

Background to Today's News

So the mid-term elections are finally [almost] over, awaiting just a few re-counts. Soon, discussion will turn to the 2020 presidential race. But till then, here is some background information about the impact of this election:

Speaker of the House

Starting in January, the Democrats will have a majority of members in the House of Representatives. The Speaker of the House (the top position) is always a member of the majority party. Paul Ryan, the current [Republican] Speaker will now be replaced by a Democrat. The members of the House elect the Speaker at a formal election in January, when the new Congress begins. Nancy Pelosi was Speaker of the House the last time Democrats had a majority (2007-2011); many - but not all - expect her to be re-elected.

The Speaker of the House has a number of important roles: S/he is second in line of succession to the Presidency (that is, if both the President and Vice-President cannot serve). S/he controls the agenda of the debates. And it is her/his job to make sure the House passes the laws supported by his/her party, by negotiating compromises and agreements.

Democratic Majority in the House

The new majority gives Democrats the obvious advantage of having more votes on any issue. But there is more. The House has 20 important committees that control its agenda. The Chair of these committees is always a member of the majority party, so these positions will all switch to a Democrat. In most cases, the *ranking* Democrat (the one who has been on the Committee the longest) will become the

Chair. Here are some of the important House Committees:

House Intelligence Committee: this group could pursue its own investigation into possible Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election and any involvement of the Trump campaign.

House Oversight and Government Reform Committee: this group can monitor White House policies (like immigration, child separation and voting rights policies) and possible financial conflicts.

House Ways and Means Committee: this group could ask to see Donald Trump's tax returns. (In the 2016 presidential election, his refusal to make his tax returns public was a campaign issue; all presidential candidates except one in the last 40 years have released theirs.) The route to his tax returns being made public would probably be long and legally complicated, and overseen by this Committee.

House Committee on the Judiciary: this group could decide whether there are grounds to *impeach* the President. If the whole House then voted to impeach, the decision whether or not to remove the President from office would be made by the Senate.

New Laws

Finally, the House can propose new bills, for example, about immigration, health care, voting rights, infrastructure and/or a federal minimum wage standard. These would have to be approved by the Senate and President, so it is unclear whether they would become law.

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Christmas Symbols

Christmas Tree: An evergreen tree with lights and decorations is, perhaps, the most common symbol of Christmas in the US. Trees were symbols of strength and long life for centuries before Christian teachers used evergreens as a symbol of “endless life.”

Red and Green: The holly bush was popular among pre-Christian Europeans. The evergreen holly, with its red berries, stands for strength against the death of winter.

Mistletoe: If you stand under a piece of mistletoe (a branch with leaves and white berries), you will be expected to kiss the host. Be careful!

Stockings: Family members hang a “stocking” next to the chimney. If the children have been good, Santa Claus fills the stocking with an orange (in the toe) and small presents and candy. If the children have been naughty, they are told they will get lumps of coal. (Could any parent really do that?)

Gifts: Christmas has become a commercial holiday for many. But within Christian belief, there is a religious root to the custom — the three Wise Men brought gifts to the baby Jesus, and Jesus grew to give his life to others. Remember that, in private, most American families’ Christmas day includes a lot of warmth, love, sweetness, tradition, and generosity. Try to keep this in mind as you walk through the shopping mall...

The Story of Christmas

Each year on December 25, most Americans from a Christian background celebrate Christmas. Even those who are not religious the rest of the year will have a Christmas tree and give gifts.

The story of Jesus’ birth may be familiar to you: Jesus’ parents, Joseph and Mary, traveled to Bethlehem to be counted in a tax census. While there, Mary gave birth to Jesus in a stable, as there were no rooms in any inn. Shepherds heard angels tell them that the son of God had been born. The shepherds visited Jesus then went to tell the world what the angels had told them. Three kings (or Wise Men), following a bright star in the East, traveled for 12 days to visit Jesus, and brought him gifts.

No one knows exactly when Jesus was born. The Bible says there were “shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.” Bethlehem in December is usually cold and rainy, so some scholars think Jesus was born some months earlier. For centuries, people argued about when to celebrate Jesus’ birth. The Roman Church chose December 25, even though (or because) it was the date of a popular pagan sun celebration.

Because of this pagan and Roman root, English religious immigrants to the US in the 1600s refused to celebrate Christmas. The warm and joyful celebration of Christmas by German and Dutch immigrants, however, won popularity in the US by the early 1800s. Today, even in the southern states, the “look” of an American Christmas (with snow and evergreen trees) is clearly northern European.

