



Photo by Drew Timmons

# CANDLELIGHT AT



## EDUCATORS' RESOURCE PACKET

**2010 THEME: TIMELESS TOYS**

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# CHRISTMAS IN TEXAS

In the early years of statehood, money was scarce, travel and transportation of goods difficult, and celebrations of the holidays often impromptu and original. But many of the traditions we're still familiar with today were formed during the late 19th century. Here are just a few:

**Christmas Tree:** In 1856, President Franklin Pierce introduced a Christmas tree into the White House for the very first time. Texans decorated their trees with whatever was handy: red berries, moss, mistletoe, cotton, pecans wrapped in colored cloth or paper, strings of popcorn, red peppers made into garlands, and homemade cookies and candies. Here's one memory of an 1863 Christmas tree: *"The Christmas tree was just a common cedar. . . Sprawling it certainly was, making it difficult to attach the many bundles done up in wrapping paper and home-made twine. The ladies worked for days stringing popcorn, making cornucopias and pasting on them the bright prints which had been saved for months."* —Julia Pease

**Parties:** Christmas was a reason for family and friends scattered across the frontier to come together and celebrate. Often, towns would hold community dances called balls, Germans or hops to celebrate. Etiquette required that everyone be invited to such celebrations. Everyone danced—from kids to grandparents. Another big part of the celebration was noisemaking—fireworks were very popular.

**Santa Claus:** Dutch settlers brought the custom of celebrating Saint Nicholas Day to America. American children adopted the saint, but they had difficulty pronouncing the Dutch name Saint Nikolaas and called him Santy, or Santa, Claus. In the new World his appearance also went under a change from the tall, thin, serious European bishop to the fat, jolly Santa of modern times. Washington Irving pictured him as a happy, rotund fellow wearing wide Dutchman's breeches and smoking a long, clay pipe. Clement Moore's poem "'Twas the Night Before Christmas" (1823) added twinkling eyes, a nose like a cherry, and a white beard and gave him a sleigh with eight reindeer to carry him on his rounds. The finishing touches to the Santa Claus imported to Texas were added by Thomas Nast, a newspaper cartoonist of the Civil War era, and Haddon Sundbloom, an illustrator who did advertisements for the Coca-Cola company in the 1930s.

**Gifts:** Most Texas children received home-made gifts such as dolls made from rags or corn husks, hand-made toy wagons, willow whistles, and socks filled with nuts, oranges, apples, and perhaps a dime in the toe. Many small towns would have a community tree, decorated by everyone with gifts for every child in the town on the tree. One memory of such a tree, from the 1880s: *"We all would pop popcorn the day before and string it, so it would be ready to hang on the tree. . . We didn't have electricity so we had to light the tree and church with candles. When we got the yards and yards of popcorn strings on the tree and the colored paper decorations, and all the presents hung on the branches, it was a pretty sight. We should have apples and oranges hanging on it too, and since we didn't have pretty Christmas paper to wrap our packages in, we would hang the presents on the tree in their boxes if we couldn't get white paper to wrap them in."* —Claudia Davis

# DECORATE YOUR CLASSROOM

Make some old-fashioned decorations for your classroom.

## Paper Chain

Colored paper cut into 1 inch strips  
Glue

Make a paper chain to drape around your classroom. Have kids loop the paper in contrasting colors, using a tiny piece of glue to secure each loop.

## Popcorn Garland

Popcorn  
Needles  
Thread

Pop the popcorn. Thread a needle onto a long string. Fishing line or regular thread works well—yarn is too thick. String the popcorn kernels one by one.

## Cornucopias

Square of paper  
Ribbon  
Stickers or stamps to decorate  
Glue

Have kids decorate their cornucopia first. Then, form a cone and glue or tape it in place. Use a hole punch at the top and attach ribbon so it can hang from a tree or can be easily carried.

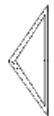
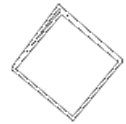


Photo by Bud Mallar

## Paper Snowflakes

Sheet of paper  
Scissors

1. Start with any square piece of paper. If you are using a standard sheet of paper, take a bottom corner and diagonal fold it across to the opposite side of the page. Cut off the 2.5 inch strip at the top of the page to create an 8.5 x 8.5 sheet of paper. Fold it in half. Fold it in half again creating a smaller square.
2. One corner will be all folds, the other three corners will have some open edges. Finding the fold corner is key to making a snowflake.
3. Turn the paper so that the fold corner is at the bottom. Fold the corner on the right side over to the left side. You should now have a long, triangular paper, with the fold corner still at the bottom.
4. Depending on the thickness of the paper, and the children's skill with scissors, now may be when you start cutting out the snowflakes. Older children can continue folding the sides together to get narrower pieces of paper.
5. Cut off the tip opposite the fold corner. It can be point or rounded depending on the shape you want for your snowflake points.
6. Continue cutting out bits of the snowflake, but be sure to keep intact enough of the fold lines running out from the fold corner.
7. Open up your snowflake when you are finished cutting.



# CHRISTMAS THEN AND NOW

Evelyn Miller Crowell grew up at Millermore, now one of the signature buildings at Dallas Heritage Village. She wrote about her childhood at the turn of the last century in the book *Texas Childhood*. Below are some sections from her book about Christmas. How does her holiday compare to your holiday?

