

Celebrate American Holidays



In 2013 "The National Flag Day Foundation" had nearly 200 students submit an essay about "What Our Flag Means to Me."

Lecturer's this is your chance to get the school children involved in a National contest. It is also something you can do as a Subordinate or Pomona Lecturer.

Another topic could be "What our Troops Means to Me." Encourage your members to write an essay, have a contest and at the end of the contest mail out a letter along with the essay to someone in the service.

Encourage your membership to memorize the words to "Star Spangle Banner," "The Land of Liberty," to write their own poem. Get them excited and carry that excitement over to the State Grange contests.



October

O sun and skies and clouds of June,
And flowers of June together,
Ye cannot rival for one hour
October's bright weather.

When gentians roll their fringes tight,
To save them for morning,
And chestnuts fall from satin burrs
Without warning.

When on the ground red apples lie
In pies like jewels shinning,
And redder still on old stone walls
Are leaves of woodbine twining.

When all the lovely wayside things
Their white winged seeds are snowing
And in the fields, still green and fair,
Late aftermaths are growing.



-Helen Hunt Jackson

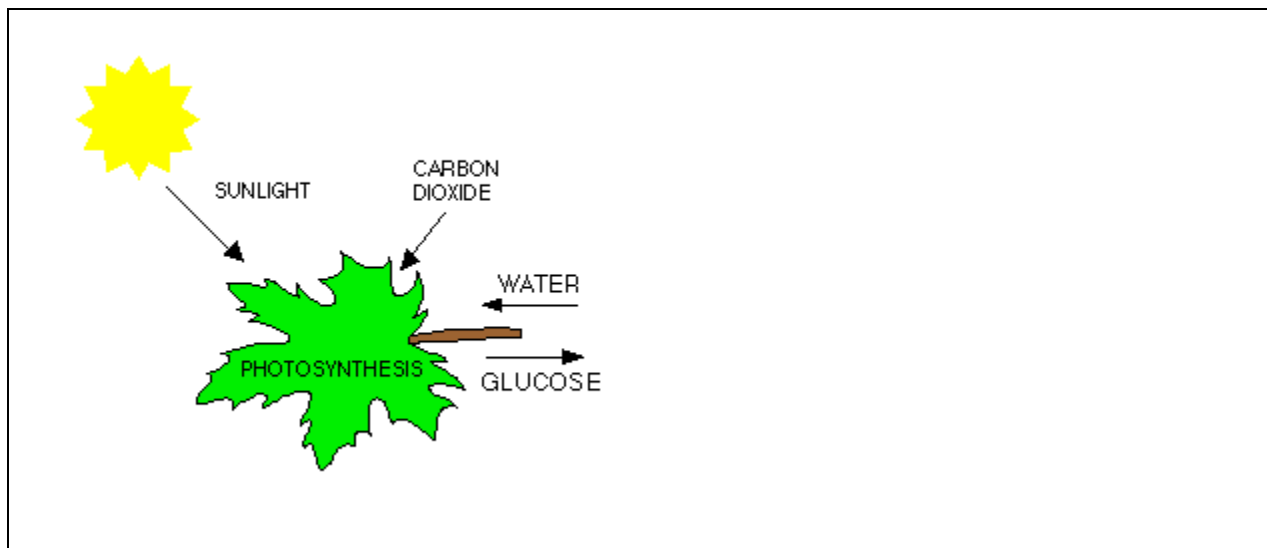
Why Do Leaves Change Color in Autumn?

We all enjoy the colors of autumn leaves. The changing fall foliage never fails to surprise and delight us. Did you ever wonder how and why a fall leaf changes color? Why a maple leaf turns bright red? Where do the yellows and oranges come from?

To answer those questions, we first have to understand what leaves are and what they do.

Photosynthesis

Leaves are nature's food factories. Plants take water from the ground through their roots. They take a gas called carbon dioxide from the air. Plants use sunlight to turn water and carbon dioxide into oxygen and glucose. Oxygen is a gas in the air that we need to breathe. Glucose is a kind of sugar. Plants use glucose as food for energy and as a building block for growing.



