



# Winter Holidays Vocabulary Packet

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## Thanksgiving Food Vocabulary



Source: Getty Images

**Acorn squash:** a type of yellow squash (other varieties: butternut squash, spaghetti squash)

**Cranberry sauce:** served with turkey and typically comes in a jelly-like format

**Cornbread:** a bread made from corn flour and served warm with butter

**Dress the turkey:** to put stuffing and spices inside the turkey and prepare it for baking

**Gravy:** The gravy is typically made from the juices of the turkey, but can also come in the form of brown or mushroom gravy.

**Green bean casserole:** a popular American dish made with green beans, mushroom soup, and crispy fried onions

**Leftovers:** Typically, Americans will eat leftover turkey and other dishes from the Thanksgiving meal for several days (or even weeks) afterward. People get very creative with their leftovers, making new dishes or using extra meat for turkey sandwiches or turkey soup.

**Pie:** a dough crust with sweet fruit filling. Pie is a very common American dessert, especially for Thanksgiving. Some popular fall varieties include pumpkin, apple, and pecan pie.

**Stuffing:** the breading that usually goes inside the turkey (also served as a side dish)

**Sweet potato casserole:** Also called “candied yams,” this dish is usually made with sweet potatoes and marshmallows

**Wishbone:** The wishbone is the clavicle bone inside the turkey that is traditionally pulled out and broken by two people. Each person makes a silent wish before snapping the bone. Whoever gets the longer end of the bone has his or her wish granted.

## Historical Vocabulary:

**Pilgrim/settler:** The pilgrims came from England to the U.S. in order to have religious freedom. They formed the Plymouth colony in Massachusetts. Many pilgrims starved to death during their first winter. However, with the help of the Native Americans, they learned how to grow and harvest local food. Thanksgiving was celebrated the following year in 1621. The first Thanksgiving lasted for three days, with 6 women cooking enough food for 90 people.

**Native American (or Indian):** The native tribes that lived in the U.S. prior to the settlers' arrival. When the settlers first arrived, a Native American named Squanto helped the settlers. Squanto taught the settlers how to grow squash and corn and how to hunt so that they could survive the long winters. During the first Thanksgiving, the Wampanoag tribe celebrated the first settlers' harvest in the New World.

**Harvest:** When a crop grows successfully and people gather the food to eat, we call this a harvest. Usually, harvests are associated with the fall, since that is when foods such as corn, squash, sweet potatoes, and apples are ready to be picked.

**Background:** Thanksgiving in the U.S. is celebrated as a day of thanks. We typically spend the day cooking, eating, and being with friends and family. Another other key feature of Thanksgiving is the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, which is probably the most famous of all the parades, and features very elaborate floats and balloons. The balloons often feature pop culture characters, while the floats depict holiday scenes and often include dancing or music. Philadelphia also has a Thanksgiving parade, which is the oldest parade for this holiday in the United States.

**Fun fact:** The President also plays an important role in Thanksgiving by pardoning a turkey. This tradition started in 1989 with the H.W. Bush administration, and continues today as a way of sparing a turkey from being eaten at the Thanksgiving dinner table. Many of the pardoned turkeys have ended up in Disneyland, where they take part in the theme park's Thanksgiving Day parade.

**Black Friday:** Although Black Friday is held the day after Thanksgiving, it is not actually connected to the holiday. In recent years, Black Friday has started as early as midnight in some stores, with people camping in tents or sleeping outside the stores to keep their place in line. Most Americans participate in Black Friday to get discounts on electronics. Cyber Monday is a fairly recent addition to the famous day of sales, with many internet-based companies offering large discounts.

Historical Information Based on: About.com and History.com

## Winter Vocabulary:



Source: Getty Images

### **Snow-related words:**

**Accumulate:** to gather or grow in quantity; it refers to how many inches or feet of snow stick to the ground

**Blizzard:** a very heavy snowstorm

**Flurry:** light snow (usually doesn't stick)

**Sleet:** freezing rain

**Slush:** a mixture of melted snow or snow and rainwater

**Stick:** to stay on the ground (when snow doesn't melt or blow away, we say that "it's sticking")

### **Equipment:**

Ice scraper

Defroster

Snow blower

Snow plow

## Christmas Vocabulary

**Bells:** Bells are a popular feature in a lot of Christmas music, as well as a common holiday decoration.

**Carols/caroling:** A popular American tradition is to sing Christmas carols, or to “go caroling” in a group by walking door to door and singing holiday songs for your neighbors.

**Stockings:** These are big, decorative socks that hang above the fireplace. Traditionally, each family member has a stocking and receives small gifts inside the stocking.

