Christmas Around the World

Grades 2–4

Name _____ Date _____

1 Las Posadas in Mexico



In Mexico, the Christmas season is full of music, lights and parties. One of the most important traditions is called Las Posadas. *Posada* is the Spanish word for an inn, a place where travellers can stay for the night.

Las Posadas lasts for nine nights, from December 16 to December 24. Each evening, a group of neighbours walks through the streets carrying candles and singing. They stop at a house and ask for a place to stay, just as the Christmas story tells of Mary and Joseph looking for shelter. At the last house, the door opens and everyone is welcomed inside for a party.

At the party, children take turns trying to break a colourful star-shaped piñata filled with candy and fruit. The red poinsettia, a plant used as a Christmas decoration around the world, first grew wild in Mexico.

1. How many nights does Las Posadas last?

(a) three (b) nine (c) twelve

2. In this passage, an inn is…

(a) a place where travellers can stay for the night (b) a kind of candle
(c) a Christmas song

3. Why do you think the neighbours carry candles?

(a) to keep their hands warm (b) to light the piñata
(c) to light their way through the dark streets

4. What happens at the last house each night?

Draw one thing from this passage and label it.

Name _____ Date _____

2 The Longest Christmas: The Philippines





People in the Philippines like to say they have the longest Christmas season in the world. Christmas songs start playing on the radio in September, and decorations often stay up until January.

The most famous decoration is the parol (say *pa-ROLE*), a star-shaped lantern. Long ago, parols were made from bamboo sticks and paper and lit with a candle. Today, many are made with shiny shells or plastic and lit with bright electric lights. Families hang a parol in a window to show that Christmas is coming.

From December 16 to 24, many families go to church very early each morning, before the sun comes up. Afterwards they might buy bibingka, a warm rice cake baked on a banana leaf. On Christmas Eve, families share a big late-night feast called Noche Buena.

1. When do Christmas songs start playing on the radio?
(a) September (b) November (c) December 24

2. A lantern is…
(a) a kind of rice cake (b) a light with a cover around it (c) a church

3. Why do people say the Philippines has the longest Christmas season?
(a) Christmas lasts from September until January (b) The feast lasts all night
(c) Parols are very large

4. How have parols changed over time?

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Draw one thing from this passage and label it.

Name _____ Date _____

3 Lucia Day in Sweden



In Sweden, winter days are very short. In the far north, the sun hardly rises at all in December. That is one reason why people in Sweden love a festival of light called Lucia Day, held on December 13.

Early in the morning, a girl chosen to be Lucia leads a procession. She wears a long white dress with a red sash and a crown of green leaves with candles on her head. Behind her walk other children dressed in white, holding candles and singing soft songs. Schools, churches and even offices hold their own Lucia processions.

People eat lussekatter (say *LOO-seh-kat-ter*), sweet yellow buns flavoured with saffron and decorated with raisins. Many Swedes say Lucia Day brings light and warmth to the darkest time of the year.

1. On which date is Lucia Day?
(a) December 1 (b) December 13 (c) December 25

2. A procession is…
(a) a line of people walking together in order (b) a kind of sweet bun (c) a winter storm

3. Why is a festival of light so special in Sweden in December?
(a) People in Sweden do not have electricity (b) It is summer in Sweden
(c) The days are very short and dark

4. Describe what Lucia wears.

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Draw one thing from this passage and label it.

Name _____ Date _____

4 Christmas in Summer: Australia



When it is cold and snowy in many countries, it is summer in Australia. That is because Australia is in the southern half of the world, where the seasons are the opposite of those in the north. December days are often hot and sunny.

Many Australian families spend Christmas Day outdoors. They might go to the beach, have a picnic in the park or cook on a barbecue. Seafood such as prawns is a popular Christmas lunch. For dessert, many people enjoy pavlova, a crunchy, fluffy meringue cake topped with cream and fresh fruit. Pavlova is loved in both Australia and New Zealand.

On Christmas Eve, thousands of people gather in parks to sing Christmas songs together while holding candles. This event is called Carols by Candlelight.

1. What season is it in Australia in December?
(a) winter (b) spring (c) summer

2. In this passage, opposite means…
(a) completely different, like hot and cold (b) exactly the same (c) very small

3. Why do many Australian families eat Christmas lunch outdoors?
(a) It is warm and sunny (b) Their houses are too small
(c) It always rains on Christmas Day

4. What is Carols by Candlelight?

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Draw one thing from this passage and label it.

Name _____ Date _____

5 La Befana in Italy



In Italy, children wait for a special visitor after Christmas. Her name is La Befana. In old Italian stories, Befana is a kind old woman who flies on a broomstick.

