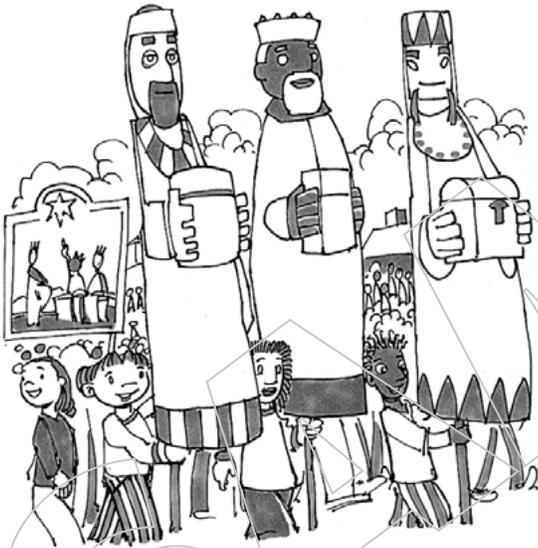


3 Kings Day



Special treat

Special foods are eaten in connection with the Three Kings celebration. In many Caribbean countries the traditional feast is of rice, beans, spicy pork, stuffed plantains and rice pudding.

One special treat served in Mexico on Three Kings Day is called "Rosca de Reyes." This is a crown-shaped sweet bread decorated with jewel like candied fruits.

But the thrill of the treat is what's inside. Tiny figures of babies are hidden in the dough before baking—to honor the Baby Jesus.

Whoever gets a piece containing a baby is required to host another party on or before Candlemas, February 2. That is the date when Mexico's winter holiday season finally comes to an end.

The tradition of giving gifts at Christmas comes from the actions of the Three Kings who visited the Baby Jesus in the Bible.

The Kings also gave us another tradition. They did not reach Jesus until 12 days after his birth. That was how the "12 Days of Christmas" came to be.

Hispanic and Latino communities from Puerto Rico to Mexico to South America celebrate the 12th day of Christmas—January 6—as the Festival of the Three Kings, or "Fiesta de los Tres Reyes Magos." Other cultures celebrate it as Epiphany (eh-PIFF-an-ee), Twelfth Night, the Feast of Kings or Little Christmas.

Shoes and hay

Because the kings gave gifts, Three Kings Day is also marked by gift giving. In fact, in some families this is the day children receive their gifts, rather than Christmas Day.

On the night before January 6 in Latino and Hispanic communities, it is the tradition for children to leave shoes outside their doors, or shoeboxes under their beds, to be filled by the passing Kings looking for Jesus.

They also leave grass, hay and water for the camels or horses of the three kings, in the way kids of other cultures leave food for Santa's reindeer.

The next morning, children wake up early to find out what toys and gifts have been left by the "Reyes Magos" (Magi).

Parades and pageants

Parades or processions featuring the Three Kings are another big part of the festival day.

Giant puppets representing the kings Melchior, Balthazar and Gaspar are at the heart of these parades, hoisted on poles. Each king carries a box to represent the gifts brought to the Baby Jesus. Live camels or donkeys sometimes walk alongside. Children follow the kings through the streets, singing, dancing and keeping time with maracas.

At the end of the parade, children and their families gather together and the story of the Three Kings is told aloud. At the end of the story each child receives a gift.

Try a pageant

A parade or pageant is a way to celebrate community traditions. As a class or in groups, brainstorm an idea for a pageant that would recognize the different holiday traditions of all your classmates. Start by making a list of all the celebrations observed. Then try to come up with a story line that would mix up all the traditions, or turn them into one tradition. Perform your pageant for another class.

New Year

New Year is a holiday of opposites—and contradictions.

We grow sad about the year gone by, yet eagerly look forward to the year to come. We celebrate all we have achieved, yet promise to correct our shortcomings. We live for the moment, yet seek a place in all our history.

Almost every culture has a new year's celebration. They don't all come the night before January 1, however.

The reason for this is that different cultures and ethnic groups mark the start of the year on different days.

Some mark it when spring begins and things start growing after a long winter.

Some mark it when the crops are harvested.

Some mark it based on the teachings of their religion.

In the United States, Europe and other parts of the world, we mark it on January 1.

The date was chosen by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582. At that time the pope set up a 365-day calendar and marked the start of the year as the time when the Earth is closest to the sun. In years afterward, this so called "Gregorian" calendar spread around the world.



Community rituals

Marking a new year is a way to celebrate as a community.

Or it is a way to share community spirit with friends and family.

In this country, New Year's Eve is celebrated with parties, toasts and merrymaking. In places like Times Square in New York City thousands of people gather to watch the electronic "ball" drop at midnight.

They chant together the final seconds as the ball starts down a high tower—"10. 9. 8. 7. 6. 5. 4. 3. 2. 1." Then everyone screams and hugs and yells "Happy New Year!"

The community spirit of New Year is shown by the fact people usually want to spend it with their best friends.

Your own new year

Different cultures choose different times to celebrate the new year. Each chooses a time that is important in the cycle of seasons, or is tied to a key event. If you could choose Your Own Personal New Year's Day, when would it be? Why would you have your Personal New Year start then?

Community news

1. Look through the newspaper today or for several days and find examples of community activities for the holidays. Pick one and write a sentence stating how this activity draws the community together.
2. Make a master list of the activities from Question 1. Break the events into categories—music, theater, meals, etc. Which type of community activity do you think is the most popular? Why?
3. Look through the ads in today's paper for items for a New Year's Party. Shop for a party for 10 people. Your budget to spend is \$200. Add up how much you spend as you shop. What kind of party will you have?

Thinking and resolving

New Year celebrations are not all fun and games. People often stop to think about the things they have done in the previous year, and make plans for the year to come.

These plans take the form of "resolutions" in which people resolve, or promise, to do certain things.

Resolutions may be small—a brother resolving to be nicer to his sister—or they can be large—someone promising to correct a problem in his/her life.

Making New Year's resolutions is a ritual we share. Not living up to them is often something we share, too!