If You Have A Tree in Your Home: Safety Tips

Even if you have had Christmas trees in your home country, safety concerns here may be new to you, depending on the type of heating in your home or the types of trees in the US.

To be safe:

- Be sure to buy a fresh (not dry) tree. (Tree farmers start cutting their trees in November and they can dry out long before you buy yours.) Grab a branch about 6 inches from the end. Pull it toward you. If the tree is fresh, no needles will come off in your hand. In some parts of the US, you can go to a farm and cut your own.
- Remember that home heat dries out trees. If possible, keep the tree outside in a bucket of water until you are ready to decorate it. When you bring it inside, saw one inch off the bottom of the trunk, to re-open the cells that can absorb water. Always keep the tree in a large pot of water. Fill the pot once a day. The average tree in the US absorbs a gallon of water per day. If you ever let the tree become completely dry, the cells close up and will not absorb any more water.
- Keep the tree away from candles and fire. Be sure the tree will not fall over. Use wire, tied from the tree to a wall, to support the tree if necessary.



Gift-Giving at the End of the Year

December is filled with the message of gift-giving. In its positive light, think of it as a time for generosity, appreciation, and community-building. Many Americans use this season to give a yearly gift or send a yearly card to others. They may do so regardless of the person's religion, by sending a card that says "Season's Greetings" rather than "Merry Christmas," and avoiding red and green paper. Here are some guidelines:

Teachers. Many young children bring a small present to their teachers on the last day of school in December. This is not necessary, and an expensive gift is not appropriate. But if you like, your child could make the teacher a gift. Or give a small craft or some food from your country. Or make a donation to a community charity in the teacher's name. High school and university students usually do not give gifts to their teachers.

Co-Workers. Some offices have a "Secret Santa" system: each employee is secretly given the name of one other employee, and buys a gift for him/her only. Others have a "Yankee Swap:" everyone brings a wrapped gift to a party. One person goes first and chooses a gift from the pile and un-wraps it. The next person can either take a different wrapped gift from the pile or the gift that Person #1 picked.

Let's Get Specific Here

OK, enough generalities about gifts. Here's what I give (but please remember, there are local differences in what is appropriate — it's best to ask a friend where you live what is common):

Teachers: To elementary school teachers: homemade cookies, a \$10 gift certificate to an office supply or book store, or a contribution to our town's Foundation that supports teachers' professional development. To high school or university teachers: just a smile.

Co-Workers: Nothing to peers or my boss. To secretaries or assistants: nuts, cookies, or a tree ornament if they celebrate Christmas. To my business manager: some favorite food.

Service Providers: To the letter carrier and newspaper deliverer: \$20. When we have had child care providers or house cleaners: one week's pay.

Neighbors: Homemade cookies.

The next person can take one from the pile, or Person #1 or #2's gift, and so on. Except for these gift exchanges, you will probably not be expected to give gifts to co-workers, except, perhaps, to people who work for you. A small gift to a secretary (like the one for a teacher) might be appropriate. Gifts to superiors are usually not given. Expensive or personal gifts are almost never appropriate.



Regular Service Providers.

Many people give money to those who give them regular and frequent service through the year, like the mail carrier, the person who delivers the newspaper, the doorman,

or the baby-sitter. Some of these people may "help you remember" by including an empty envelope with their name on it, with one of their deliveries! How much money to give depends on how long you have known them, the number of other holiday gifts they are likely to get, the size of your weekly payment to them, how good a job they have done, and their (and your) personal financial situation. Ask a friend or neighbor about what is appropriate.

Neighbors. This is a good time to meet your neighbors, if you have not done so already. Sweets or traditional food from your country would be a welcome gift.

Santa Claus

Here is how Santa Claus works in the US. He "lives" at the North Pole, where he and his many elves (tiny helpers) work hard all year to make children's toys. Children write a letter to Santa, asking for the gifts they want. On Christmas Eve (December 24), Santa puts his toys in a sleigh pulled by eight reindeer. He flies from house to house, landing on the roof, but only when all children are asleep. He comes down the chimney with his bag of presents. Children leave milk and cookies for him. If these are gone in the morning, it is "proof" that Santa really came.

The character of Santa Claus evolved from stories about St. Nicholas, a bishop who lived in the fourth century. He was generous, especially to children and the poor. The name Santa Claus comes from St. Nicholas, or Sinterklaas in Dutch. Some people refer to Santa Claus as Kriss Kringle, from the German Christkindl, or Christ Child. But Santa Claus is not the Christ Child. This is a simple example of a slowly-changing tradition.

