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**HISTORY STORIES**

**SPECIAL #1**

*A History of Christmas*

Nanci Bell

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## Special Flight #1

# History of Christmas

## Prehistory to Present



**T**his new Flight tells the story of Christmas, that happy time of the year when you all make feasts of delicious food and leave it all on the table for me to join in. And stuff about carols, religious celebrations, family...but more importantly, food! There are pies, cakes, roast turkey, potatoes, yams, and fruitcakes. The list goes on and on.

Naturally I know that this holiday has many foods from many different cultures. Some of them I haven't even tasted yet! But also this season has always been about sharing...something I think you can all do better at, with *all* your meals: dinners, lunches, brekkies, and second brekkies.

You know what? I like the whole tree thing, too. There's nothing finer than clawing my way into a creaking tree and batting at the pretty colorful ornaments. I'm also fond of eating ribbons and tearing open wrapping paper. And I do love the way you humans smile and hug a lot at Christmas. It makes me tear up a little.

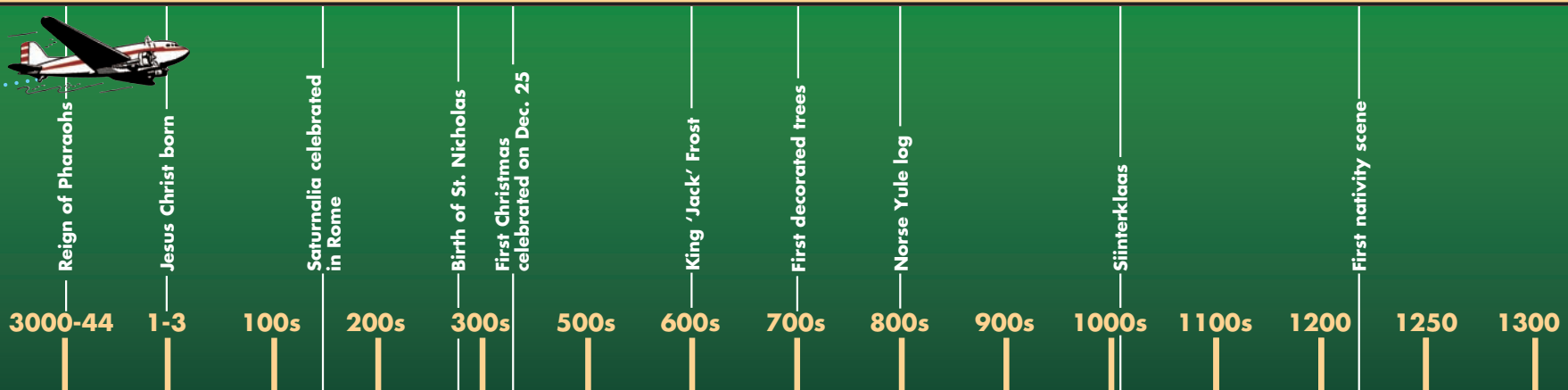


**1** Long before Christmas as we know it existed, winter celebrations took place all over the world. Farmers worked hard all year to grow and harvest their crops. When the work was all done and winter snow lay on the ground, they had a rare chance to take a break. The Romans feasted and gave gifts at large parties during Saturnalia. The Norse dragged a huge log to their village and set it on fire. This Yule log burned for many days, during which the people held feasts, played games, and sang songs.

1. Why do you think farmers did not work in the winter?
2. Why do you think the Norse people dragged a huge log to their village? Why not a tiny branch?
3. Why do you think it took days to burn the log?
4. Do you think people played games or sang while they were growing or harvesting their crops? Why or why not?
5. What do you think the people did when the Yule log burned up?

**2** In the Middle Ages, people put out green winter plants like holly and ivy at their parties. Later, early Puritan colonists in America banned parties for years. But new people brought their traditions to America and mixed theirs with the old ones. By the 1800s, most people danced, feasted, and gave gifts. They hung sweet-smelling boughs and herbs in their houses. Despite the cold snow outside, people cuddled before the fire and sang carols.

