



The Mysterious History...



Read the story. Highlight all the nouns yellow. Underline all the verbs in red.



Long ago in the ancient world, a Greek conqueror named Alexander the Great ruled a vast empire. When he died, his generals divided up his kingdom among themselves. These men and their descendants fought against each other for land and power. One of these generals was named Antiochus. He ruled from Egypt to Persia. Many different kinds of people lived in his kingdom, including the Babylonians, Persians, Medes, Arabs, Syrians, Greeks, and the Jews.

Antiochus did not think his kingdom would last if everyone was so different. Everyone spoke his own language and worshiped his own gods! He decided to force all of his subjects to become Greeks. This change occurred quickly because people liked the beauty and wisdom of Greek culture. Greeks were often powerful and rich people. As Greek colonies multiplied in his empire, Antiochus knew his plan had worked!

But one group of people did not become Greek. These people had descended from the Israelites, an ancient people that Moses led out of slavery from Egypt many years before. They were called Judeans, or Jews, because they lived in Judea, a small province near Egypt. They worshiped only one God as opposed to the many Greek and Roman gods of that era. The Jews believed that their God ruled the entire world and that all other gods were false. Jews liked many parts of Greek culture, like the democratic government, wise philosophers, and universal language. But they would not give up their God for Greek religion.

Antiochus knew he had to do something. If the Jews were allowed to disobey the rules, other people might try to disobey as well. He decided to force the Jews to turn into Greeks. His army marched to Jerusalem, the capital of Judea, and seized the city and the Temple. This was where the Jewish people worshiped God. The Greek soldiers built a statue of Zeus and offered sacrifices of unclean animals on the altar to their own gods. The Jews were very sad and upset with these actions.

The Greek soldiers traveled around Judea and tried to force the Jews to worship Greek gods at shrines. One day the soldiers entered the tiny village of Modi'in and asked the Jews to sacrifice a pig to their gods. Jews believe that pork is unclean and cannot eat or kill it. One scared





... Of Hanukkah



man agreed to do it. Suddenly an old priest named Mattathias killed the traitor! His five sons and the other villagers helped kill the rest of the Greeks. Then the Jews fled into hiding. They asked other Jews to help them defeat Antiochus and his army.

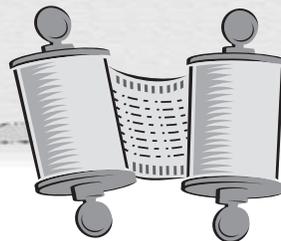
Antiochus was furious with their rebellious actions! He decided to send his powerful Greek army after the Jews! The Jewish rebels knew they could not win a traditional fight, so they used guerilla warfare (surprise attacks). Matthias died, so his strong son Judah began to lead the Jewish rebels. He and his followers were soon called Maccabees, a Hebrew word which means “hammer.”

During one battle, a Greek general went looking for the Maccabees. While the Greeks were away from their camp, Judah burned his tents and supplies and scared off his animals. Without supplies, the Greeks were forced to retreat. Antiochus grew angrier with the guerilla fighters and decided to wipe out the Jews completely. He built a very large and powerful army. It even included war elephants from India!

Antiochus met the Jews for battle in a place called Bet Zur. The Jews were greatly outnumbered, but Judah thought of a smart plan. He ordered his archers to shoot the *mabouts* first. These were the men from India who trained the war elephants. Once the trainers were dead or injured, the elephants had no leaders. They stampeded in panic and stomped all over the Greek army! The Maccabees defeated the Greeks who weren't stepped on already, and they won the battle!

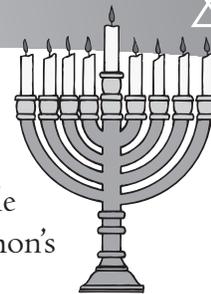
The victorious Maccabees returned to Jerusalem. They worked night and day to clean up the Temple and destroy the Greek idols. On the 25th day of Kislev (a Hebrew month that occurs in November), Judah and the Maccabees rededicated the Temple to the God of Israel during eight days of ceremonies. This was the first Hanukkah “dedication.”

When Judah went to light the Temple menorah, he only found one bottle of oil left—just enough for a single day. However the oil miraculously lasted for all eight days of the ceremonies! Now when Jewish people celebrate Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights, they remember the burning oil miracle and the heroism of the Maccabees who won the right to worship their own God.





Light The Menorah!