At times in US history, people thought of Santa Claus as a small elf. Then in the 1800s, an American cartoonist drew Santa as human-size, fat and jolly, bearded, and dressed in red with white fur trim. This is the Santa you will see in stores and on street corners. These Santas confuse children, who think he should be hard at work at the North Pole.



Holidays in the Work Place

Many companies and organizations have a holiday party in December. These used to be called "Christmas parties" and had a reputation for having lots of alcohol and rowdy behavior.

Now, with a clearer sensitivity for non-Christian co-workers and for appropriate work place behavior, parties are typically calmer and lack the red-and-green marks of Christmas. You may be invited to a small gathering at work, to a restaurant, to your boss's house, or to an elegant affair at a hotel.

Eating and drinking at office parties is always optional. However, if the theme, food, or alcohol at the party will be a problem for you, you should not feel obligated to go to the party at all. You could simply decline the invitation ("I'm sorry, I will not be able to attend the holiday party this year."). Or, you could explain the reasons for not going ("As you know, my family and I do not celebrate Christmas. We do not feel comfortable joining in a party with a Christmas focus.").

Usually, gifts for specific people are not expected at office holiday parties. Some offices have a kind of gift swap - see the article on Gift-Giving on page 3 for details.

If you do go to the party, remember that, no matter where the party is, you are still at work. Dress and act appropriately. If alcohol is served, drink only in moderation. Remember, you will be back at work with these people soon.

Kwanzaa

Kwanzaa is a relatively new family and community celebration for African Americans. It lasts seven days, from December 26 to January 1. The holiday is a time to honor one's ancestors, and to celebrate African culture and history. Friends, neighbors, and family gather to consider seven ideas that are important to the African American community:

- umoya*: unity, or coming together
- kujichagulia*: self-determination or having control of one's life
- ujima*: collective work and responsibility
- ujamaa*: cooperative economics, or sharing money and profits
- nia*: having a purpose or reason
- kuumba*: being creative
- imani*: having faith

Kwanzaa is not an ancient religious holiday. It was established in 1966 as part of the civil rights movement in the US. And so, families

are still deciding what traditions they will develop and use.

However, a few customs have already been widely accepted. The symbolic colors of Kwanzaa are red (for hard work), black (for beauty), and green (for a plentiful future). Families put a straw mat (*mkeka*) on a table (to remember African culture), and on it, a candle-holder (*kinara*). Every night, they light a candle to celebrate one of the seven ideas. Many families have a feast on December 31.



New Year's Eve: For Parents

I will be writing more about New Year's Day (January 1) in the next issue. But in December you may begin to make plans for New Year's Eve celebrations (on December 31). You may be invited to a party that does not include children. And your children, especially adolescents, may ask your permission to go to a New Year's Eve party without you. Some towns plan cultural and festive activities that continue all day, through midnight. Many people make their plans far in advance. If you will need a baby-sitter, start looking for one now.

Many parents and towns worry about car accidents on New Year's Eve, because so many people will have been drinking alcohol. In some towns, buses and subways are free, to encourage using them rather than a car. Taxi companies have many more drivers on duty than usual. Some companies will allow you to order a taxi ahead of time. Some groups of teenagers and/or adults hire a limousine for the evening, to drive from place to place. If they split the cost six ways, this may be a good, safe (and luxurious...) choice. Many restaurants and bars offer free coffee. Even if you and your children will not be drinking alcohol, remember that almost everyone else on the road will have been.

Some families have an at-home celebration. Children may invite groups of friends to sleep all night in their home, on the floor. If your child is invited to a friend's house, make sure that the parents will be home. Discuss with your teenagers your family rule about alcohol. If the party is not a sleep-over, make careful plans for how and when your child will get home safely.

Hanukkah

Hanukkah (sometimes spelled Chanukah) is a Jewish festival of lights and dedication. The holiday has its roots in the second century, BCE, when Antiochus Epiphanes became king of the Syrian branch of Alexander the Great's empire. He made Jewish (and other local) religions illegal and forced people to become Hellenistic (Greek). On the 25th day of the month of Kislev in the Jewish calendar (probably at the time of a pagan sun celebration), he changed the Temple of Jerusalem into a temple of Zeus, a Greek god. A group of Jews, led by Mattathias and his five sons (called the Maccabees), began to fight against Antiochus. After three years of war, the Maccabees won. They took down the altar in the temple and built a new one. On the anniversary of Antiochus' actions, they re-dedicated the Temple. They had only one bottle of oil, enough for one day. By a miracle, the oil lasted eight days, through the whole celebration. For this reason, Hanukkah lasts eight days.