*For weeks Maybelle and I had been scribbling notes to Santa Claus and then carefully dropping them in the fire. We were confident that the charred bits of paper which flew up the chimney would somehow, miraculously, reach Santa and be read by him without difficulty.*

*The stocking was not one of my own, which I considered far too small. It was one I had bought at a charity bazaar a few weeks before with my own money. It was a beautiful stocking—red and white flannel trimmed with red ribbons and little brass bells.*

*The little Santa that had been there every Christmas since I was born was perched on the topmost branch. There were garlands of glistening tinsel and ornaments and red and green tarlatan bags of fruit and candy and nuts.*

*And there, at the base of the tree, were my toys—all of the toys for which I had asked Santa. . . There was the big dolls who went to sleep, the very one I fell in love with when mamma took me to town to see Santa. And there was the little stove and lots of cunning pots and pans. And beautiful little green and white dishes. And a new coat for Joe (my doll) and a dress for his wife, Nancy. And a sweet little beaded purse, just like a grown-up lady's, only small. And books and books and books!*

## Similarities with Today

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## Differences with Today

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# CHRISTMAS CLASSICS

Many classic novels feature scenes set during the holidays. Choose from some of the chapters listed below to spark discussion about Christmas in the past.

## ***Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott** (set in the 1860s, during the Civil War)

Chapter 1: "Playing Pilgrims" and Chapter 2: "A Merry Christmas"

Times are tough during the war. The four March daughters decide to spend their Christmas money not on themselves, but on gifts for their mother. After they share their breakfast, they put on a play—and end up having a wonderful party through the generosity of their neighbor.

### **Favorite Quote**

"Christmas won't be Christmas without any presents," grumbled Jo, lying on the rug." p. 1

### **Discussion Questions**

How did the Civil War affect their Christmas?

What kinds of gifts do the sisters want for themselves?

What kind of surprises happen on Christmas? How do their plans change?

Was it a Christmas without any presents?

## ***Little House on the Prairie* by Laura Ingalls Wilder** (Set in the 1870s.)

"Mr. Edwards Meets Santa Claus"

Mary and Laura are worried that Santa Claus will be unable to reach them, since there is no snow and they live so far from other families. Ma and Pa are worried because they are unable to get Christmas presents. But Mr. Edwards saves the day!

### **Favorite Quote**

"They had never even thought of such a thing as having a penny. Think of having a whole penny for your very own. Think of having a cup and a cake and a stick of candy *and* a penny. There had never been such a Christmas." p. 250

### **Discussion Questions**

Why is the Ingalls family worried about Christmas?

How is Santa Claus described? Is it different than the way we describe Santa Claus today?

What were the presents that Mary and Laura received?

## ***More Adventures of the Great Brain by John D. Fitzgerald*** (set in the 1890s)

### Chapter 1: "The Night the Monster Walked"

Tom Fitzgerald, aka The Great Brain, has reformed and is no longer tricking his friends out of items. But in the aftermath of Christmas, he's up to his old tricks.

#### **Favorite Quote**

"It was the first Christmas parents bought presents for their sons, believing my brother wouldn't try to connive their kids out of them." p. 2

#### **Discussion Questions**

Have you ever tried to be a better kid to get what you wanted for Christmas?

What reasoning does Tom give for his bet with Parley? What do you think the real reason?

What do you think of the town's reaction to the tracks of the "monster"?

Do you think Tom and John's punishment was appropriate?

## ***Betsy and Tacy Go Downtown by Maud Hart Lovelace*** (set in the 1900s)

### Chapter 10: "Christmas Shopping" and Chapter 11: "Mrs. Poppy's Party"

Every year, Betsy and Tacy go shopping and this year, they bring a new friend along. Christmas celebrations last longer this year, with the addition of Mrs. Poppy's party.

#### **Favorite Quote**

"You see," Betsy explained to Winona when they invited her, "we usually make our Christmas presents, or else our mothers buy them for us. . . the ones we give away, I mean."

"Then why do you go shopping?" Winona asked.

"We go shopping to shop," said Tacy.

#### **Discussion Questions**

What kind of stores do the girls visit?

Why do the girls choose to buy an ornament every year?

How does the Ray family celebrate Christmas?

How do they continue celebrating at Mrs. Poppy's?

## **Roller Skates by Ruth Sawyer** (set around 1900 in New York City)

### Chapter 6: "Born is the King of Israel"

Lucinda decides to plan a special holiday surprise for her friend, Trinket. She takes odd jobs around the neighborhood to earn money for presents. And all her friends join them for a party—and Trinket's very first Christmas tree.

### **Favorite Quote**

"It's the nicest tree I ever had, and it will be Trinket's onliest up to now. I do hope you're as excited about it as I am, Miss Nettie." Lucinda spread sugary fingers about Miss Nettie's neck and said something that surprised them both: "I do love you, Miss Nettie." p. 112.

### **Discussion Questions**

How do Lucinda's neighbors help her in throwing the Christmas party?

How is the Christmas tree decorated?

What kind of traditions does Lucinda have to celebrate? How are some of those shaped by where she lives?

Why do you think this was such a memorable Christmas for everyone?



## **General Discussion Questions**

Of the traditions mentioned in these stories, what traditions do you also use to celebrate?

How are some of these Christmases from the past different from your Christmas?

If you read more than one selection, what do these celebrations have in common? How are they different? What are some reasons for these differences?

If you could pick one Christmas to celebrate with some of the characters mentioned above, which would it be?

What are some of the toys mentioned? Are there any you'd like to play with?