The way plants turn water and carbon dioxide into oxygen and sugar is called photosynthesis. That means "putting together with light." A chemical called chlorophyll helps make photosynthesis happen. Chlorophyll is what gives plants their green color.

Autumn Preparations for Winter

As summer ends and autumn comes, the days get shorter and shorter. This is how the trees "know" to begin getting ready for winter.

During winter, there is not enough light or water for photosynthesis. The trees will rest, and live off the food they stored during the summer. They begin to shut down their food-making factories. The green chlorophyll disappears from the leaves.

As the bright green fades away, we begin to see yellow and orange colors. Small amounts of these colors have been in the leaves all along. We just can't see them in the summer, because they are covered up by the green chlorophyll.



The bright reds and purples we see in leaves are made mostly in the fall. In some trees, like maples, glucose is trapped in the leaves after photosynthesis stops. Sunlight and the cool nights of autumn cause the leaves turn this glucose into a red color.

The brown color of trees like oaks is made from wastes left in the leaves.

It is the combination of all these things that make the beautiful fall foliage colors we enjoy each year.

Christmas Legends



Holly

The reverence for holly is believed to have originated with the Druids whom some say wore sprigs of the plant in their hair as they went into the ancient oak groves to obtain their sacred mistletoe. In Rome, holly was a sacred plant of the god, Saturn, and during the winter feast of Saturnalia, Romans gave each other holly wreaths and adorned pictures of Saturn with its branches. All sorts of powers were attributed to it; it supposedly frightened off witches, protected the home from lightning and assured peaceful dreams if hung on the bedpost.

With the growing influence of Christianity, it became associated with Christ's 'Crown of Thorns' (In Scandinavia, it's known as the Christ Thorn). According to legend, the original holly berries were white, and it was Jesus's blood that left them with the permanent red stain. Yet another legend tells of a orphan boy living with the shepherds when the angels announced Christ's birth. He wove a wreath of holly for the child's head, but seeing what a poor gift it was, began to cry. The legend says when Jesus touched the wreath it began to sparkle and the boy's tears turned into the scarlet berries. (Notice the similarity to the poinsettia legend of Maria and Pablo below)



Candy Canes

While many Christmas traditions have pagan origins, this secular little Christmas goody is steeped in Christian symbolism. According to legend, a candymaker wanted to make a confection to honor Christ's birth. It had to be hard candy to represent the church being built on solid rock. Because Jesus is known as the 'Good Shepherd', it was formed in the shape of a shepherd's staff (and turning it upside down, it was a "J" for Jesus). The three small red stripes represented the scourging Jesus suffered on his way to the cross. The one large red stripe represented the blood Jesus shed as payment for our sins. The white stripes represented the virgin birth and the sinless nature of Christ.



Poinsettias

These beautiful flowers are native to Mexico, and it is from this country that we learn the legend of the first poinsettia. The story is told of a poor girl, Maria, and her little brother, Pablo. The two loved the annual Mexican Christmas festival with its large manger scene, but each year were disappointed that they had no money to buy a present for the baby Jesus.

One Christmas Eve, Maria and Pablo stopped on their way to church to pick some weeds growing along the roadside to give to the baby Jesus. The other children chided them for their gift, but Maria and Pablo knew their gift was from the heart, and it was all they could give. As they began to place their plants around the manger, the green-top leaves miraculously turned into bright red petals. Soon the manger was surrounded by beautiful star-shaped flowers and became known as *Flores de Noche Buena* - Flowers of the Holy Night - the first

pointsettias.

Poinsettias were first introduced to the United States in 1825 by Joel Robert Poinsett, amateur botanist and first ambassador to Mexico, when he brought some cuttings to his plantation in Greenwood, South Carolina. Upon his death in 1851, December 12th was named National Poinsettia Day in his honor.



