

Project #1—Winter Holiday Collection Ages 5-8

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BOOKS FOR AGES 5-7

1.

Khan, H. (2008). *Night of the moon*. San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books.

Khan, Hena. *Night of the Moon*. Illustrations by Julie Paschkis. Chronicle Books, 2008. 32 pages. Tr. 16.99 ISBN 978-0-8118-6062-8

Given the prejudice and fear which have been encouraged to grow following September 11, the necessity for children's books which present Muslim culture in a positive light cannot be overemphasized. The pretty deep blue and yellow illustrations, modeled after intricate Persian art, depict the reassuringly modern and attractive family of little girl Yasmeen, as they prepare for and experience the lunar cycle of Ramadan and Eid, attending the mosque, hosting a party, and receiving gifts. Larger, especially ornate text and a glossary support the introduction of holiday-specific words.

The book does not provide any specific details of Islamic belief, concentrating instead on recognizable common elements of holiday celebrations, culminating in a multi-cultural Muslim celebration of "The Night of the Moon".

In listing the book for grades K-2 Booklist recognizes that the plain diction and intriguing illustrations would work well for story times, though there are many words per page and the illustrations are very intricate—better for a lap-read than a large group. Although sometimes the book depends too heavily on its charming illustrations to leaven mundane language like "tons of dessert", together the detailed illustrations and the narrative of family details rendered in simple prose also make the book a good choice for independent readers 7-8. The connection between the religious/cultural celebration and Yasmeen's nightly observation of the natural world in the waxing and waning of the moon is a valuable element for media-saturated young readers.

Night of the Moon and books like it must form an essential part of elementary age curriculum in schools and libraries, both to educate American children of other backgrounds and to increase the feeling of belonging and approval for young American Muslims.

Cooper, I. (2008 October 1). Youth: New Religion and Spirituality Books for Youth: Young Nonfiction [Review of *Night of the Moon*, by Hena Khan. *Booklist*, 105(3), 51. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier database at Persistent URL: <http://libaccess.sjlibrary.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=34680645&site=ehost-live>

2.

Levine, A. (2003). *This is the dreidel*. Morton Grove, IL: Albert Whitman & Company.

Levine, Abby. *This is the Dreidel*. Illustrated by Paige Billin-Frye. Albert Whitman & Company, 2003, 32 pages. Tr. \$16.99 ISBN 978-0-8075-7884-1

A second grade lesson in playing dreidel at Hanukkah which instilled in this reviewer a life-long interest in Jewish tradition attests to the power of play for connecting children to cultural heritage, new or familiar. In cheerful rhyming couplets paired with bright, simple illustrations, *This is the Dreidel* provides an overview of the elements and background of the Hanukkah celebration. Especially suitable for young children 3-6, information is imparted through the holiday experience of a young boy Max and his warmly depicted large family and cozy home.

The book's illustrations are used cleverly and economically to clarify Hebrew terms and letters, and a back-page glossary is also helpful. The poetry text is similarly efficient, conveying a sense of the cycle of seasons, the comfort of ritual, and the importance of shared narratives, all in simple words and engaging bouncy rhymes.

Teachers and librarians striving to make holiday time inclusive, respectful, and fun for children of all cultures will be happy to have this resource providing youngest students a chance to learn about or proudly recognize this great Jewish festival.

Weisman, K. (2003 September). Holiday Books Roundup [Review of the book *This Is the Dreidel*, by Abby Levine. *Booklist*, 100(1), 135. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier database at Persistent URL:

<http://libaccess.sjlibrary.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=11155424&site=ehost-live>

BOOKS FOR AGES 5-8

3.

Hines, A.G. (2005). *Winter lights: A season of poems and quilts*. New York, NY: Greenwillow Books.

Hines, Anna Grossnickle. *Winter Lights: A Season of Poems and Quilts*. Illustrated by the author. Greenwillow Books, 2005. 32 pages. Tr. 17.99 ISBN 978-0-06-000817-8.

