

THE HISTORY CHANNEL CLASSROOM STUDY GUIDES

Christmas Unwrapped: The History of Christmas

People all over the world celebrate the birth of Christ on December 25th. But why is the Nativity marked by gift giving, and was Jesus really born on that day? And just where did the Christmas tree come from? Take an enchanting tour through the history of this beloved holiday and trace the origins of its enduring traditions. In this special presentation, take a journey back to the earliest celebrations when the infant religion embraced pagan solstice festivals like the Roman Saturnalia and turned them into a commemoration of Jesus' birth. In *Christmas Unwrapped*, students, teachers and their families will learn how Prince Albert introduced the Christmas tree to the English-speaking world in 1841, and discover how British settlers in the New World transformed the patron saint of children into jolly old St. Nick. This is an excellent program for students interested in learning about the historical meaning and stories behind this holiday that so many celebrate throughout the world. It would be a great resource for pre-holiday activities and for discussions about how traditions develop and change over time.

Curriculum Links:

Christmas Unwrapped: The History of Christmas would be useful for classes on History, Culture and Religion.

It is appropriate for middle school and high school.

It fulfills the following standards as outlined by the National Council for History Education:

Civilization, Cultural Diffusion and Innovation.

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- [abundant](#)
- [agenda](#)

- bacchanalian
- brethren
- burgeoning
- carouse
- decadent
- emanation
- expertise
- fertility
- frivolous
- gnome
- icon
- impervious
- licentiousness
- nocturnal
- personify
- piety
- raucous
- revelry
- ribald
- secular
- solstice
- vestige

Discussion Questions

1. What are the Biblical origins of Christmas?
2. What are some of the other origins of Christmas? How do they differ from the Biblical origins?
3. What is the purpose or role of the Yule log?
4. Discuss the origins of the evergreen Christmas tree.
5. Discuss how Christmas traditions are an amalgamation of many different traditions from around the world.
6. Scholars believe that December 25th is not the true birth date of Jesus Christ. If this is not the birth date of Jesus Christ, then why do we celebrate the 25th of December? Why did Christians choose December 25th as the Feast Day of the Nativity?
7. Discuss the origins of Christmas ornaments.
8. Discuss the class discord and conflicts of early medieval Christmas celebrations.
9. Discuss the tensions between piety and revelry in the history of Christmas celebrations.
10. What are some of the literary contributions that have shaped the celebrations of the Christmas holiday and become part of our cultural heritage?
11. What are the origins of Santa Claus?
12. How has the image of Santa Claus been used for commercial gain?

Extended Activities

1. Create a poster or write an essay illustrating some of the Christmas traditions of your family.
2. Research different Christmas traditions and create a chart comparing these different traditions from different cultures.