This year Hanukkah begins on the evening of December 2 and continues every night for eight nights. Jewish families gather to light candles, held in a special holder called a *menorah*. On the first night of Hanukkah, families

use the middle candle to light one other one. On the second night, the middle candle is used to light two candles, symbolizing the new day and increasing light. This continues through the eighth night. As they light the candles, families say a blessing and may sing songs. Jewish children may receive a gift or money on each of the nights of Hanukkah.

The story of Hanukkah is a story of despair and hope, of dark and light. On the 25th day of Kislev, the moon is always dark, as the Jewish calendar is a moon-based one. The end of Kislev is also usually very near the winter solstice, when the days in the northern hemisphere are the shortest. So Hanukkah always comes at the year's longest and darkest nights. Jews remember the darkest days of their history when the forces to give up their religion and culture were strong. And they remember their power to resist these forces. They remember the sadness of their people when they lost their temple, but also the joy of the miracle of the lasting oil.

Even if you are not Jewish, you may identify with the struggle to keep one's own truest beliefs in the face of a new, competing culture.

Your Home in Winter

- ♦ To save energy, it is safe to turn your home thermostat down a bit when you go away, but always keep the temperature warm enough so the pipes will not freeze. (If you have pets or house plants, remember to think about what level of heat they will need.)
- ♦ If you have a hot-air heating system, replace or clean its air filter once a month. Otherwise, dust will clog the filter and decrease the amount of heat you feel.
- ♦ If you can feel wind come in at your windows or doors, use a sealer to cover the gaps. Hardware stores sell many kinds — find a knowledgeable salesperson and ask for help in which kind to buy.
- ♦ Dry air feels colder than warm air (see chart on this page), and is unhealthy. Keep bowls of water around your rooms to help increase the air moisture. Or use a humidifier, but then be sure to clean it frequently or germs will spread through the air.
- ♦ Keep a snow shovel where you can reach it from inside. Also keep something handy to reduce snow and ice on your steps or walkway: rock salt, snow-melting chemicals, sand, sawdust, or gravel.
- ♦ Outside, turn off the water to garden faucets then drain the pipes by leaving the faucet open to keep it from freezing.
- ♦ Clean your house's gutters by removing old leaves and sticks. Otherwise, water will gather and freeze.

**Apparent Temperature,
by Relative Humidity and Room Temperature**

	Relative Humidity (%)					
	0	20	40	60	80	100
75°	68°	71°	74°	76°	77°	79°
72°	64°	67°	70°	72°	74°	76°
69°	62°	64°	66°	68°	70°	72°
66°	59°	61°	63°	65°	67°	68°
63°	57°	59°	60°	62°	63°	64°
60°	55°	56°	58°	59°	60°	61°

The "apparent temperature" of a room (how warm it feels) is higher if the room is more humid. A relative humidity of 20% is common in the winter in northeastern US in homes with no humidifier. Notice that the apparent temperature of a room at 72° and 20% humidity is the same (67°) as that of a room at 66° and 80% humidity.

Source: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

- ♦ *Preferred Provider Organization (PPO)* and *Point of Service* plans refer to different insurance arrangements regarding co-payments and deductibles, and the need to choose a doctor from within a network.
- ♦ *co-payment*: the money you must pay when you see a doctor, even if you have insurance
- ♦ *deductible*: the first medical costs in a year, to be paid by you, after which the insurance company pays (perhaps with a co-payment)
- ♦ *primary care physician (PCP)*: the doctor who is assigned to manage your care; this will be the person you usually see when you are sick — either a family (or general) practitioner, or a pediatrician for children and an internist for adults
- ♦ *specialist*: a doctor with extra training in one type of medicine (like cardiology or surgery)
- ♦ *registered nurse*: a graduate of a four-year university with a specialization in nursing
- ♦ *nurse practitioner*: a registered nurse with graduate training who can prescribe medicine
- ♦ *physician's assistant*: a person with graduate training who can prescribe medicine
- ♦ *managed care*: a general term to refer to providing medical care in a cost-effective way, often by limiting which doctors you can see and by emphasizing preventive care

Medical Care in the US

Many international newcomers are surprised and confused about the way the US health care system works. Many Americans are too! The country is in the middle of a national debate about how health care should be given. The Affordable Care Act, sometimes called Obamacare, is in the middle of changing the way care is delivered, and by and for whom. Be very sure you have medical insurance of some kind, and that you understand how it works before anyone gets sick. Policies vary widely.