Ms. Hines has a beautiful idea: she composes poems, makes small quilts which reflect the themes or subjects of the poetry, then photographs them as illustrations for the poetry collection. This collection finds the common theme of light in darkness which unites most winter holidays, building poems around the holidays themselves, the special lights associated with them, and the winter lights of nature. There are 16 poems, some cleverly shaped to reflect their content, usually laid out one poem on a page spread. A four-page appendix in small print shows how the quilts were made

The quilts and their photographs are astonishing—large enough to be seen by a story group but with detail to be appreciated by children 6 and up, who can appreciate the

enormous number of tiny pieces and stitches visible in the quilts. The Christmas path of farolitos and the Winter Solstice fire are particularly beautiful examples. The poems are not the equal of the amazing fabric illustrations, but they capture the essence of winter lights through their focus on the child's point of view and will interest children as old as 8 years. Taken together the elements form a memorable holiday experience for children.

In the frenetic commercialism of modern holidays, poetry read aloud or alone offers children some brief moments of contemplation and peace, which in this collection will be intensified by attention to the patiently created beauty of the quilts.

Cooper, Ilene. (2005 September 1). Starred Reviews: Books for Youth [Review of *Winter Lights*, by Anna Grossnickle Hines]. *Booklist*. 102 (1), 124. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier database at Persistent URL:
<http://libaccess.sjlibrary.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=18341263&site=ehost-live>

4.

Murray, Julie. (2003). *Kwanzaa*. Edina, MN: ABDO Publishing Company.

Murray, Julie. *Kwanzaa*. Stock Photographs. (Holidays Series). ABDO Publishing Company, 2003. 24 pages. Library Binding \$24.21 ISBN 978-1-57765-955-6

The difficulties of the children's publishing industry are certainly reflected in books for Kwanzaa—many stronger examples reviewed are sadly now out of print, with Amazon listing only 6 new Kwanzaa books for children last year. This entry, a basic beginner reference book complete with one page index and a glossary of African words, introduces children 6-8 to the origins, principals, and practices of Kwanzaa.

As a library resource or school project aid *Kwanzaa* will serve well. The informative textbook style paragraphs and clear layout communicate a large amount of information without overwhelming beginning researchers, but this is not a recreational book. It lacks the narrative voice, visual energy, or dynamic language which make many informative books suitable for oral reading or independent pleasure reading.

It's sad to consider what a large impact business practices can have on the cultural life of a vulnerable community.

Alpert, Mara. (2003 October). Holiday Books [Review of *Kwanzaa*, by Julie Murray]. *School Library Journal*. 49(10), 66. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier database at Persistent URL:
<http://libaccess.sjlibrary.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=11071164&site=ehost-live>

5.

Ofanansky, A. (2008). *Harvest of Light*. Minneapolis, MN: Kar-Ben Publishing

Ofanansky, Allison. *Harvest of Light*. Photographs by Eliyahu Alpern. Kar-Ben Publishing, 2008. 32 pages. Tr. \$15.95 ISBN 978-0822573890

Many have found metaphorical value in the olive—that something so hard and bitter becomes a source of such rich nourishment is food for thought in *Harvest of Light*. In this unusual Hanukkah book a small Israeli girl tells how her family grows and harvests olives, culminating in their use of some of their own oil for the Hanukkah lights.

Alpern's photos, bathed in the penetrating sunlight of the Mideast, and Ofanansky's use of a child's voice and perspective, highlight the beauty of traditional farming and family rituals without attempting to address any of the complex issues surrounding the presence of this family in Safed. The text and pictures together show, rather than preach, the value of family unity, physical labor, and respect for tradition.

Books that connect ancient traditions with the cycle of the natural world and ongoing human occupation have value for today's often disconnected children, and the pervading sense of continuity and interconnection in *Harvest of Light* creates a mood of peace and security which listening children of 6-7 will enjoy. At the same time the book provides basic information on the processes of curing olives and crushing them for their oil, making the book practical for simple researchers 7-8.

Markson, Teri. (2008 October). The Book Review: December Holidays [Review of *Harvest of Light*, by Allison Ofanansky]. *School Library Journal*, 54(10), 69.

Retrieved from Academic Search Premier database at Persistent URL:
<http://libaccess.sjlibrary.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?>

6.

Pfeffer, W.(2003). *The shortest day: Celebrating the winter solstice*. New York, NY: Dutton Children's Books.

Pfeffer, Wendy. *The Shortest Day: Celebrating the Winter Solstice*. Illustrated by Jesse Reisch. Dutton Children's Books, 2003. 32 pages. Tr. \$17.99 ISBN 978-0-525-46968-1.

Why are days shorter in winter? Why do we bring trees inside at Christmas time? For the many adults who have failed to answer these questions, *The Shortest Day* will be a welcome addition to the library. The book gives scientific explanation for the solstice, accompanied by the history of astronomical calculations in many cultures, and of Northern European solstice celebrations. Interesting supplemental information, experiments and activities fill the last 8 pages.