On the night of January 5, she visits homes and fills children's stockings. Children who have been good find sweets and small toys. Children who have been naughty might find a lump of coal! Today the coal is usually a black sweet made of sugar, so it is really a joke. Some families leave a small snack out for Befana. In the morning the snack is gone and the floor has been swept, because Befana always tidies up with her broom.

Italian families also enjoy panettone, a tall, fluffy sweet bread with raisins and candied fruit. It first came from the city of Milan.

1. On which night does La Befana visit?
(a) December 24 (b) December 31 (c) January 5

2. Naughty means…
(a) badly behaved (b) very hungry (c) very sleepy

3. Why is the coal “really a joke”?
(a) Befana forgot to bring presents (b) It is made of sugar, so it is a sweet
(c) Children like real coal

4. Why might the floor be swept in the morning?

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Draw one thing from this passage and label it.

Name _____ Date _____

6 Ganna in Ethiopia



In Ethiopia, Christmas is called Ganna (say *GEN-nah*), and it is celebrated on January 7. Ethiopia's Orthodox Church follows an old calendar, so its Christmas comes about two weeks later than in many other countries.

Before Ganna, many people fast for weeks. This means they do not eat foods such as meat, eggs or milk. On the night before Christmas, people dress in white. Many wrap themselves in a netela, a thin white cotton shawl with a coloured border, and go to church services that can last until early morning.

After church, families break their fast with a special meal. A favourite is doro wat, a spicy chicken stew, eaten with injera, a soft, spongy flatbread. In the afternoon, boys and young men often play a game called genna, which is a little like hockey.

1. On which date is Ganna celebrated?
(a) January 7 (b) December 25 (c) December 13

2. In this passage, to fast means…
(a) to run very quickly (b) to not eat certain foods for a time (c) to wear white clothes

3. Why do families eat a special meal after church?
(a) The game of genna is over (b) It is time for breakfast
(c) They have finished their fast

4. What is injera?

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Draw one thing from this passage and label it.

Compare the Traditions

Grades 2–4

Name _____ Date _____

Use the passages to fill in the chart.

Write the continent for each country. Use the word bank.

Africa | **Asia** | **Europe** | **North America** | **Oceania**

Country	Continent	When?	Something to eat	Something to see
Mexico				
The Philippines				
Sweden				
Australia				
Italy				
Ethiopia				

Which two countries celebrate after December 25? How do you know?

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Which tradition would you most like to try? Give two reasons from the passage.

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Christmas Around the World

Answer Key

Passage questions

1. Las Posadas in Mexico
1. **b** (nine) 2. **a** (a place where travellers can stay for the night) 3. **c** (to light their way through the dark streets)
4. The door opens and everyone is welcomed inside for a party, where children try to break a piñata.

2. The Longest Christmas: The Philippines
1. **a** (September) 2. **b** (a light with a cover around it) 3. **a** (Christmas lasts from September until January)
4. Long ago they were made of bamboo and paper and lit with a candle; today many are made of shells or plastic and lit with electric lights.

3. Lucia Day in Sweden
1. **b** (December 13) 2. **a** (a line of people walking together in order) 3. **c** (The days are very short and dark)
4. A long white dress with a red sash and a crown of green leaves with candles.

4. Christmas in Summer: Australia
1. **c** (summer) 2. **a** (completely different, like hot and cold) 3. **a** (It is warm and sunny)
4. An event on Christmas Eve when thousands of people gather in parks to sing Christmas songs while holding candles.

5. La Befana in Italy
1. **c** (January 5) 2. **a** (badly behaved) 3. **b** (It is made of sugar, so it is a sweet)
4. Because Befana tidies up with her broom when she visits.

6. Ganna in Ethiopia
1. **a** (January 7) 2. **b** (to not eat certain foods for a time) 3. **c** (They have finished their fast)
4. A soft, spongy flatbread eaten with stews such as doro wat.

Compare chart

Country	Continent	When?	Something to eat	Something to see
Mexico	North America	December 16 to 24	candy and fruit from the piñata	candles and piñatas
The Philippines	Asia	September to January (Noche Buena on December 24)	bibingka (rice cake)	parol lanterns
Sweden	Europe	December 13	lussekatter (saffron buns)	a crown of candles
Australia	Oceania	December 24 and 25	pavlova and prawns	candles at Carols by Candlelight
Italy	Europe	January 5	panettone	Befana's broom and stockings
Ethiopia	Africa	January 7	doro wat with injera	white netela shawls

After December 25: Italy (La Befana visits on January 5) and Ethiopia (Ganna is on January 7). **Favourite tradition:** answers will vary; look for two reasons taken from the passage.