



Mary Ann's Christmas Gift to You

The Week Before Christmas

Dear Friend,

I am excited to share this packet of information with you. December is a magical month, but it is also a stressed-out month for many families. I have been thinking back to my own family and I realized that as many wonderful things as we did during the holidays much of it was running here and there; church parties, work parties, school parties, friends' parties. Whew, we got tired and sometimes cranky.

Wouldn't it be wonderful to spend five, six or even seven quiet evenings with just you and your family celebrating this remarkably joyous season? I am with you, it would. We can make that happen by cleaning out our calendar a bit, planning ahead and then making a commitment to do it.

This packet is designed to give you some simple ideas for family activities that you can do without too much muss or fuss each evening before everyone heads off to bed. I have chosen only games, activities, crafts and recipes that will require a minimum amount of time to put together with very inexpensive materials. I want this to be easy!

So, print these pages, look them over with your family and choose your favorites. Take a good hard look at your calendar and remove what isn't vital to your family's happiness and then gather for just a short amount of time each evening and cherish one another.

Here's to Christmas Joy and better family connections,

Mary Ann Johnson

PART I: Family Games

1. LETTER TO SANTA

A seasonal variation on the alphabetical memory game:

‘I wrote a letter to Santa and asked for an ... android.’ ‘I wrote a letter to Santa and asked for an android and a... Barbie.’ ‘I wrote a letter to Santa and asked for an android, a Barbie and a... computer.’

Take it in turns to repeat the list and add an item – using alphabetical order makes it easier on the memory but harder on the imagination.

2. THE CHRISTMAS PRESIDENT’S SPEECH

Both teams compose the following list:

- A traditional Christmas foodstuff
- A kitchen utensil
- A children’s book title
- A male celebrity
- A part of the human body
- Something you’d use to clean the bathroom
- A cartoon character
- A contagious disease
- A TV show
- An exotic holiday destination
- A small, furry animal
- The name of one of Santa’s reindeers



Now the teams swap lists and have 5 minutes to compose and perform an authentic-sounding Presidential Christmas Speech, mentioning each item on their list in order. Points can be awarded for delivery and creativity, not to mention delivering the speech in a suitably presidential manner.

3. IN THE MANNER OF THE WORD

Noisy and silly, the name of this game explains it all. One player decides on an adverb e.g. merrily, furiously, quickly and whispers it to the player sitting to the right. This player has to sing a Christmas carol in the manner of the word and continue until the adverb has been guessed by the rest of the players.

4. CHARADES

Possibly the most traditional Christmas game in the world! The problem is, most people end up stuck for inspiration by the second round. This year, plan and print out some seasonal suggestions from this list:

- A Charlie Brown Christmas (Christmas movie – 1965)
- A Christmas Carol (Book by Charles Dickens and movies)
- Angels We Have Heard on High (Christmas carol)
- Away in a Manger (Christmas carol)
- Deck the Halls (Christmas carol)
- Frosty the Snowman (Song and TV movie)
- God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen (Christmas carol)
- I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus (Song)
- It’s A Wonderful Life (Christmas movie – 1946)
- Jingle All the Way (Christmas movie – 1996)

- Little Drummer Boy (Christmas carol and TV movie)
- Miracle on 34th Street (Christmas movie – 1947)
- Silent Night (Christmas carol)
- The 12 Days of Christmas (Christmas carol)

5. PIN THE TAIL ON THE REINDEER

This is played the same as Pin the Tail on the Donkey, but with a festive theme. If you're playing with younger children, consider awarding prizes for near-misses as well as direct hits. Another variation is to have the children pin the red nose on Rudolph instead of the tail.

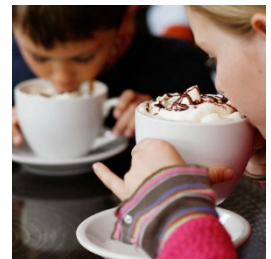
6. SPROUT OR SWEET

A slightly revolting but fun game for all the family. Taking it in turns, the victim is blindfolded, and another player holds their nose whilst feeding them EITHER a slice of cooked sprout OR a piece of chocolate truffle. The victim must guess what he/she is actually eating and if they get it right, they win another sweet (probably to take the taste away). Guessing is harder than it seems, as it's difficult to taste anything without using your nose.