What Kind of Doctor Do I Need?

In the US, most routine medical care is provided by a *primary care physician* (see sidebar). If you need to see a specialist, your primary care physician will suggest names for you. In many doctors' offices, a *registered nurse*, *nurse practitioner*, or *physician's assistant* may also give you care. These professionals have training in routine medical care and, may be able to prescribe medicines and do simple procedures.



How Do I Find a Good Doctor?

There are several ways to choose a doctor:

- ♦ Ask your co-workers or neighbors for a recommendation.
- ♦ If you have one doctor you like (say, a pediatrician), ask him/her for a recommendation for a different specialty (say, for an internist).
- ♦ Your insurance may offer care through some type of managed care (see sidebar). The websites of these plans will describe what you must do to see your *primary care physician* or a specialist.
- ♦ Contact your local medical center or hospital

and ask about their internist group. These groups of doctors often see *out-patients* (non-hospitalized patients).

- ♦ Many towns have neighborhood walk-in clinics. These may be run by private companies, hospitals, or groups of physicians. They accept most kinds of insurance, but usually you do not need insurance to get medical care there. Ask about their insurance rules before you get service. Usually you do not need an appointment, but can simply walk in. This may be a good choice for a one-time visit for a non-serious illness but you will not be able to have an on-going relationship with a doctor.

Try to meet your new doctor before you (or your child) are sick, so you will feel comfortable later when you need him/her.

If you have brought medical records with you, leave a copy of them with the doctor you choose.

Getting Care When You Need It

In the US, doctors rarely make house calls. You must take your

child or yourself to the doctor, no matter how ill you are. Once you have chosen a doctor, you can telephone his or her office when you are sick. The doctor or the nurse will ask you questions and help you decide if you should go to the doctor's office.

If you have a medical emergency before you have chosen a doctor, go to the Emergency Room of your closest hospital.

Prescription Drugs

If you will need to take a medicine while in the US, arrange for a prescription with your doctor. Rules about which drugs require a prescription differ from country to country, so do not wait till the last minute to make arrangements.

Counting Votes in the US

You may have been surprised at the number of elections whose outcome was not immediately known by the evening of November 6. An unusual number of races were “too close to call.” States have their own rules about how many votes must be counted before one candidate is named the winner, and the circumstances under which the votes must be re-counted (because of the possibility of error). When races are very close -- as seemed to happen a lot this year -- observers become very careful to be sure every legitimate vote is counted. You are witnessing a deep state-by-state conversation about the importance of helping every citizen vote vs. preventing possible fraud. The chart below lists some of the proposals that have been made that would widen the pool of potential voters, and the opinions about them.

Wide partisan gaps in views of automatic voter registration, removing inactive voters from the rolls

% who strongly/somewhat favor ...



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 24-Oct. 7, 2018.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Birthday Biography: Walt Disney

Walt Disney, born on December 5, 1901, changed the face of the American entertainment industry. He is most famous as the cartoonist who created Mickey Mouse. But he was an innovator in many areas — from animation and film color technique, to the design and efficient running of amusement parks. His personal story, in which he used his imagination and optimism to change his world, is full of favorite American themes.

As a young man, Disney borrowed \$250 from his brother and started a Hollywood-based business producing short animated films. Mickey Mouse was the star of Disney’s first cartoon with sound, *Steamboat Willie*. He had an agreement with the holder of the patent for the new three-color process called “Technicolor,” which allowed him to make the only color cartoons for two years.

His studio won its first Academy Award in 1932 for *Flowers and Trees*. You can watch both these films in their entirety on youtube. Let’s just say that animation has come a long way...

His films would eventually win 48 more Academy Awards, and he was personally honored with national awards from France, Thailand, Brazil, and Mexico. His films and television shows (including *Show White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Pinocchio*, *Fantasia*, and *Bambi* and many non-animated family-friendly stories) have been the staple of U.S. family entertainment ever since.

Happy Birthday, Mr. Disney.

Newcomer's Almanac is published monthly by The Interchange Institute, for people who have recently moved to the United States. Its goal is to promote international understanding by providing information about the American holidays, customs, values, social issues, and language that often confuse and surprise newcomers. It is written by Anne P. Copeland, PhD, who is a clinical psychologist and the Director of The Interchange Institute. She is an American and has lived and worked overseas with her family.