1. Why do you think people used holly and ivy? Why not flowers?
2. Why do you think the Puritans banned parties?
3. Why do you think new people brought their traditions to America?
4. Why do you think people might mix traditions?
5. Why do you think people cuddled before their fires? Why not outside?



**3** Santa Claus has also changed over the years. In some lands he was an elf or had a flying horse. He might be a rascal with a three-cornered hat, red waistcoat, and yellow stockings. The Dutch Sinterklaas brought gifts for good children and a stick for the bad ones. England's thin, old Father Christmas wore a robe and a crown of holly. In 1870, Thomas Nast drew the first Santa, as we know him now. He was a fat jolly man with a white beard and a red suit. Other details were added later, like his sleigh and reindeer, and his North Pole workshop.

1. Why do you think there were so many versions of Santa Claus?
2. Why do you think Sinterklaas brought a stick for the bad children?
3. How do you think the name "Santa Claus" came about?
4. Why do you think the English called their version of Santa "Father" Christmas ?
5. Do you think most people liked the version of Santa that Nast drew? Why or why not?

**4** Christmas trees have changed over the years, too. Ancient desert pharaohs brought in date palms in the winter. Fragrant evergreen boughs were hung over doors and windows. Long ago, Germans began bringing evergreen trees home during the cold, dead winter. They decorated the trees with apples, nuts, and cookies. Candles hung off the branches to light the trees. When they came to America, the trees became popular. In 1850, a man hauled a wagon full of trees into New York City, and became the first Christmas tree seller.

1. Why do you think pharaohs used date palms instead of evergreen trees from a forest?
2. Why might it be nice to hang fragrant boughs of evergreen in their houses during the winter?
3. What do you think happened to the apples, nuts, and cookies after people took down the trees?
4. Do you think putting candles in Christmas trees was a good idea? Why or why not?
5. How do you think people got Christmas trees before men started selling them?





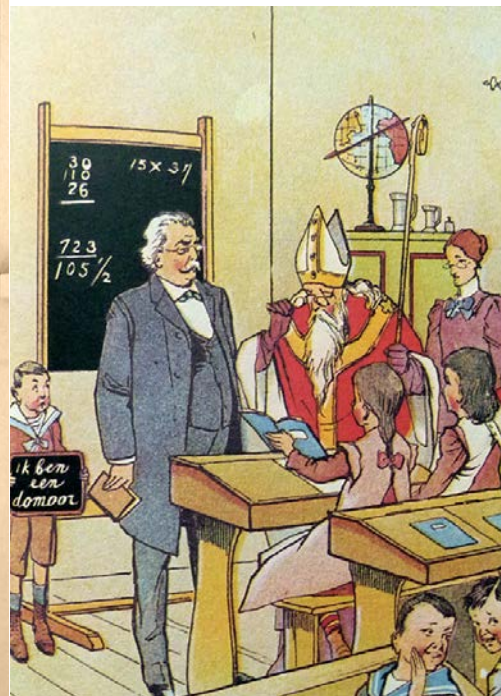
(clockwise from left) Family Christmas tree, circa 1930; bringing in the Yule Log; Father Christmas; Sinterklaas; Santa Claus, by Thomas Nast, 1881



5

Today Christmas is celebrated in different ways around the world. In the Ukraine a family's youngest child sits in a window and waits. She searches the night sky for the North Star. When it appears, the family enjoys a twelve-course meal. In snowy Finland, people spend Christmas Eve in saunas full of hot steam. Christmas is in summer in Australia. People Down Under often enjoy a barbeque on the beach. However the holiday is celebrated, though, it is a time for families to get together.

1. Do you think the North Star appears in the sky every year? Explain.
2. Why do you think Finns go to saunas on Christmas Eve? Why not swim in a pool or lake?
3. Why do you think some Australians celebrate Christmas at the beach?
4. Do you think most Australians cuddle in front of fires or light Yule logs? Why or why not?
5. Do you think families get together other times of the year? Explain.