PART II: Family Fun

1. HAVE A HOT COCO COMPETITION

Warm up a chilly afternoon or evening with a hot cocoa competition. Whip up a few different varieties of cocoa – milk chocolate, white chocolate, or a combination of both; set out toppings like crushed candy canes, chocolate slivers, powdered cocoa and peanut butter chips. Have the kids mix up their own individualized cup of cocoa. Create a simple scoring system – taste, creativity, use of ingredients – and have each family member vote on the winning cup.



2. CAMP “IN” UNDER THE TREE

Have family members dressed in their pajamas and armed with sleeping bags. Serve apple cider, candy cane ice cream or holiday cookies. Do group activities, make s'mores in the fireplace or oven, or read holiday stories like The Polar Express, The Grinch Who Stole Christmas, Christmas Miracle, Olive the Other Reindeer.

3. MAKE LINKS OF LOVE

Make a paper chain for the final week before Christmas. On each link of the chain, write the name of a family member. Each morning let one person remove a link and do a good deed or gesture to the person named on the link. Let the kids choose the good deeds. Examples are helping with the laundry, setting the table, making a sibling's bed, no teasing, picking up toys for another.

4. CREATE YOUR OWN CHRISTMAS STORY

Asking children to create their own Christmas stories is a great way to connect them to holiday traditions. If your family is religious, the kids can write their own story about the nativity. If you have relatives from another country, your kids can write a story about how families celebrate Christmas in that country. Or, you can have your kids tell the story of how your family celebrates Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. If your kids can't write yet, you can write the words and let the kids make the pictures. Save the book; it can become a keepsake you read every Christmas.

5. ACT OUT LUKE 2

Read Luke 2 aloud. have the children put on a play about the Christmas story. You may have to help them with

props and such. Make sure there is a part for everyone.

6. MAKE A CAKE FOR JESUS BIRTHDAY

Let young children help decorate a cake for Jesus' birthday. Have each one tell their vision of the Christmas story, then sing Christmas carols such as "Away in a Manger."

7. MAKE AN ACROSTIC FROM THE WORD "CHRISTMAS" - such as C is for the cows that grazed nearby; H is for the hay in the stable, and so on. Try other words such as "King," "Messiah," "Shepherd," and "Angel."

8. TELL WHAT YOU APPRECIATE

One tradition that is a good one to observe on Christmas Eve is for each family member to tell what they appreciate about the holiday season and other family members

9. HOLIDAY MOVIE NIGHT

Some favorite choices for kids: Home Alone, Christmas on 34th Street, A Flintstone Christmas Carol, and the Muppet's Christmas Carol. These holiday movies are hilarious and great for the whole family.

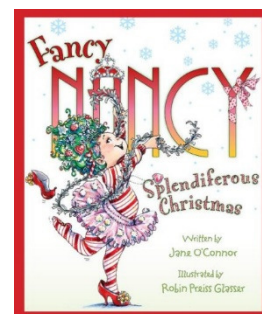
10 COLOR A FUN CHRISTMAS PICTURE and hang it up. See color sheets at the end of this packet.

PART III: Christmas Books to Share

1. ELIZABETH'S CHRISTMAS EVE GIFT - This is a vintage Christmas story by Chesna L. Smith. Spend Christmas Eve with young cowgirl, Elizabeth on the Miller ranch in the 1920s to discover how amid everyday chores, good ol' cowboy humor and the ranch animals remind her of the true meaning of Christmas.

2. THE ELF ON THE SHELF: A CHRISTMAS TRADITION by Carol Aebersold is an activity the entire family will enjoy. Based on the tradition Carol Aebersold began with her family in the 1970s, this cleverly rhymed children's book explains that Santa knows who is naughty and/or nice because he sends a scout elf to every home. During the holiday season, the elf watches children by day and reports to Santa each night. When children awake, the elf has returned from the North Pole and can be found hiding in a different location. This activity allows The Elf on the Shelf to become a delightful hide-and-seek game.

3. FANCY NANCY: SPLENDIFEROUS CHRISTMAS By Jane O'Connor - Presents with elegant wrapping paper, festive decorations, Christmas cookies with sprinkles—and who could forget the tree? After all, there is no such thing as too much tinsel. Ooh la la! This year, Nancy is especially excited about decorating the Christmas tree. She bought a brand-new sparkly tree topper with her own money and has been waiting for Christmas to come. But when things don't turn out the way Nancy planned; will Christmas still be splendiferous?

