Greetings kids, parents, grandparents, guardians, friends and neighbors!

Welcome to issue 13 of the Minis at Home newsletter. Each newsletter features a special theme and offers pertinent information, a craft, and recommended reading. Grownups: please work on projects together with your children. Your participation is important! We will offer hints and tips for ways to create art as a twosome or a family.

This week’s theme = Winter Solstice

Get your (battery-operated) candles out because December 21st will be the shortest day of the year (for us in the Northern Hemisphere). That means it's the day that has the least amount of daylight and the longest night. It’s known as the winter solstice.

Grownups, did you know this? The dictionary says that the word “solstice” comes from the Latin solstitium, from sol ‘sun’ + stit- ‘stopped, stationary’ (from the verb sistere). I love these little word meaning nuggets, don’t you?

If all the darkness bothers you, the good news is that the days will now grow longer and longer...until the summer solstice, which is on June 21 (in our hemisphere). Even though each day will only be growing longer by about a minute—so you won’t notice much right away—30 days means 30 minutes, and we’ll all notice that!

Right now, the sun sets early and it's probably dark by the time you are eating dinner. In the summertime, it doesn't get dark until much later, probably after you are in bed.
This year, the winter solstice happens on December 21st, but you may want to check out the exact time for your area from the Old Farmers’ Almanac: https://www.almanac.com/content/first-day-winter-winter-solstice.

FUN TIDBIT: Did you know that if you go outside at noon on the day of the winter solstice and stand in the sun, your shadow will be longer than on any other day of the year?

Even though it’s been cold for awhile and you may have been wearing a jacket, hat and mittens for a few weeks, the winter solstice marks the very first day of winter. Why is it the day with the least amount of light, though? Good question!

In order to answer that question, let’s look at how the Earth moves. Did you know that the Earth is always in motion? We can’t feel it moving because everything else on our planet is moving right along with us. Our beds, our houses, our friends’ houses, the trees outside—yep, they’re all on the move together.

Now, did you know that the Earth, along with all the other planets in our Solar System, moves in more than one way? First, we move around the Sun in what’s called an orbit. Here’s a cool way to understand an orbit. Take a large ball and place it in the middle of a table or on the floor. We’re going to pretend that’s the Sun. Now hold a smaller ball in your hand and move it in an oval shape around the Sun. That smaller ball is the Earth. Try to remember where you started moving your ball and stop in the same place. That’s one trip around the sun, also known as a revolution. It takes the Earth 365 days—or one year—to finish one revolution around the Sun.

But Earth, like all the other planets—moves in another way as well. It spins around and around, much the way a top does. Again, we don’t get dizzy because everything else on our planet is spinning right along with us. Our beds, our houses, our friends’ houses, the trees outside—yep, they’re all on the move together! We call the spinning movement of the earth a rotation.

If you don’t have a top at home, you can watch one spin here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mekf0oyciddk.
Did you know that the reason we have days and nights is that the Earth is rotating? It takes the Earth 24 hours to complete a rotation. As the Earth spins, one side faces the sun and the other faces away. When we have daylight, we are facing the sun, when it’s dark we have night.

Now, we know that the Earth revolves around the Sun and we know that it rotates, giving us day and night, but we still haven’t talked about why we have **seasons**, why we have winter, and why the winter solstice marks the shortest day of the year. Don’t worry! We’re getting there!

In order to understand the seasons and the changes in daylight and darkness, you have to know that the Earth is tilted! That’s right—our planet does not spin straight up and down, but at an angle. So, depending on the time of year, different parts of Earth are receiving the Sun's most direct rays. When the North Pole is tilting toward the Sun, it’s summer in the Northern Hemisphere, but when the South Pole is tilting toward the Sun, it’s winter in the Northern Hemisphere. Right now, the South Pole is tilting toward the sun, so it’s cold and dark here in Maryland. On the day of the winter solstice, the North Pole will have reached its maximum tilt away from the Sun.

Here’s a great video about how and why the Earth moves: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EXasopxAFoM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EXasopxAFoM)

For thousands of years, people all over the world have celebrated the winter solstice. But what is there to celebrate about the cold and dark!? Why would anyone get excited about the shortest day of the year?

Because it marks the moment when our days will become longer. The promise of light and heat is on the horizon, even if it’s still very far off. In a few months, these longer and warmer days will help crops to grow, so food will become more plentiful. The birds and animals who migrated will be returning. (Remember when we learned about **migrating**?)

People mark the winter solstice by sharing gifts and food with others, burning a log indoors to represent the sun’s light and warmth, and giving food to those animals and birds who did not migrate by decorating pine trees with fruit and seeds.