Mistletoe

Also known as the golden bough, mistletoe was held sacred by both the Celtic Druids and the Norseman.

Celts believed this parasitic plant held the soul of the host tree, the holy oak. In a special ceremony, the Druid priests would harvest it with a golden sickle making sure it never touched the ground where it's magical powers would be absorbed back into the earth. The branches were then divided and distributed to the people who used it as a protection from all sorts of evils.

Once called 'Allheal', it has been used as a folk medicine to heal toothache, measles, and many other ills.

The practice of 'kissing under the mistletoe' has many legends associated with it. Some say the Druids dedicated the plant to the Goddess of Love, and this is where the custom comes from. Others claim it came from England, where mistletoe was hung in doorways for good luck. Since only happiness could pass beneath it, enemies would embrace and seal their peace with a kiss of friendship. Scandinavians also considered it the plant of peace, and if enemies met by chance beneath it in the forest, they laid down their arms and maintained a truce until the next day. Even now, if there is armed conflict anywhere in the world, there is usually a cease-fire on Christmas Day, which is probably a custom that has come down from these practices in antiquity.

My favorite legend comes from the ancient Norse people. In it, Frigga, wife of the god Odin, dearly loved her son Balder and took steps to

make sure no harm would come to him by earth, fire, water or air. Since mistletoe did not fit into any of these realms, an evil spirit names Loki fashioned an arrow of it and gave it to Balder's blind brother, Holder. Guided by Loki's hand, Holder unknowingly shot his brother in the heart, killing him.

The legend has several outcomes. In one, Balder is brought back to life. In another, He was sent to the Otherworld with a Viking's funeral, on a burning ship, to await the day when He returns to Earth to usher in a new era. In both cases, Frigga swore that mistletoe would never again cause harm; making it a symbol of love and promising to bestow a kiss upon anyone who passed under it.



The Christmas Tree

This symbol of the season has so many legends associated with it, entire books have been written on the subject.

Some say the modern day Christmas tree has its origins in the Pagan Yule celebration. Pagan families would bring a live tree into the home so the wood spirits would have a place to keep warm during the cold winter months. Bells were hung in the branches so they could tell when a spirit was present. Food and treats were hung on the branches for the spirits to eat and a five-pointed star, the pentagram, was placed atop the tree.

Some say the Christmas tree story began in the 1300's in northern Europe, when performers strolled the streets bearing huge pine boughs laden with apples as walking advertisements for the miracle plays they staged on the church steps. The boughs represented the Garden of Eden in the play about Adam and Eve, traditionally performed on Dec. 24th. Gradually this "paradise" tree, as it was called, transmuted into the tree of life--the Christ Child's tree

Another legend from the early days of Christianity in England tells the story of a Christian monk who was trying to spread Christianity among the Druids. One day, surrounded by a group of his converts, he struck down a huge oak tree, which, in the Druid religion, was an object of worship. As it fell to the ground, the oak tree split into four pieces and from its center sprung up a fir tree. The monk told the Druids, "This

little tree shall be your Holy Tree tonight. It is a wood of peace, for your houses are built of fir. It's the sign of an endless life, for its leaves are evergreen. See how it points toward the heavens? Let this be called the tree of the Christ Child. Gather about it, not in the wilderness, but in your homes. There it will be surrounded with loving gifts and rites of kindness."

One of the first written references to a Christmas tree was in 1605 , where a visitor in Germany reported seeing a tree decorated with apples, gilded candies, paper roses and thin wafers. The rose was the symbol of Mary the Virgin; the wafer represented the host of the Holy Communion, and the gilded candies were for children. The writer called the tree "Christbaum". Two hundred years later, it was brought to England by German Prince Albert, husband of Queen Victoria and found its way to the United States through German immigrants settling in Pennsylvania who put up our first Christmas tree on December 20, 1821.