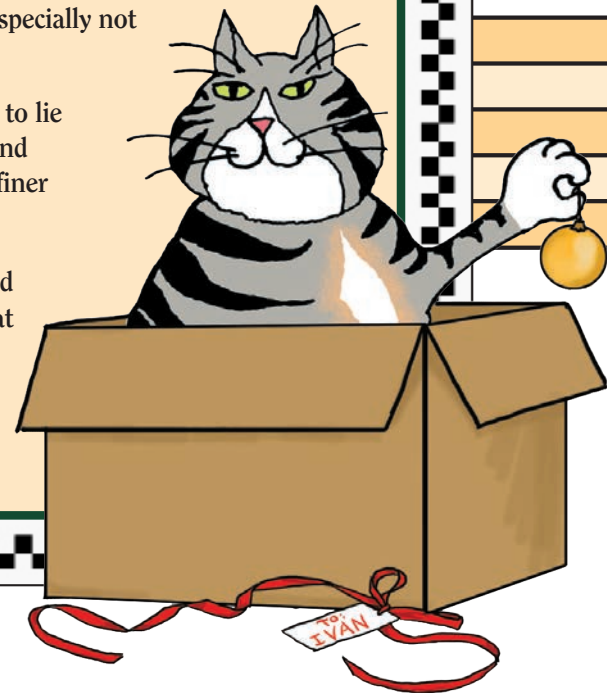


### Ivan says—

So in the dead of winter, people celebrated the coming spring and the past harvest. They brought green stuff into their houses to remind them of the growing seasons. I personally don't care much for green stuff, especially not on my plate. Give me a Christmas goose instead!

I do like presents. Like those nice warm sweaters I like to lie on to take a nap. Or the fun toys bought just for me! And especially the best gift of all: empty boxes! There is no finer plaything than an empty box and imagination.

Well, enough about Christmas. I think you've all stuffed yourselves with enough fruitcake. Not me, though. That doesn't sound like a good treat at all. I'll still eat it, however. Well, I'll be waiting over here for the next party at New Year's Eve.



# Special Flight 1

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Pre-Flight for **History of Christmas**

### Preread words for each paragraph:

1

Christmas celebrations	Romans	German village
harvest	Saturnalia	Yule log
feasted	Norse	

2

Middle Ages	colonists	herbs
holly	traditions	cuddled
ivy	boughs	carols
Puritan		

3

Santa Claus	Dutch	beard
elf	Sinterklaas	sleigh
rascal	crown	reindeer
waistcoat	jolly	workshop

4

ancient	fragrant	apples
desert	evergreen	candles
pharaohs	Germans	popular
date palms	decorated	wagon

5

Ukraine	Finland	Australia
North Star	Eve	barbeque
course	saunas	holiday

### Study and visualize the vocabulary:

**Christmas:** a winter holiday; the recognized birthdate of Jesus Christ (n.) **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**celebration:** a party or special time (n.)

**harvest:** collect the edible parts of the crop (v.)

**Saturnalia:** a celebration, like a carnival, held in early December (n.)

**Yule log:** a huge tree trunk burned during winter festivals (n.)

**Middle Ages:** period of European history from A.D. 1100 to 1453 (n.) **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**holly:** a shrub with prickly dark green leaves and red berries that grows in winter (n.)

**Puritan:** one of a group of settlers in America in the 1600s who were very religious (n.)

**colonists:** settlers in a new country (n.)

**boughs:** leafy branches of trees (n.)

**carols:** religious or folk songs, particularly associated with Christmas (n.)

**Santa Claus:** also know as St. Nick, Father Christmas, and Kris Kringle, he is a legendary figure who is said to bring gifts to kids on Christmas Eve (n.) **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**rascal:** a mischief-maker or cheeky person (n.)