**Stocking stuffers:** Small gifts (small in both size and monetary value). Gifts may include candy, socks, or small toys



Source: Getty Images

### Christmas and winter holiday decorations:

**Christmas tree:** Most Americans who celebrate Christmas buy a pine or spruce tree and decorate its branches with ornaments, lights, and garland. Some families also buy artificial or fiber optic trees (for the history of Christmas trees, go here: <http://www.history.com/topics/history-of-christmas-trees>)

**Garland:** a decorative wreath or cord made of beads, flowers, pine, or even popcorn

**Holly:** a type of plant with green, pointy leaves and red berries. The holly plant is a traditional symbol for Christmas used in wreaths, pictures, and on holiday cards

**Lights:** Outdoor holiday lights are a big affair for some families, and sometimes cover the entire house and surrounding property. Many neighborhoods become local attractions due to their elaborate decorations, and some Americans even drive around in their cars to look at the lights.

**Mistletoe:** usually hung above the door. A popular tradition is to “kiss under the mistletoe”—in other words, if two people are standing under it, they should kiss.

**Nativity scene:** a miniature version of Jesus’s birth scene that usually includes small figurines for Jesus, Mary, Joseph, the three magi, the shepherd, the angel, and the sheep and donkeys inside the stable. Churches, malls, and even museums often display life-sized versions of nativity scenes.

**Poinsettia:** a plant with red flowers that is traditionally displayed around Christmastime

**Tinsel:** similar to garland, this is a decoration that wraps around the Christmas tree, banisters, or mantle. It is usually very shiny and comes in silver, gold, red, or green.

**Tree ornaments:** Many Americans take pride in developing a collection of tree ornaments. Some Americans choose to make their own ornaments, but most ornaments are also sold in stores. Typical shapes include spheres, snowflakes, fruit, or angels, and are often shiny or covered in glitter.

**Wreath:** a wreath is a circular decoration made of pine, holly, or other plants. Wreaths usually hang on the door outside someone’s house. Although they are most popular at Christmastime, many Americans also hang wreaths made out of leaves or twigs for the fall.

### **Common holiday salutations:**

- Season’s Greetings
- Happy Holidays

Both of these greetings are secular and would be appropriate if you do not know the religious background of a person, or what holiday he/she celebrates.

- Merry Christmas
- Merry Xmas

Many people say Merry Christmas to each other even if they do not celebrate the holiday. However, you might notice in stores that most salespeople say “Happy Holidays” to avoid possibly offending someone.

Xmas is often used as an abbreviated form of “Christmas,” but it actually originates from the Greek letter Chi (X), which is the first part of the word “Christ.”

- Happy Hanukkah (sometimes spelled “Chanukah”)

## Christmas themes

### Commercial themes:

**Santa Claus/Saint Nicholas:** Santa Claus, otherwise known as Saint Nicholas, Saint Nick, or Sinter Klaas, originated from tales of a monk named Saint Nicholas. Saint Nicholas allegedly gave away most of his wealth and spent his time helping the poor and sick, as well as protecting women and small children. Over the years, Santa has become the central secular figure of Christmas. Small children often hope to catch Santa sneaking down the chimney and leaving them presents under the tree.

**Note:** If visiting an American family with small children, it is assumed that guests will play along with children who believe in Santa. It is considered a major faux pas to refer to Santa as imaginary in front of children, unless the parents have indicated otherwise.

**Fun Fact:** According to history.com, the first live Santa Claus model appeared in a Philadelphia store in 1841!

**Reindeer:** According to legend, Santa Claus goes from house to house on Christmas Eve while flying a sleigh guided by nine reindeer. The most famous reindeer is Rudolph, who has a red, glowing nose.

**Sleigh:** Santa flies a sleigh on Christmas Eve to deliver presents all around the world. Traditionally, horses pull a sleigh, not reindeer.



### Religious themes:

**Advent:** advent literally means “arrival;” in this case, it refers to the four weeks preceding Christmas. It is used in many churches as a time to prepare for Jesus’s birth.

**Noel:** the French word for Christmas, and also a popular name of a carol, “The First Noel”

**Yuletide:** a religious festival celebrated by ancient Germanic groups. Today, the word has been incorporated into Christmas and is often referenced in carols.



Source: Getty Images

## Christmas food

**Chocolate advent calendar:** A calendar with a single box for each of the twenty-four days preceding Christmas Day. Each day, you open a window in the calendar to see a small image or poem, or more typically, to get a small toy or piece of chocolate

**Ham:** Many Americans eat baked ham at Christmas as the main entrée. Sometimes, it is decorated with pineapple rings on top.

**Candy canes:** Red and white striped peppermint candies

**Christmas cookies:** usually includes sugar cookies, gingerbread, shortbread, or cookies filled with jam or nuts

**Eggnog:** a thick drink made of whipped (usually raw) eggs, milk, sugar, and nutmeg or cinnamon

**Fruitcake:** A bread or cake made with nuts and candied fruit. In the United States, many people joke that fruitcake is passed down from generation to generation because it never goes bad.