Some people bring pine trees into their homes to decorate as a symbol of all the life around them, even in the darkest winter days. Remember...pine trees, also called evergreens, are always covered with green pine needles. The winter solstice is a time for celebrating the beginning of the warmer and lighter days to come and to thank the Sun for a job well done!
Activity: Armchair Traveler

In ancient times, people around the world constructed buildings such as pyramids or huge rock monuments like Stonehenge to capture the sun through spaces (almost like windows) in these gigantic monuments. On the winter solstice, at exactly right moment, the sun will rise and shine through the spaces in these monuments. Stonehenge (below) and Newgrange (bottom), both around 5,000 years old, are just a couple of examples of these special monuments. Look up “winter solstice monuments” online to see great pictures from many different parts of the world.

AMAZING OPPORTUNITY: You can watch the solstice happening LIVE at Stonehenge on December 21st! Here's the website:

https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/stonehenge/things-to-do/solstice/

Just to know, time in the UK is five hours ahead of us, so you'll be able to watch when it's still afternoon here.

What are some of ways you celebrate or decorate during the holidays? As we enjoy the winter holidays, we can thank people who lived thousands of years ago for giving us many of the traditions we have today!
Activity: Craft

Paper Cup and Tube Lanterns

Light up the dark with festive luminaries!

Materials:
- Small paper cups "Dixie" sized, and/or Toilet Paper Rolls
- Markers
- Paint
- Paintbrush
- Water cup
- Fancy paper, such as scrapbook paper, tissue paper or bits of wrapping paper
- Hole puncher
- Push pins
- Flameless tea lights {battery operated}
- Scissors
- Small knife for cutting out bottom of cups
- White glue

Procedure:

Prepare your cups/TP rolls. If using a paper cup, cut out the bottom. A paring knife works well for this (definitely an adult-required step).

Decorate your cups/TP rolls using paint, markers, glitter or by gluing pretty paper around the surfaces.

When cups/TP rolls are dry and paper is secured on, punch out holes

Switch on the tea lights and place your lanterns on top.

Fun decorating ideas:

* You can make many luminaries with different sized cups and TP rolls and group them in the center of the table

* You can collage different colors of tissue paper squares all over your cup/TP roll using a white glue and water mixture.

* You can use paper punches with designs such as snowflakes, hearts or stars

* Use push pins to poke teeny holes and make designs in your cup/TP rolls.

(adapted from littlebinsforlittlehands.com)
Musical Interlude

Italian composer Antonio Vivaldi (1678 – 1741) wrote a musical piece called the *Four Seasons*. You can listen to the part called Winter here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TZCfydWF48c

Ask your grown-up to listen to it with you. Does it sound like winter? Can you hear the wind? Can you imagine the weather and time of day when you hear it?

Look for more winter solstice music online. You may enjoy the spiritual, *This Little Light of Mine*. Many versions exist, but all have the main verse,

**This little light of mine**

I’m going to let it shine

Oh, this little light of mine

I’m going to let it shine

This little light of mine

I’m going to let it shine

Let it shine, all the time, let it shine

(Children can hold up their index finger for a pretend candle.)
**Winter Solstice Soup**

by Rosario Del Nero

There's nothing more perfect for a cold winter's night than hot and healthy soup. This recipe is easy to make and substitutions are easy! Cooking time = about 40 mins.

**Ingredients:**

- 1/4 Cup Extra virgin olive oil
- 1 Small onion (approx. 1 Cup), chopped
- 2 Large carrots, peeled and chopped
- 2 Celery stalks, peeled and chopped
- 1 Bayleaf
- 1 Cup potatoes, peeled and chopped
- 2 Cloves garlic, peeled and chopped
- 1 14-oz Can Chopped tomatoes (with their juices)
- 1 1/2 Cup Cooked chickpeas, cannellini beans, kidney beans or a combination
- 4 Cups Water
- 1/2 C Small pasta shapes, such as tubettini or broken spaghetti
- 1 T Fresh herbs, such as parsley and/or rosemary, chopped
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1 T Per person, grated Parmesan cheese

**Procedure:**

Heat the olive oil over low heat. Add the onions and sauté for 5 minutes or until soft. Add the carrots, celery and bayleaf and cook for another 5 minutes. Add the potatoes and garlic and cook for 5 more minutes. Add the tomatoes with their juices and bring to a simmer. Add the cooked beans and return to a simmer. Add the water, raise the flame and bring to a simmer. Add the pasta (Important: The soup must be actively simmering when you add the pasta or it won't cook properly!) and cook for about 10 minutes (or according to package directions). Add the fresh herbs, salt and pepper to taste. Portion into bowls. Finish with grated cheese.
Literacy: RECOMMENDED BOOKS

Snuggle up in a big comfy chair and read together

*The Shortest Day: Celebrating the Winter Solstice* by Wendy Pfeffer
*The Reason for the Seasons* by Gail Gibbons
*Iliana* by Walter Fordham
*The Shortest Day* by Susan Cooper
*The Winter Solstice* by Ellen Jackson
*One Short Day in December* by Lilith Rogers

Note: We’ll be taking some time off around the holidays.
See you in January with issue 14 of *Minis at Home*!

Share your work on  [https://www.instagram.com/minimastersaam/](https://www.instagram.com/minimastersaam/)
or email pictures to Ann Hansen
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