******As a little side-story connected with Christmas Trees, the addition of tinsel as decoration comes from a legend about a poor old woman who was unable to provide decorations for her children's Christmas tree. During the night, spiders lodged in the tree and covered it with their webs. The Christ Child, seeing this, realized that the woman would be sad to see her surprise spoiled. He turned the spider webs into silver, and the next morning the poor family was dazzled by the brilliant "tinsel" that shone on the tree

Tinsel was invented in Germany around 1610. At that time real silver was used, and machines were invented which pulled the silver out into the wafer thin strips. Though it was durable, it tarnished easily, so some attempt was made to make tinsel with lead and tin. This proved too heavy and breakable, so silver was actually used until the mid 20th century. Today, the tinsel we use is made of plastic. ******



Santa Claus

Here's another one with a slew of legends associated with it.

Some say the jolly fellow descended from legends of the Norse god, Thor, who lived in the polar regions up north and came to our parts of the world on a sleigh that was driven by goats (or on a white horse, depending on the story) bringing coins and bread for the poor. He was said to dole out punishments to bad children and presents to well behaved children. (Knows if you have been naughty or nice?). Some say Santa is derived from pagan cultures worshipping a hearth god who wore red, entered the house through the chimney, blessed those who pleased him and cursed those who didn't. Food was reportedly left out to appease this god.(milk and cookies of today?) Most accounts attribute the origins of Santa Clause to St. Nicholas who lived in Myra (known as Turkey, today) in the fourth century. Born an only child of a wealthy family, he was orphaned at an early age when both parents died of the plague, and grew up in a monastery, becoming one of the the world's youngest priests at the age of 17. Many stories are told of his generosity as he gave his wealth away in the form of gifts to those in need.

One of these stories is also probably where our tradition of Christmas Stockings comes from. According to legend, there was once a kindly nobleman whose wife became very ill. When she died, he and his three daughters fell into poverty and despair and when it came time for the daughters to marry, they had no dowries (money and property given to the new husband's family).

One night after the daughters had washed out their clothing, they hung their stockings over the fireplace to dry. That night Saint Nicholas, knowing the family's hardship, stopped by the nobleman's house. Looking in through the window, he saw that everyone had gone to bed and noticed the daughters stockings at the hearth. He took three small bags of gold from his pouch and threw them one by one down the chimney landing (by some kind of miracle of physics *smile*) in the stockings.(Another version has him coming in through the window, which is a little more plausible).

The next morning when the daughters awoke, they found the gold in

their stockings. The nobleman was able to see his three daughters marry and everyone lived happily ever after.

Some years later Nicholas became a bishop and, after his death, he was elevated to sainthood. Eventually, when the Catholic Church began celebrating Christmas, St. Nicholas was incorporated into the season, but when the Reformation took place, the new Protestants no longer desired St. Nicholas as their gift-giver since he was so closely tied to the Catholic Church. Therefore, each country or region developed their own gift-giver. In France he was known as Pere Noel. In England he was Father Christmas (depicted with sprigs of holly, ivy or mistletoe). Germany knew him as Weihnachtsmann (Christmas man). When the communists took over in Russia and outlawed Christianity, the Russians began calling him Grandfather Frost (wearing blue instead of the traditional red). To the Dutch, he was Sinterklaas (which eventually was mispronounced in America as Santa Claus) who rode into town on a white horse, accompanied by his Moorish sidekick, Blackpieter or Black Peter (who, leaping from rooftop to rooftop throwing gifts down chimneys, was probably the forerunner of the Santa's elves today). All early 'Santas' had long white beards and carried gifts for the children.

In 1809, American writer Washington Irving created a new version of the old Saint Nicholas, describing him as a jolly Dutchman who smoked a pipe, wore baggy pants, and rode over the treetops in a horse-drawn wagon dropping gifts down chimneys.

Then in 1823, Clement C. Moore wrote the famous poem, "A Visit From St. Nicholas," now known as "The Night Before Christmas." describing him as the jolly fellow we know today, and trading in his horse and wagon for a sleigh and reindeer. (You can read the poem [here.](#)) In 1863, illustrator Thomas Nast solidified this image of Santa Claus by drawing him as Moore had described him and giving him a home in the North Pole. These illustrations appeared in the Harper's Weekly magazine for 23 years.