**sleigh:** a sled drawn by horses or reindeer across snow and ice (n.)

**reindeer:** a four-legged, antlered deer native to the far north of America and Europe (n.)

**ancient:** from the very distant past; long ago (adj.) **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**pharaohs:** a ruler in ancient Egypt; a type of king or emperor (n.)

**date palms:** a tree native to very hot places such as Africa and parts of Asia (n.)

**fragrant:** having a pleasant or sweet smell (adj.)

**evergreen:** a plant or tree that retains green leaves throughout the year (n.)

**Ukraine:** a country in eastern Europe (n.) **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**North Star:** a star that remains fixed in the sky above the North Pole (n.)

**course:** a food dish or set of dishes served together (n.)

**Finland:** a country in the far north of Europe (n.)

**saunas:** small rooms used as hot steam baths or hot air baths (n.)

**Australia:** the world's smallest continent, between the Pacific and Indian Oceans (n.)





Name: \_\_\_\_\_

# History of Christmas Special Flight #1

M	L	C	I	H	D	U	T	C	H	Q	B	I	I	R	U	K	R	E	I	N	D	E	E	R
W	Y	G	K	D	A	R	Q	J	O	S	K	T	V	E	C	M	S	A	K	O	C	W	S	S
P	W	M	J	H	T	I	E	J	B	B	E	T	L	I	B	E	P	U	R	W	L	A	S	A
M	R	I	N	L	B	O	I	D	O	W	R	V	H	J	L	C	L	T	K	V	Z	G	Z	U
J	Y	B	E	H	C	H	R	I	S	T	M	A	S	P	R	L	A	Q	W	R	D	O	O	N
R	A	D	L	O	H	C	O	O	K	I	E	S	P	H	J	D	A	R	G	T	A	N	K	A
G	P	P	D	S	L	C	M	N	Y	E	L	A	A	Y	Y	N	T	G	O	S	H	I	M	G
A	Z	Q	N	P	O	G	E	H	O	L	L	Y	N	O	J	K	G	W	E	L	M	G	N	Z
E	N	S	R	C	P	Q	E	D	K	Y	G	T	M	Q	S	S	T	E	A	M	S	V	Y	E
K	D	P	T	X	F	K	W	O	M	W	S	W	T	I	N	S	E	L	W	Q	H	L	I	A
F	S	I	N	T	E	R	K	L	A	A	S	Z	E	G	V	Q	I	N	P	L	L	K	V	W
L	I	J	Q	P	O	F	I	C	R	C	A	N	D	L	E	S	F	J	N	O	R	O	Y	H
S	J	N	B	A	R	B	E	Q	U	E	N	S	L	E	I	G	H	J	J	O	X	T	R	P
H	C	A	L	X	G	K	Y	S	N	Z	Y	W	K	J	V	V	X	C	Y	Q	A	Y	B	A
D	N	V	P	A	H	G	U	P	S	Q	L	H	X	Y	P	V	D	W	R	A	S	C	A	L
A	T	J	C	C	N	K	S	V	E	T	V	Z	T	W	W	T	E	Q	N	A	K	J	V	U
S	N	Z	K	D	S	D	A	U	S	T	R	A	L	I	A	N	B	Y	F	B	C	Z	R	F