The Interchange Institute is a not-for-profit organization that studies the impact of intercultural transitions on individuals, their families, and the organizations for which they work. From the results of this research, the Institute offers seminars and workshops, produces publications, and provides consultative services to the international newcomers, their organizations, and to host communities, recognizing that change and insight on both sides facilitates smooth transition.

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The
Interchange
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That Crazy English: Waiting

The U.S. has spent a good part of the last month waiting and waiting for the results of the mid-term elections. Here are some useful "waiting" idioms:

Maybe one of the candidates will just give up the race, but *don't hold your breath*. (*...but this is very unlikely, or very unlikely to happen soon.*)

Now we are waiting for the Court to decide what to do. *Stay tuned for details*. (*When there is more to tell, we will tell you.*) (This phrase used to be common during television and radio news programs to say that more information would soon follow.)

Watching the election process feels like *waiting for Godot*. (*...feels endless and unlikely ever to succeed.*) (*Waiting for Godot* -- pronounced ga-DOH -- was the name of a 1952 play by Samuel Becket in which two characters wait endlessly -- and without any apparent reason -- on stage for someone named "Godot" who never comes.)

We have heard the results from all except one county; now we are *waiting for the other shoe to drop*. (*...waiting for something that will happen soon and with non-surprising results.*)

They are *waiting in the wings* for the results of the election but are ready to start work immediately, if elected. (*...waiting quietly and out of sight.*)

I am *waiting with bated breath* to hear who won. (*...holding my breath, waiting eagerly.*)

WITH A PEN

1. Read [Gift-Giving at the End of the Year](#) on page 3. Write a list of the people in your home country (besides your family and friends) to whom you give a gift at least once a year. For each person, describe what a typical gift might be. Then write a list of the people in your home country who give you a gift at least once a year. What is a typical gift from each of these people?

2. Read [Christmas Symbols](#) on page 2. Think of holidays in your home culture in which some colors are symbolic or traditional. Write a brief description of the meaning of these colors.

3. Read [Santa Claus](#) on page 3. Draw a picture of a person, animal or imaginary character that is a symbol of a holiday in your home country. Write a short description of your picture.

4. Read about [Kwanzaa](#) and [Hanukkah](#) on pages 4 and 5. Write a description of a holiday in your home country in which candles are important.

5. Read [Medical Care in the US](#) and [Health Care Words to Know](#) on page 6. Write a list of medical care providers you or your family might see in your home country. Are they doctors, nurses, or some other type of provider? How is their training different?

WHAT YOU USUALLY DO: SIMPLE PRESENT TENSE

Read about the various [December holidays](#) on pages 2-5. Think about your family's own rituals during one of its most important holidays. Complete each sentence below, using the simple present tense to describe what you usually do.