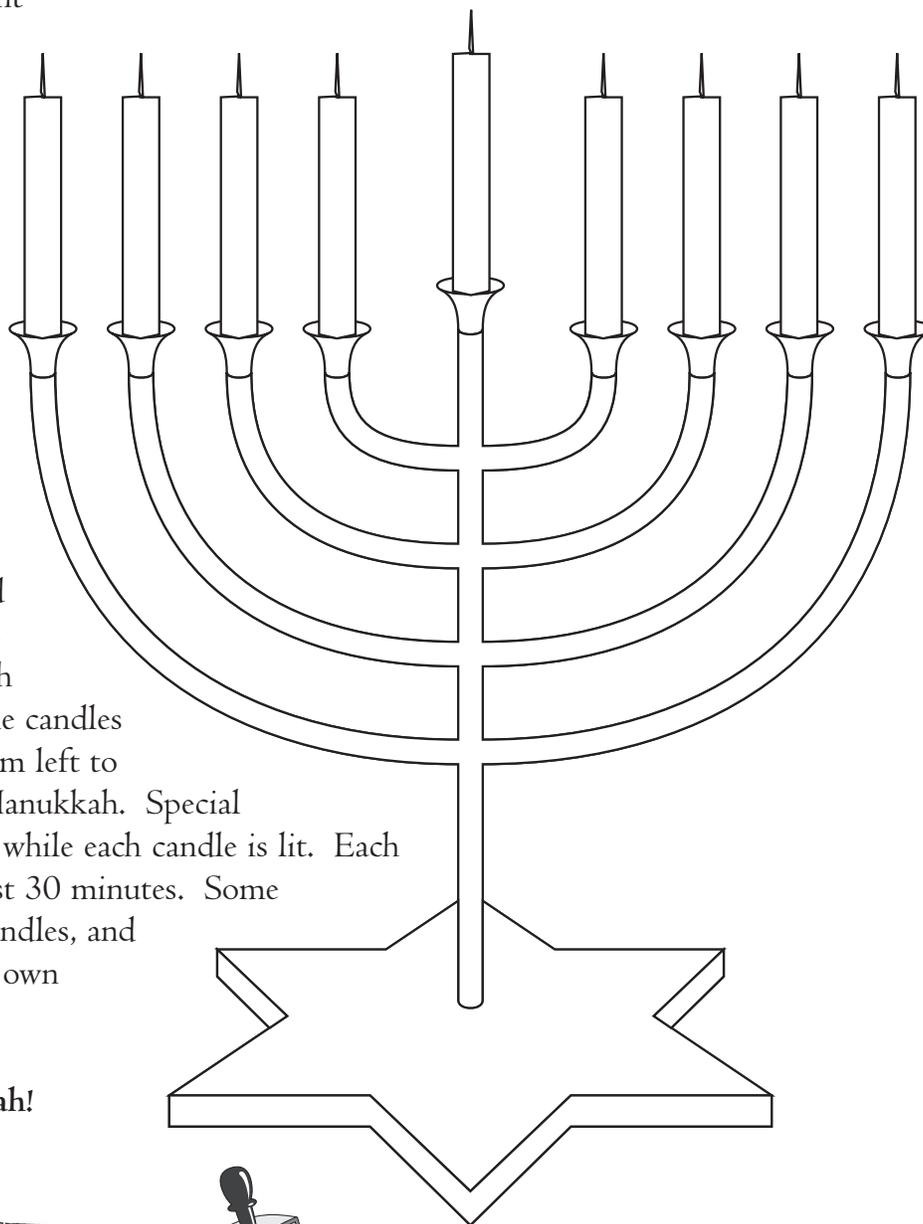


A menorah is a candlestick with seven branches. The first menorah was created by a man named Bezalel in the wilderness when the Jewish people searched for the Promised Land. Later a menorah was placed in King Solomon's temple for religious purposes. It could not be replicated.

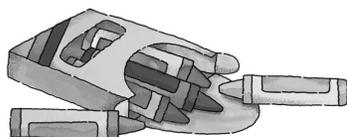
In 70 BC, a Roman general named Titus destroyed the Jewish temple. He took the menorah back to Rome as a war trophy to celebrate his victory. Afterwards, the menorah became an important symbol in Jewish culture. It could be found in synagogues, design, and even tombstones. Today the menorah is the emblem of the State of Israel. A large menorah sits outside Knesset, the parliament building,.