Although listed by *School Library Journal* as suitable for preschool to grade 4, some of the pages have 12-16 lines of text, including scientific or historical information, which will make the book more successful for oral or independent reading with students 6-8 years old. The soft pastel pictures will engage students, with animal and forest scenes well-suited to younger readers, while the detailed depictions of historical sites may be more interesting to those older.

The resolutely scientific and historical approach to winter holidays encourages respect for families who prefer to keep their winter celebrations secular or pre-Christian, but could prove problematic in the classroom, since many elements of the Christian Christmas holidays are clearly shown to have pagan roots. For the library, the book is an excellent resource for ages 6-8, with an unusual integration of scientific and cultural/historic information which will encourage critical thinking and observation of the natural world.

Menaldi-Scanlan, N. (2003 September). The book review: Preschool to grade 4: Nonfiction [Review of the book *The shortest day: Celebrating the winter solstice*, by Wendy Pfeffer]. *School Library Journal*, 49(9), 206. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier database at Persistent URL:
<http://libaccess.sjlibrary.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=10824762&site=ehost-live>

BOOKS FOR AGES 7-8

7.

Heiligman, D. (2006). *Celebrate Diwali*. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic.

Heiligman, Deborah. *Celebrate Diwali*. Multiple Photographers (National Geographic *Holidays Around the World Series*). National Geographic, 2006. 32 pages. Tr. \$15.95 ISBN 978-0-7922-5922-0.

Who could resist a holiday that combines bright lights, lots of candy, and fireworks? Children everywhere will want to celebrate Diwali after learning of this Hindu, Sikh and Jain holiday which celebrates victories of good over darkness. Heiligman's book provides a simple overview of the practices of Diwali and the beliefs and traditions behind them. Each page spread provides a central element of the holiday in a 1'' font sentence, followed by one or two very short paragraphs of more detailed information in smaller text, which makes the book adaptable to both oral reading for younger listeners ages 3-6 and independent reading for more advanced students ages 6-8. Many photographers have contributed the absolutely beautiful images found on every page. Supplemental material includes recipes, games, and an article from Dr. Vasuda Narayanan, consultant on the book.

The text is simple but composed with care. Using the pronoun 'we' creates an inclusive global tone. Unlike many informational books on multi-cultural holidays, thanks in large part to its irresistible photographs, Carefully designed to be engaging to children 3-8, *Celebrate Diwali* manages to be informative and respectful while also communicating the joyful vitality at the heart of this holiday wherever it is celebrated.

The warmth of Diwali provides an effective introduction to Indian traditions for children unfamiliar with this increasingly influential culture. For children from this culture, use of this book in classroom or library will acknowledge the importance of our varied holiday traditions, encouraging pride in their family heritage.

Ranelli, J. (2007 January). The book review: Preschool to grade 4: Nonfiction [Review of the book *Celebrate Diwali*, by Deborah Heiligman]. *School Library Journal*, 53(1), 118. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier database at Persistent URL: <http://libaccess.sjlibrary.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=23755198&site=ehost-live>

8.

Hoyt-Goldsmith, D. (1999). *Las Posadas: An Hispanic Christmas celebration*. New York, NY: Holiday House.

Hoyt-Goldsmith, Diane. *Las Posadas: An Hispanic Christmas Celebration*. Photographs by Lawrence Migdale (Series of books on American Celebrations by Diane Hoyt-Goldsmith and Lawrence Migdale). Holiday House, 1999. 32 pages. Tr. \$16.95 ISBN 978-0823414499.

How wonderful for our California students to learn that there are Spanish-speaking communities in the United States which are hundreds of years old! Definitely intended for an audience 7-8 and up, this rich photo essay follows 11-year-old Kristen as she prepares with her New Mexico community for her role in the traditional Spanish Catholic celebration of Las Posadas. Las Posadas, in which a parade moves through the town re-enacting the gospel story of Mary and Joseph's search for shelter, lasts for 9 nights of pageantry, religious observance, feasting, and gifts. The text provides the information on traditions and historical background which might be used for research reports, while the photos and their captions provide the personalized view of the festival by following Kristen's family through the event. Recipes, song lyrics, and music are also included.

