

The Holiday Peace Project

Holiday Meaning Map & Games

Use this two, part handout to set your intentions and spark low, pressure connection. Part 1 helps you clarify what each holiday means to you and choose how you want to feel. Part 2 offers simple, laughter, first games that work for mixed ages without complex rules.

Part 1: Holiday Meaning Map

The Meaning Behind the Holidays

Thanksgiving

Date: Fourth Thursday in November (U.S.)

Roots & Meaning:

Thanksgiving began as a harvest festival, a time to express gratitude for the bounty of the land and the people who gathered it. While its history is complex and deeply intertwined with Native American experiences, today many people focus on **gratitude, togetherness, and reflection** rather than the historical narrative.

Peace Project Reflection:

What are you thankful for that doesn't show up on a shopping list? Who do you want to be present with, not just physically, but emotionally?

Hanukkah

Date: Eight days, usually in late November or December (based on the Hebrew calendar)

Roots & Meaning:

Hanukkah, also known as the Festival of Lights, commemorates the rededication of the Second Temple in Jerusalem and the miracle of a small amount of oil that burned for eight nights. It's celebrated by lighting a **menorah**, sharing foods fried in oil like **latkes** and **sufganiyot (jelly doughnuts)**, and spending time with family.

Peace Project Reflection:

Hanukkah reminds us that **light can outlast darkness**, a beautiful metaphor for mental and emotional resilience. What's one "small flame" in your life that you can protect and nurture this season?

Christmas

Date: December 25

Roots & Meaning:

Christmas celebrates the **birth of Jesus Christ**, symbolizing hope, joy, and love. Over time, cultural traditions have layered in gift, giving, Christmas trees, lights, and music, all reminders of warmth and generosity in the coldest season.

Peace Project Reflection:

Beyond the lists and wrapping paper, what are you truly celebrating? What traditions bring joy, and which ones bring stress? Give yourself permission to simplify.

Kwanzaa

Dates: December 26 – January 1

Roots & Meaning:

Kwanzaa was created in 1966 by Dr. Maulana Karenga to honor African heritage and values of community, family, and culture. Each of the seven days celebrates one of the **Nguzo Saba** (Seven Principles):

1. **Umoja** (Unity)
2. **Kujichagulia** (Self, Determination)
3. **Ujima** (Collective Work & Responsibility)
4. **Ujamaa** (Cooperative Economics)
5. **Nia** (Purpose)
6. **Kuumba** (Creativity)
7. **Imani** (Faith)

Peace Project Reflection:

Kwanzaa centers on **intention and contribution**, what you give back to strengthen your community. How might you carry that spirit forward into the new year?

New Year's Eve & New Year's Day

Dates: December 31 – January 1

Roots & Meaning:

New Year's marks both **an ending and a beginning**, a universal opportunity for reflection and renewal. Around the world, people celebrate with fireworks, food, and traditions that symbolize luck and fresh starts (like eating black, eyed peas in the South).

Peace Project Reflection:

Before making resolutions, pause for appreciation: What do you want to carry with you into the new year , and what can you gently set down?

Four Intentional Questions

1) What do I want to feel this season? (It's okay to choose more than one: calm, joy, wistful, grateful...)

2) What would help me feel that? (Tiny anchors: candle + one gratitude note, 10-minute walk, ask two people to bring dishes, budget caps.)

3) Where does commercial/cultural pressure distract me? (Ads, Instagram, "shoulds," blended-family expectations.)

4) What one change would bring me more peace this year? (Simplify meals, order Thanksgiving, kind no to extra events.)

Part 2: Simple Games for Connection (No Pressure, Big Laughs)

Pick 1–2 based on your group. Aim for quick start, shared laughter, and low competition—so everyone participates, including the planner!

Buyable Party Games (Quick, Start)

- 🎲 Telestrations — [Amazon listing](#)
- 🎲 Heads Up! — [Amazon listing](#)
- 🎲 Pictionary Air — [Amazon listing](#)
- 🎲 Left Center Right — [Amazon listing](#)
- 🎲 Anomia — [Amazon listing](#)
- 🎲 Wits & Wagers — [Amazon listing](#)
- 🎲 Blank Slate — [Amazon listing](#)
- 🎲 Codenames — [Amazon listing](#)
- Michelle's rec: Guestures: [Amazon listing](#)

No, Purchase / Prep, Free Games

Reverse Charades: Team acts, one guesses; rotate the guesser. Removes performance pressure.

Category Charades: Pick a theme (movies, winter words). Actors can use props around the room.

Story Tag: Sit in a circle; each adds one sentence. Optional: require a holiday word each turn.

Holiday Would-You-Rather: Light debate prompts (e.g., 'Tree: real or artificial?'). Keep it kind and silly.

Name-That-Tune: Holiday Edition: Hum or whistle 5–10 seconds. First to guess earns a point—or just play for fun.

Low-Stakes Karaoke: YouTube instrumentals + phones as microphones. Duets encouraged; no judging allowed.

Tip: If rules feel heavy, switch to a simpler game or play cooperative, style. The goal is connection, not perfection.

Trivia (Answer key below!):

Use this trivia set for parties, classroom breaks, or family gatherings to bring laughter, learning, and lighthearted connection this season. Answer aloud, write them down, or use them for giveaways and games!

1. What was the first company to use Santa Claus in advertising?
2. In what country did the tradition of the Christmas tree begin?
3. What day do most Americans start decorating for the holidays?
4. What fruit is traditionally found in Christmas stockings?
5. What was Frosty the Snowman's nose made of?
6. During Hanukkah, how many candles are on the menorah?
7. Kwanzaa was first celebrated in which decade?
8. In Japan, what food is commonly eaten on Christmas Day?
9. Which country celebrates "La Befana," a kind witch who brings gifts to children on Epiphany?
10. What color are the berries of mistletoe?
11. What's the most re-watched holiday movie of all time (according to 2024 streaming stats)?
12. How many gifts total are given in "The 12 Days of Christmas"?
13. What was the first song ever broadcast from space?
14. What reindeer name is also a kitchen cleaner brand?
15. What hormone is released when we sing together — boosting joy and bonding?
16. True or False: Gratitude journaling during December can lower stress hormones by up to 23%.
17. What percentage of people say holiday music instantly improves their mood?
18. What's the number one word people use to describe their favorite holiday memory?

Answer Key

1. Coca-Cola (1930s — they shaped the modern red-suit image)
2. Germany
3. The weekend after Thanksgiving (63% start then, according to a YouGov poll)
4. An orange — symbolized generosity and gold during leaner times
5. A button
6. Nine (eight for each night plus the shamash or helper candle)
7. 1960s (created in 1966 to honor African heritage and unity)
8. Fried chicken — KFC made it a Christmas tradition in Japan
9. Italy
10. White (not red — those belong to holly)
11. Home Alone (followed closely by Elf and The Grinch)
12. 364 total gifts
13. “Jingle Bells,” played by astronauts in 1965
14. Comet
15. Oxytocin — the “connection chemical”
16. True (UC Davis study)
17. About 75% (APA, 2023)
18. “Together”

Part 3: Holiday Mental Health: The Good & The Bad

The Not-So-Good Stats:

- 9 in 10 Americans say they experience *some level* of stress during the holidays.
- 64% of people with a mental health condition say symptoms worsen this time of year.
- Financial and family expectations are the top stressors.

The Hopeful Side:

- Kindness boosts happiness by up to 20%.
- People who laugh more during gatherings have 30% lower stress hormones.
- 78% say their favorite holiday memories come from *connection*, not perfection.
- “Even small rituals — like lighting a candle or writing one gratitude note — can calm your nervous system.”