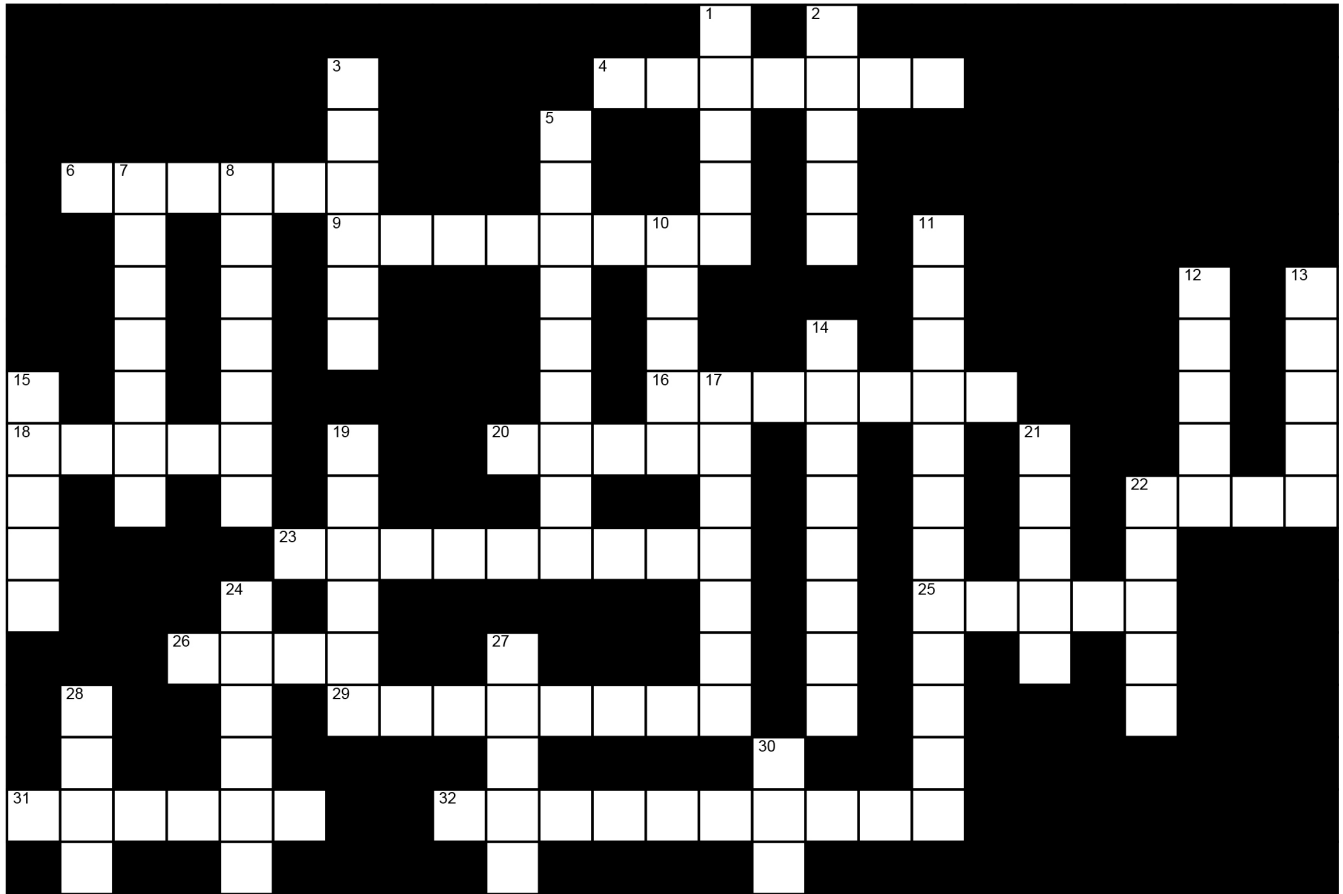
Name of Holiday _____

1. Every year we _____.
2. The day before this holiday, we _____.
3. Children always _____.
4. Men _____.
5. Women _____.
6. For dinner, we _____.
7. Some families _____.
8. Our neighbors _____.
9. Music _____.
10. For clothes, we _____.

UNDERSTANDING WHAT YOU READ

Read about [Christmas](#) on pages 2 and 3. Mark each of these TRUE (T) or FALSE (F). Correct any false statements.

- | | T | F |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Since a Christmas tree is dead, there is no need to give it water in your home. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Nineteenth-century German and Dutch immigrants to the US made the celebration of Christmas popular in this country. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Santa Claus is a modern-day symbol of Jesus. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. The Bible says that Jesus was born on December 25. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. According to US legend, Santa Claus travels in a sleigh that is pulled by eight reindeer. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. In the 4th century, St. Nicholas wore red clothes with white fur. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |



Across

- 4. a typical year-end gift for an elementary-school teacher
- 6. ___ Swap, a common gift-giving custom in offices
- 9. "___ temperature," how warm a room feels
- 16. The ___ of the House is second in line to become President if the President can no longer serve.
- 18. unity, or coming together, celebrated at Kwanzaa
- 20. Most Americans think it would be a good idea to automatically update ___ registrations when people more.
- 22. Are you waiting for the other ___ to drop?
- 23. where Jesus was born
- 25. one symbolic color of Christmas
- 26. ___-giving is a common part of Christmas and the end of the year.
- 29. Keep the ___ high in a room to make it feel warmer.
- 31. ___ Mouse was Walt Disney's most famous cartoon character.
- 32. medical costs you must pay before your insurance pays

Down

- 1. This is like waiting for ___; it will never happen.
- 2. They are waiting in the ___, ready to serve when the time is right.
- 3. waiting with bated ___; eagerly
- 5. The American Santa Claus lives at the ___ (two words).
- 7. Be careful on New Year's Eve, as many drivers will have been drinking ___.
- 8. an African American celebration of family and community
- 10. ___ practitioners can prescribe medicine.
- 11. The House ___ Committee could pursue whether Russians interfered with the 2016 presidential election.
- 12. Be sure to buy a ___ (not dry) Christmas tree.
- 13. US doctors rarely make ___ calls.
- 14. a Jewish festival of lights and dedication
- 15. Stay ___ for details; you will learn more soon.
- 17. ___ care physician
- 19. Don't hold your ___; it probably won't happen.
- 21. a typical year-end gift for a babysitter or newspaper deliverer
- 22. He comes down American Christian's chimneys on Christmas Eve.
- 24. If you have a hot-air heating system, replace or clean your ___ monthly.
- 27. Even if you turn your furnace down, be sure the ___ won't freeze.
- 28. Most Americans do not think elections should be conducted by ___.
- 30. A bottle of oil lasted ___ days during a re-dedication of a Temple.