Though the text is dense and information-packed, the strategy of providing support and increasing interest through the pictures usually works well. The photographs of Kristen's neighbors creating traditional arts and crafts are especially interesting, and could provide the basis for some simplified story-time or classroom holiday projects.

As our Hispanic population grows it is especially important that other citizens are educated about the long history and cultural contributions of this group in America, and equally important that Hispanic children recognize their own traditions in the versions of holiday celebration acknowledged and accepted in American life.

Mitnick, E. (1999 October). December Holiday Books 1999 [Review of *Las Posadas: An Hispanic Christmas celebration*, by Diane Hoyt-Goldsmith]. *School Library Journal*, 45(10), 64. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier database at Persistent URL: <http://libaccess.sjlibrary.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=2392656&site=ehost-live>

9.

McGee, R. (2009). *Paper crafts for Christmas*. Berkeley Heights, NJ: Enslow Elementary

McGee, Randel. *Paper Crafts for Christmas*. Illustrated by the author (*Paper Craft Fun for Holidays Series*. Enslow Elementary, 2009. 48 pages. Library Binding \$23.93 ISBN 978-0-7660-2952-1.

It's not Martha Stewart, but the clear directions and simple requirements in *Paper Crafts for Christmas* actually make it feasible that children 7-8 could make some of these projects by themselves (at least once the included patterns are enlarged), opening up some great possibilities for holiday gift-making. There are 8 projects in all, which are listed in a table of contents and organized with numbered directions and supply lists. A nice overview of the holiday history and tradition behind each project is provided, and a detailed history of the modern Christmas traditions precedes the crafts--all of this material is printed in smaller text and written in more complex language than the directions themselves.

Some of the projects are versions of the paper plate-based teacher favorites which cover our refrigerators in December, but there are a few standouts, such as the pop-up chimney card and the stand-up tree. Children younger than 7 could complete many of these projects with step by step directions from a teacher, librarian, or parent, so the book is a useful resource for these adults.

All children like to make things. Developing ingenuity, coordination, and self-esteem, an interest in craft can lead to a lifetime of productive creativity. Though many children will need assistance, McGee's projects are achievable for most children and attractive when completed.

Engberg, Gillian. (2009 April 1). Youth: Continuing Series Nonfiction Showcase [Review of *Paper Crafts for Christmas*, by Randel McGee]. *Booklist*. 105 (15), 57. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier database at Persistent URL: <http://libaccess.sjlibrary.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=37698701&site=ehost-live>

ALL AGES

10.

Moore, C.C. *The night before Christmas: A poem*. (2006). New York, NY: Philomel Books.

Moore, Clement C. *The Night Before Christmas: A Poem*. Illustrated by Will Moses. Philomel Books, 2006. 40 pages. Tr. \$16.99 ISBN 978-0-399-23745-4

Grandma Moses really was his grandma (great), and in that same primitive Currier and Ives style, Will Moses provides one of the better-illustrated editions of "The Night Before Christmas" currently in print. This edition contains a cardboard Santa ornament for

removal and construction. With its flying reindeer and catchy anapestic tetrameter, the poem has delighted children for more than a century, telling the story of how one paterfamilias observes St. Nicholas while the “right jolly old elf” lands on the roof in a sled, comes down the chimney, leaves toys in the stockings, and departs with good wishes.

At first glance Will Moses’ illustrations are reminiscent of the cartoons of Charles Addams, giving a slightly gothic mood to the usually cheery poem, but a child exposed to them had a positive response, especially to the dollhouse-like cutaway picture of the family home, and the illustrations do capture the coexisting coziness and mystery of the story. Since the modern secular Christmas celebration derives in large part from this poem, it is no surprise that the narrative stays resolutely clear of the religious elements of Christmas, making it a useful choice for diverse story time groups or classrooms, although the small size of the rectangular book makes the detailed paintings problematic for large audiences.

The “Night Before Christmas” is usually classified as reading for “All Ages”; knowledge of the poem is part of an American’s cultural literacy, and exposure to it serves as a reading stepping-stone for many. Though few children today will be familiar with sugarplums, nightcaps, or window sashes, the pleasantly repeated rhyming pattern and the familiar props of the Santa story provide a safe entry into the world of Victorian literature.

Reviews: Christmas: Children’s Books [Review of *The Night Before Christmas*, by Clement C. Moore, Illustrated by Will Moses]. *Publisher’s Weekly*, (September 25, 2006), 253(3), 69. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier database at Persistent URL:

<http://libaccess.sjlibrary.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=22896342&site=ehost-live>

MEDIA

11.