Apples  
Finland

Australia  
Holly  
Sauna

Barbeque  
Ivy  
Sleigh

Candles  
Jolly  
Steam

Carols  
New York  
Tinsel

Christmas  
Rascal  
Ukraine

Cookies  
Reindeer  
Village

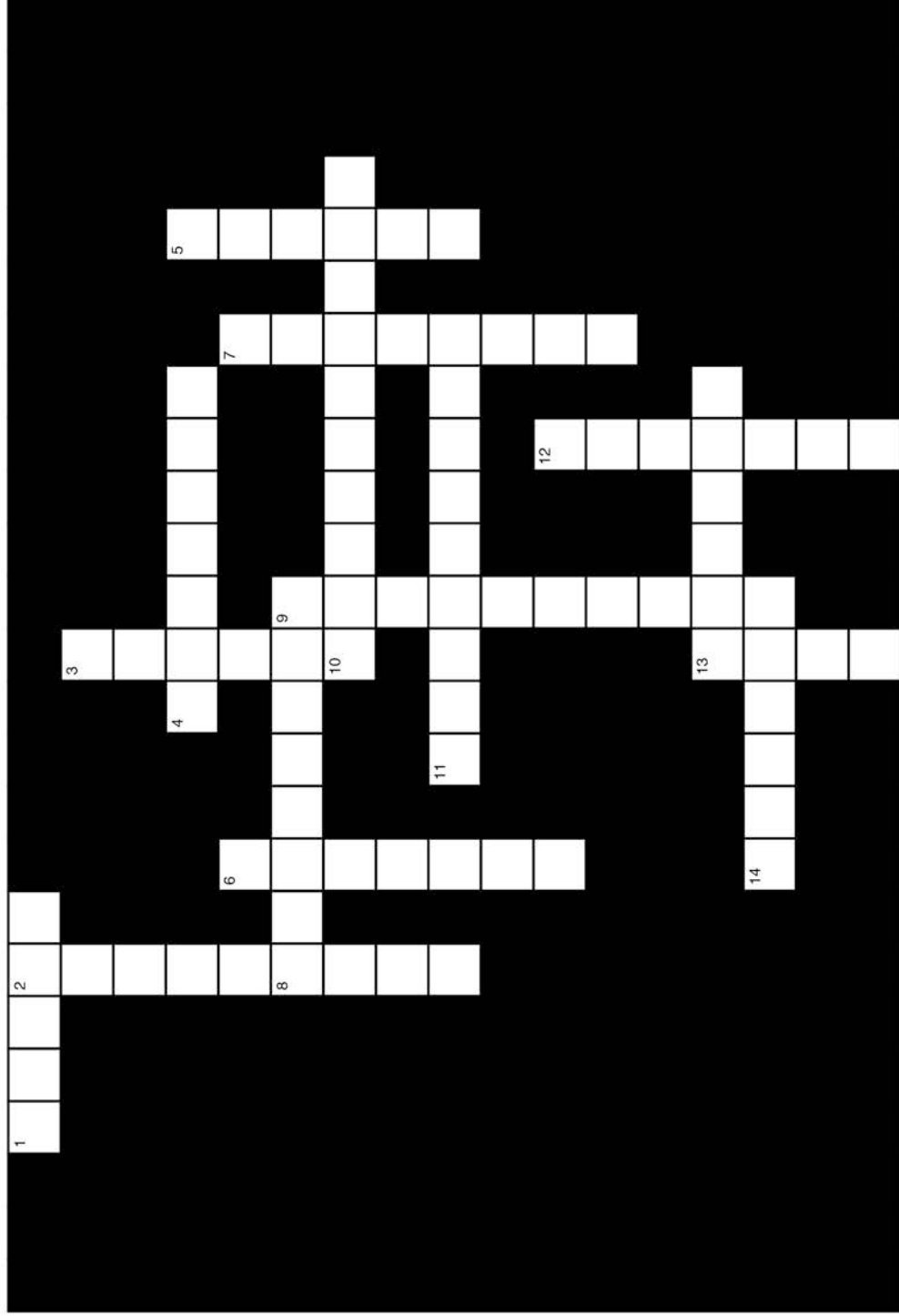
Dutch  
Sinterklaas  
Wagon



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

# History of Christmas

## Special Flight #1



### Across

1. Steamy bath.
4. Sat close to each other; cozied up.
8. Egyptian rulers.
10. Roman party.
11. Polaris; shines bright in the night sky. (two words)
13. After spring.
14. Ancient people of Italy.

### Down

2. Santa's neighborhood. (two words)
3. Branches.
5. Santa's ride.
6. Picking food from the farm.
7. Smelling good.
9. The guy in the red suit. (two words)
12. Piece of wood burned during Norse winter celebration. (two words)
13. Really cold rain.