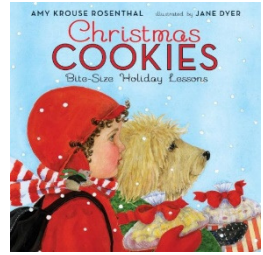


4. THE LITTLE FIR TREE by Margaret Wise Brown - It longed to be part of the forest—or part of anything at all. After many lonely years, its dream came true. And the little fir tree's life changed forever! Celebrate the true spirit of Christmas with heartwarming text by the author of Goodnight Moon.

5. DRUMMER BOY by Loren Long - In a wintry little town, a drummer boy appears on a child's doorstep. And when it is still and quiet, the drummer boy plays, boom pum pum boom pum, and warms the child's heart. But one day the drummer boy is accidentally knocked into the trash, sending him on a journey he never imagined—a journey on which he continues to play his drum, warming the hearts of others, from a rat to an owl to a snowman. And in a touching conclusion, his own heart is warmed as he plays to his most perfect

audience: the baby in a manger.

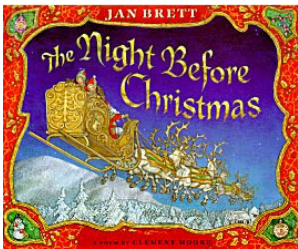
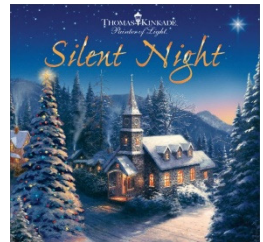
6. CHRISTMAS COOKIES: BITE SIZE HOLIDAY LESSONS by Amy Krouse Rosenthal - This scrumptious follow-up to the bestselling *Cookies: Bite-Size Life Lessons* captures the spirit of the holiday season. From making the same kind of cookies at the same time each year (tradition) to decorating them with lots of sprinkles (celebrate), youngsters will gobble up vocabulary words and holiday lessons in this charming dictionary of sorts.



7. THE CHRISTMAS MAGIC by Lauren Thompson -Far, far North, when the nights are longest and the stars shine brightest, Santa begins to prepare for his big night of giving. He gathers his reindeer, feeds them parsnips and berries, and polishes his bells and his sled. Then lovingly, he chooses toys for every child in the world. For Santa loves them all, and he knows what each child at heart wants most. Then, with the thrum of magic that makes reindeer fly, he spreads the Christmas joy and warmth throughout the world—as he always has — and always will until the end of time.

8. STICK MAN by Julia Donaldson - Stick Man lives in the family tree with his Stick Lady Love and their stick children three. But one day, Stick Man is carried off by a mischievous dog who wants to play fetch! Things go from bad to worse as Stick Man is carried farther and farther away from home. Lonely and lost, Stick Man desperately wants to get home to be with his family for Christmas. And when he helps Santa Claus out of a bind, he finds the perfect ticket home!

9. SILENT NIGHT by Joseph Mohr, Thomas Kinkade, the Painter of Light, illustrates the classic Christmas hymn.



10. THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS by Jan Brett (A poem by Clement Clarke Moore) A new generation of readers will find Jan's visual interpretation of this favorite poem, set in a snowy New England village, both familiar, as St. Nick visits a Victorian family, and surprising with Jan's addition of two stowaway elves from the North Pole.

Part IV: CHRISTMAS STORIES TO SHARE

Secular Short Stories about Christmas

You can print these short stories at <http://www.apples4theteacher.com/holidays/christmas/stories/>

- Bipper and Wick - by Artie Knapp
- The Birds' Christmas - Founded on Fact by F.E. Mann
- Christmas at Fezziwig's Warehouse by Charles Dickens
- A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens
- The Christmas Carol of the Birds
- Christmas Day
- A Christmas Fairy by John Strange Winter
- Christmas in Seventeen Seventy-Six (1776) by Anne Hollingsworth Wharton
- Christmas in the Alley by Olive Thorne Miller
- Christmas in the Barn by F. Arnstein
- The Christmas Masquerade by Mary E. Wilkins Freeman
- A Christmas Matinee by M.A.L. Lane