OUT AND ABOUT

1. Read about [Santa Claus](#) on page 3. In one week in December, count the number of pictures of or people dressed as "Santa Claus" you see — on street corners (they are probably collecting money for the poor), department stores (they are probably talking to children, asking what gifts they would like for Christmas).

At the same time, count the number of "nativity scenes" (models or pictures of the baby Jesus, his parents, and animals in the stable). Which number is higher — the number of nativity scenes or the number of people dressed as Santa? Compare this to your own country.

IF YOU USE THE WEB

1. Read *Birthday Biography: Walt Disney* on page 6. You can watch Disney's first movie, *Steamboat Willie*, with Mickey Mouse's first-ever appearance on screen, at www.youtube.com/watch?v=BBgghnQF6E4 Well, I guess he had to start somewhere...

2. Read *Kwanzaa* on page 4. To hear the founder of Kwanzaa, Dr. Maulana Karenga, describe the holiday and his vision for its celebration, go to www.youtube.com/watch?v=c-MY8I_kwJY.

3. Read *Your Home in Winter* on page 5. Go to www.homedvisor.com/r/home-winterization-checklist/ Read the short list of tips. Did you find something you have not yet done to winterize your home?

WITH A FRIEND

1. Read *Kwanzaa* on page 4. Look at the list of seven ideas that are celebrated on this holiday. Do you have any holidays in your home country that celebrate any of these seven ideas? Describe them to a friend or partner.

2. Read *Hanukkah* on page 5. Hanukkah celebrates Jews' resistance against forces to give up their religion and culture. In the US, have you felt pressure — from your family or community — to change your values and culture, in ways you don't like? What can you do to resist this pressure?

3. Read *Counting Votes in the US* on page 7. Discuss with a friend or partner whether any of the voting practices listed in the chart are used in your home country. For example, can people register on Election Day at the polls? How do these rules work out?

SAYING WHAT YOU MEAN

Read *New Year's Eve* on page 5. With a partner:

Partner 1: You have a 14-year-old daughter who has been invited to a friend's house for a New Year's Eve party. You want to ask the friend's parents some questions about the party before you decide whether to let your daughter go.

Partner 2: You are the school friend's parent. You hope Partner 1's daughter will come to the party.

Have a conversation about the party. Then switch roles and try again.

Useful Expressions

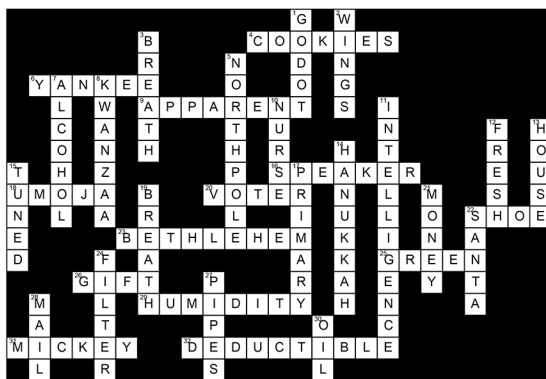
Would you mind if I asked a few questions about New Year's Eve parties, because I don't know how they work here in the US.

In my country on New Year's Eve, children this age usually _____.

I wanted to be sure that you, or another adult, will be at home for the party.

I know families have different rules about drinking alcohol. In our family, our children _____. Will that be a problem at your party?

Because we are new here, I don't know what time parties like this are usually over.



ANSWER CORNER

VOCABULARY OF NOUNS AND VERBS

2 noun (separate) 8 verb (cover) 14 verb (hole in sink) 3 noun (sprinkle) 9 noun (cover) 15 noun (exits) 4 verb (lid) 10 noun (tip) 16 noun (stays) 5 noun (saves) 11 noun (sprinkle) 6 noun (plays game) 12 noun (smooth) 7 noun (live with) 13 noun (pour liquid on)



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UNDERSTANDING WHAT YOU READ

1.F (Even though a Christmas tree is dead, it still needs water.) 2.T 3.F (Santa Claus is a modern-day symbol of St. Nicholas.) 4.F (The Bible does not give a date for Jesus' birthday.) 5.T 6.F (The red clothes and white fur became a symbol of Christmas later.)