupational Safety & Health Administration
8. International Olympics Committee
9. Federal Aviation Administration

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1. January
2. July
3. December
4. February
5. November
6. March
7. October
8. April
9. September
10. May
11. August
12. June

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Answers will vary.