

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.

Snowflake Ornament Activity

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

Materials

- 3 popsicle sticks or tongue depressors
- Paint or food coloring
- Drill and small drill bit
- 6 inch piece of ribbon
- Sequins, buttons or other materials for decoration
- Hot glue gun (craft glue also works, but takes longer to dry)
- Open work space

Steps to make your ornament



1. Paint your popsicle sticks whichever color you choose. For a large number of popsicle sticks you may also use food coloring to dye the sticks. Follow directions from the food coloring maker for egg dyeing and leave the sticks in the dye for 10 hours.

2. Have an adult drill a small hole towards the end of 1 stick ($\frac{3}{32}$ " bit works well)

3. Glue the three sticks together in a snowflake pattern



4. Thread a ribbon through the hole at the top of the stick, tie in a bow



5. Use your creativity and whatever you have to decorate your snowflake. Some examples of things you can use include sequins, buttons, markers and pom-poms.

6. Lastly, write the year or your name on the back of the snowflake and display it on a Christmas tree or in your house.