A hanukkiah is a special kind of nine-branched menorah used to celebrate Hanukkah. One branch is set aside for the shammash, "servant" candle. The shammash is used to light the other eight candles in the menorah. These additional candles stand for each night of the miracle of the oil.

The candles are placed in the menorah candleholders from right to left, one on each night of Hanukkah. Then the candles are lit with the shammash from left to right, one on each night of Hanukkah. Special prayers and blessings are said while each candle is lit. Each candle should burn for at least 30 minutes. Some families take turns lighting candles, and sometimes everyone has their own menorah.

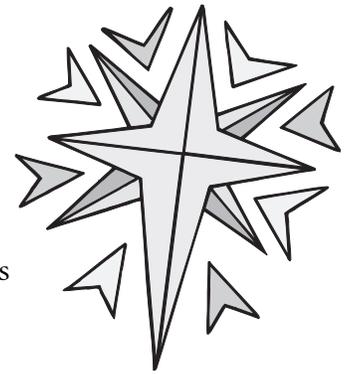


Color the Hanukkah menorah!





The History of Christmas



Ancient Days

People in the Northern Hemisphere try to awaken the sun god every December by singing and dancing around a huge bonfire, fueled by a great “Yule” log.

Romans honor Saturnus (the harvest god) and Mithras (the ancient god of light) during Saturnalia, which is observed between December 17 and 24.

274 AD

Solstice falls on December 25. Roman Emperor Aurelian decrees the “Natalis Solis Invicti” festival on that day to celebrate the birth of the invincible sun.

320 AD

Pope Julius declares that December 25 is the official birth date of Jesus Christ, even though He was born in March. People had been observing the famous birth on many wrong dates for more than 300 years!

325 AD

Constantine the Great, the first Christian Roman emperor, decides everyone should celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ and enacts a Christmas feast day on December 25. Christians refuse to celebrate on the day of a pagan holiday.

354 AD

Bishop Liberius of Rome requires all church members to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ on December 25.

1649-
1660

Oliver Cromwell of England forbids Christmas festivities because he thinks it should be observed as a reverent and dignified day.

1820

Washington Irving writes a book called *The Keeping of Christmas at Bracebridge Hall*, which inspires more people to celebrate the holiday.

1834

Charles Dickens publishes *A Christmas Carol* a week before Christmas.

1836

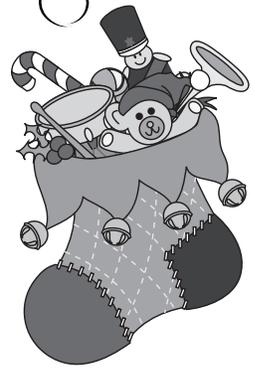
Alabama is the first state in the U.S. to declare Christmas a legal holiday.

1860

Famous American illustrator Thomas Nast creates a Father Christmas character after the old European stories about Saint Nicholas.

Stuff Your Own Stocking

Cut out the pattern below. Trace two stockings on red paper. Cut them out. Staple or glue the outside edges together to form a stocking. You could also punch holes along the edge and tie them together with yarn or ribbon bows. Glue cotton balls to fill the top space. Draw or paste pictures of things you might like to have in your stocking this Christmas!



The History of Kwanzaa

Read the story. Highlight all the nouns yellow. Underline all the verbs in red.



Once there was a man named Maulana Karenga. He was a very intelligent African American scholar. Maulana looked around his world and saw racial inequality, the battle for civil rights, and prejudice. He believed that African Americans needed to learn more about their African history. He knew that Africans would unite into a stronger community if they understood and honored their common ancestry.

In 1966, Maulana Karenga decided to combine many different African customs and traditions into one special holiday called Kwanzaa. The word Kwanzaa means “first fruits” in Swahili, an African language. Many families all around the world observe Kwanzaa, an African American holiday celebrated for seven days, from December 26 to January 1.

The celebration of Kwanzaa focuses on Seven Principles (*Nguzo Saba*). These principles are taught by using the Seven Symbols. Families spread the *mkeka* on a low table. The *kinara* and *kikombe cha umoja* are placed in the center. The *mubindi* are placed around the *kinara*. The *mishumaa saba* are set to the far right. The *zawadi* and *mazao* go on the *mkeka*. The symbols and principles are designed to pull the African American community together and to grow stronger as one body.



🌿 Celebrate the Joy of Kwanzaa! 🌿

Circle the things you might enjoy on this joyous holiday! Color the pictures.