Angelou, M. (Author/Reader). (2005). *Amazing Peace* [CD]. New York, NY: Random House Inc.

Angelou, Maya. *Amazing Peace*. Read by Maya Angelou. Random House Inc. (2008). [Mixed Media—CD packaged with Angelou, Maya. (2008). *Amazing Peace: A Christmas Poem* [Book]. Illustrated by Steve Johnson and Lou Fancher. New York, NY: Schwartz and Wade.]. 5:37 min. \$17.99 ISBN 978-0375841507.

“Amazing Peace” was originally written by Angelou for the White House tree lighting ceremony in 2005, not long after both the Indian Ocean Tsunami and Hurricane Katrina. The poem celebrates the restorative comfort of winter celebrations after storms and darkness have tried us. Packaging this CD of her calm and melodious reading with the

glowing, homespun illustrations of Johnson and Fancher is an excellent plan. The poem, which might be both ominous and abstract for children 5-6, is supported and explained by the illustrations of racially diverse children participating with their families in community celebrations during wintertime, but even with the illustrations the poem is better suited to children 7 and up. For older students, the accompanying text would also support independent reading of the challenging vocabulary in the poem, including words such as ‘covenant’, ‘Confucian’, and ‘courtesies’.

Although much of the poem’s content may not be directly comprehended by younger children, the combined effect of Angelou’s delivery and the folk-textured images is unmistakable—the poem begins in unrest and agitation, and through evoking human commonalities, gradually creates an air of security, harmony, and ‘amazing peace’. When attempting to avoid a religious approach to Christmas, teachers, librarians, and parents are often forced toward the secular narratives with all their commercial associations. This CD and its accompanying text provide opportunity to approach the spiritual dimension of Christmas in a generously inclusive way.

*McKulski, K. (2008 November 15) Youth [Review of the CD and book *Amazing Peace*, by Maya Angelou]. *Booklist*, 105(6), 41. Retrieved from Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts with Full Text at Persistent URL:
<http://libaccess.sjlibrary.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lih&AN=35524755&site=ehost-live>

* Unfortunately, in all databases checked only the first half of the review is found as catalogued, on page 41. The second half can be found at the Persistent URL below, which will bring up page 42 of the November 18 2008 *Booklist*:
<http://libaccess.sjlibrary.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lih&AN=35524758&site=ehost-live>

12.

Prelutsky, J. (Author/Reader). (2005). *The Jack Prelutsky holiday audio collection* [CD]. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers.

Prelutsky, Jack. *The Jack Prelutsky Holiday Audio Collection*. Read by Jack Prelutsky. Produced and Directed by Judith Walcutt. HarperChildren's Audio (2005). [CD]. 30 min. \$13.95 ISBN 978-0060820657.

One section of this holiday CD, which also contains Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Valentine’s segments, holds a dozen pieces of Prelutsky’s trademark silly doggerel. The poems depict the Christmas tree falling on Daddy’s head, the Christmas puppy producing a puddle, and other antics aimed at the lowest common denominator of children’s humor.

What makes this a good use of school or library purchasing resources is the chance for children to hear an author they admire reading his own words. Prelutsky reads slowly and

carefully for his K-3 audience, and in an understated way emphasizes the emotions and surprises of his verse, modeling fluency and effective expression for young readers. It is always valuable to remind developing readers that poems and stories are created by real people like themselves—encouraging both admiration and emulation.

While Prelutsky's humor may not be the favorite of all adults, it is indubitably popular with children. This audio version would provide a fun holiday listening activity for younger children, and combined with text, create a supported high interest reading experience for struggling readers 7-8.

Kindergarten--Grade 3: Poetry [Review of the CD *The Jack Prelutsky Holiday Audio Collection*, by Jack Prelutsky]. *School Library Journal Supplement*, (April 2006), 52.
Retrieved from Academic Search Premier database at Persistent URL:
<http://libaccess.sjlibrary.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=20470878&site=ehost-live>

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http://www.booksinprint.com.libaccess.sjlibrary.org/merge_shared/Childrens/children.asp?navPage=13&uname=&bipid=8B2588E57004495A9A790270ED06CC65

Sonoma County Library (2010). *Search the catalog*. Retrieved from
<http://catalog.sonomalibrary.org/ipac20/ipac.jsp?profile=dial>