**Gingerbread house:** A house made out of gingerbread that is covered in candy and frosting. The house mimics the candy house seen in the popular folk tale, “Hansel and Gretel.” A gingerbread man is also a popular type of cookie made around the holidays.

### **Historical Background:**

Christmas in the United States combines many pagan and Christian beliefs. Many families try to include both sets of traditions in the holiday. For example, a family might have a formal dinner and go to Christmas Mass or service on Christmas Eve. Then, on Christmas morning, the family will open presents together.

Gift-giving is a huge part of the holidays for both friends and families. Here are some variations on gift-giving that are popular at Christmas or holiday parties:

**Secret Santa:** Each person draws a name from a hat (usually a few weeks before Christmas) and must get a gift for the person whose name they selected. No one knows who the gift-giver is until the day of the gift exchange. Another variation is to give several small gifts every day until the final day of gift-giving, when the secret Santa is revealed.

**Yankee Swap (sometimes called “White Elephant”):** This is a hilarious gift-giving game hosted at parties. Usually, the host will set a price limit for the gift (gifts are generally cheap) and each person buys a gift for no person in particular. The gifts are often humorous or useless objects. On the day of the party, everyone randomly selects a number. The person with number one chooses his or her gift first and opens it. The person with number 2 then opens a gift. That person may choose to keep the gift or to swap it with the first player’s gift. The game continues until everyone has opened a gift. Then, the person with number one gets to select his or her favorite gift among all of the opened gifts.

## Hanukkah Vocabulary



Source: gettyimages.com

**Dreidel:** A dreidel is a four-sided spinning top that has a Yiddish character on each side. Although the dreidel derives from popular gambling games, it is associated with Hanukkah and the outlawing of Judaism by the ancient Greeks. According to some historical accounts, Jewish children played the game to disguise the fact that they were actually studying the Torah.

**Menorah:** A nine-branched candelabrum (candle holder) used during the eight days of Hanukkah. The ninth candle is used as an extra light for the other candles.

### Hannukkah Food:

**Gelt coins:** Today, gelt coins are made of chocolate and come in small bags at most pharmacy or grocery stores. They originate from the belief that the ancient Maccabees (leaders of a rebel Jewish army) used newly minted coins after defeating the Greeks.

**Hamentashen:** A cookie with three pinched corners and a fruit or nut filling. It is said that the cookie is shaped like the hat worn by Haman, an ancient noble who tried to plot the destruction of the Jews (as seen in the story of Esther).

**Kugel:** A dish typically made with egg noodles and apples, potatoes, or other fruit and vegetables.

**Potato latkes:** A fried potato pancake

**Rugelach:** Dough shaped into crescents and filled with nuts, poppy seeds, or fruit

**Sufganiyot:** a type of jelly-filled doughnut fried in olive oil. Frying things in olive oil is encouraged during Hanukkah to represent the olive oil that burned inside the temple for eight days

### Historical Background:

Hanukkah is also called The Festival of Lights. Hanukkah is connected to events in 165-167 BCE, when the Temple of Jerusalem was liberated and Judaism was no longer outlawed. It celebrates the miracle of one day's supply of oil lasting eight days. Today, the holiday lasts eight days and nights and includes daily prayer and meals. Every night a new candle is lit on the menorah to represent one of the eight days. Due to the influence of Christmas, many families also give gifts to each other on some or all of those nights.

**Fun Fact:** In 2013, Hanukkah coincides with Thanksgiving for the first and only time in our lifetimes. According to the Jewish calendar, the first full day of Hanukkah won't overlap with Thanksgiving again for another 77,000 years.

A ten-year-old boy invented the “menurkey” to commemorate the overlap of the two holidays:



Source: [ruthtalksfood.blogspot.com](http://ruthtalksfood.blogspot.com)

## New Year's Vocabulary



**Image Source:** [http://nitechreviews.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/IMG\\_0675.jpg](http://nitechreviews.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/IMG_0675.jpg)

**Auld Lang Syne:** a traditional Scottish ballad sung in many English-speaking countries to commemorate the New Year. “Auld Lang Syne” loosely translates to “in days gone by.” The song is referenced frequently in American pop culture, including the movie “When Harry Met Sally.”

**Resolutions:** Many Americans make New Year’s resolutions, or pledges that to improve themselves. Common resolutions usually aim to get rid of bad habits or live a healthier lifestyle, such as losing weight, quitting smoking, or finding personal happiness.

**Ring in the New Year:** to start the New Year with a celebration, to start off on the right foot

**Watch the ball drop:** Every year a large crystal ball drops in Time Square, usually in the final thirty seconds before midnight on December 31<sup>st</sup>. Millions of people gather in Times Square to witness the event.

Formal parties with champagne, noisemakers, and masks or hats are also part of many American New Year’s celebrations.