

Holiday Traditions



Image from an 1862 edition of *A Visit from St. Nicholas*

During the 1800s many of our current holiday traditions took shape. The poem *A Visit from St. Nicholas* by Clement Clark Moore had a big impact on the way we view Christmas. Now referred to by its opening line '*Twas the Night Before Christmas*', this poem is responsible for the popularity of Santa Claus, reindeer and stockings.

A Visit from St. Nicholas was first published in 1823 and soon appeared in many other places. Over time, many words in the original poem have been replaced with more modern words. For example, originally one of the reindeer was named Donder (not Donner).

The poem does not mention a Christmas tree, but trees also became popular during the 1800s. Most Christmas trees were much smaller than they are today and were decorated with handmade ornaments or materials like popcorn, cranberries and paper chains. Before electric lights, many families tied or clipped candles to their tree and lit the tree for a very short time, keeping a bucket of water nearby to extinguish flames.

Learn about your history

1. What is your favorite holiday tradition?
2. Ask your parents where they learned their favorite holiday tradition.
3. Ask your grandparents about their childhood holiday traditions.

Bottle Cap Ornament Activity

This activity teaches children about the tradition of homemade holiday decorations through the creation of an ornament using bottle caps.

Materials

- 3 bottlecaps (paint white and let dry before crafting)
- 6 inch piece of pipe cleaner or ribbon
- Sequins, buttons or other materials for decoration
- Small scrap of orange paper for nose
- Length of festive ribbon or fabric for scarf
- Hot glue gun (craft glue also works, but takes longer to dry)
- Open work space

Steps to make your ornament



1. Twist the end of your pipe cleaner or ribbon into a loop to act as the ornament hanger



2. Line up the bottle caps along the pipe cleaner, leave a little space between each bottle cap. Glue the bottle caps to the pipe cleaner. Gluing can be difficult with the plastic liner of the bottle cap, glue directly to the edge if cap is plastic lined.



3. Use your creativity and whatever you have to create a face and decorate your snowman. Some examples of things you can use include sequins, buttons, markers and a triangle shaped piece of orange paper.



4. If you want, tie a piece of fabric or ribbon around the pipe cleaner to create a scarf for your snowman. You can also use another pipe cleaner to make arms.



5. Lastly, write the year or your name on the bottom of the snowman and display it on a Christmas tree or in your house.