Finally, from 1931 to 1964, Haddon Sundblom created a new Santa each Christmas for Coca-Cola advertisements that appeared all over the world. Having a long white beard, wearing a red suit trimmed with white fur, leather boots and belt, and carrying a pack of toys on his back, he's become the modern version of Santa we know today.

Other Legends from Around The World

Père Noël in France has some competition with Aunt Airie, a kind of

faery who wears a cape and travels on a donkey, and also gives gifts on Christmas Eve.

If you live in the Netherlands, you put hay and sugar inside a shoe on the night before Saint Nicholas Day. Saint Nicholas' horse will eat the hay and sugar when they stop at your house. After the horse eats, Saint Nicholas repays you by filling your shoes with candy and tiny gifts.

In Spain, you put straw inside your shoes. The camels of The Three Kings will eat the straw as they pass your house and leave gifts on Epiphany, twelve nights after Christmas.

In some parts of Germany at Christmas you get gifts from a girl called Christkind. She wears a crown of candles and carries a basket full of gifts to give to the children. (A scary being called Hans Trapp is said to go with Christkind, who waves a stick to threaten the naughty children.)

In Italy you may get your gifts in a large jar, called the Urn of Fate. It is said that La Befana, a kindly witch, flies down the chimney and fills each jar with gifts and goodies on Epiphany instead of Christmas. It was in Italy that the nativity scene became popular and spread through the Alps eventually making its way to the United States with German pioneers.

In Poland, gifts are brought to the children by Babouska. You can read her legend [here](#).

There's the Julbock, or Yule goat, from Sweden and Norway, who had his beginnings as one of the goats pulling the sleigh for the god Thor. Now he carries the Yule elf (called Jultomten in Sweden, Julesvenn in Norway, and Jule-nissen in Denmark and Norway) as he delivers presents and receives his offering of porridge.

Christmas folklore

Superstition and folklore about the Christmas season seems endless. Here's a sampling:

- ~animals will all kneel down as the Holy Night arrives,
- ~bees hum the '100th psalm' on Christmas Eve,
- ~a windy Christmas will bring good luck,
- ~a person born on Christmas Day can see the Little People,
- ~a cricket on the hearth brings good luck,

~opening all doors of the house at midnight allows evil spirits to depart,
~you will have one lucky month for each Christmas pudding you sample,
~the tree must be taken down by Twelfth Night or bad luck will follow,
~'if Christmas on a Sunday be, a windy winter we shall see',
~'hours of sun on Christmas Day, so many frosts in the month of May',
~the Twelve Days of Christmas will predict each month's weather for the coming year,

and so on.....



medi courtesy of [Spider's Christmas Gifs](#)

Global Youth Service Day

Host a Celebration Event



Get started by choosing your
GYSD project!

☐ Directly thank the young people who have served their communities throughout the year by hosting a celebration event. Present awards (or certificates or prizes, etc.) to youth volunteers.

☐ Host a community forum, school board meeting, or town council meeting with influential community members so young service leaders can present what they know about identifying community needs and creating a service project. Thank them for their service to your community.

GYSD 2015 will take place in
April 2015

Activities for Kids with Disabilities

Here are some ways to have fun and keep a kid feeling like he or she belongs

<http://health.howstuffworks.com/pregnancy-and-parenting/childhood-conditions/activities-for-kids-with-disabilities.htm>

Global Youth Service Day:
http://www.gysd.org/project_ideas



MAKE A DIFFERENCE DAY

Make A Difference day always takes place on the

4th Saturday in October.

Eligibility. Subject to the additional restrictions, the Make A Difference Day Awards is open to all U.S. residents including active military members and their family members.

How To Enter a Project. To submit your project, complete an official entry form online at www.makeadifferenceday.com and in the Make A Difference Day brochure.

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