- Christmas Under the Snow by Olive Thorne Miller
- The Cratchits' Christmas Dinner by Charles Dickens
- The Dolls' Christmas Party
- The Fairy Christmas
- The First New England Christmas by G.L. Stone and M.G. Fickett
- The Fir-Tree by Hans Christian Andersen
- Grandma's Christmas Gifts
- The Greatest of These by Joseph Mills Hanson
- How Christmas Came to the Santa Maria Flats by Elia W. Peattie
- Jimmy Scarecrow's Christmas by Mary E. Wilkins Freeman
- Little Girl's Christmas by Winnifred E. Lincoln
- Mama's Happy Christmas
- Mr. Bluff's Experience of Holidays by Oliver Bell Bunce
- Old Father Christmas by J.H. Ewing
- The Philanthropist's Christmas by James Weber Linn
- The Queerest Christmas by Grace Margaret Gallaher
- Yes Virginia, There is a Santa Claus

Religious Short Stories about Christmas

You can print these short stories off at <http://www.apples4theteacher.com/holidays/christmas-religious/short-stories/>

- A Christmas Star by Katherine Pyle
- A Christmas Story
- A Story of the Christ Child – A German Legend for Christmas Eve – As told by Elizabeth Harrison
- Christmas on Big Rattle
- Little Gretchen and the Wooden Shoe by Elizabeth Harrison
- Master Sandy's Snapdragon
- The First Christmas Tree
- The First New England Christmas Tree by G.L. Stone and M.G. Fickett
- The Legend of Babouscka – From the Russian Folk Tale
- The Little Sister's Vacation by Winifred M. Kirkland
- The Shepherds and the Angels adapted from the bible
- The Voyage of the Wee Red Cap by Ruth Sawyer Durand
- Why the Chimes Rang by Raymond Macdonald Alden

PART V: SIMPLE CHRISTMAS TREATS

1. SANTA SALAD

What You Need:

- Large tomato slices
- Green olives with pimentos
- Radishes
- Cottage cheese
- Plates
- Knife



Wash all vegetables. Cut tomatoes into 1/2-inch-thick slices, one for each Santa. Slice a few green olives. Lay

the tomato slice on a plate and add the green olives for Santa's eyes. Use a radish slice for his nose and cut a radish half-moon for his mouth.

Carefully spoon cottage cheese on and around the tomato for Santa's hair and beard. You can broil the tomato slices in a toaster oven before you begin. Hot or cold, these Santa's are delicious!

2. NUTTER BUTTER REINDEER COOKIES

Nutter Butter Reindeer Cookies *You could use a Vienna Finger cookie if your child has a peanut allergy.

What you need:

- Nutter Butter Cookies
- Pretzels
- Chocolate Chips
- M&M's
- Canned cake frosting



Lay out 1 nutter butter on your plate. Take 1 pretzel and very gently break the bottom (round part) of the pretzel off. You will be left with the 2 loopy parts.

Using white cookie icing (found in the cake decorating section) or regular icing, "glue" the pretzel antlers to the top of the cookie. Use the frosting to glue either 2 chocolate chips or 2 brown (or green or blue) M&M's for the eyes. Use the frosting to glue 1 red M&M for the nose.

<http://www.thismommycooks.com/2010/12/easy-and-fun-holiday-treats-to-make.html>

3. CANDY AIRPLANE

What you need:

- Smarties
- 5 stick package of gum
- Lifesavers
- Rubber band



Use 1 package of Smarties (this will be the body of your airplane). Use one 5 stick package of gum. (these are your wings). Place the gum perpendicular to the Smarties, on top of the Smarties, forming a "T". Get 2 lifesavers (wheels) and 1 rubber band. Put the rubber band through the holes of the lifesavers. Pull the rubber band ends around the ends of the gum package to hold the gum into place.

From <http://www.thismommycooks.com/2010/12/easy-and-fun-holiday-treats-to-make.html>

4. SNATA CRACKERS

What you need:

- Ritz Crackers
- Pepperoni Slices
- Ricotta Cheese or Cottage Cheese
- Celery Slices
- Capers or bits of sweet or dill pickle
- Scissors or knife



Use kitchen scissors to cut a pepperoni hat; attach to cracker with a dab of ricotta. Spread on a ricotta beard. Add celery slices for mustache and capers for eyes and nose. Cover bottom of hat with more ricotta for fluffy trim.

5. SNAP PEA CHRISTMAS TREE

- What you need:
- Snap Peas
- Cheese Slices
- Pretzel Sticks



Arrange peas on a plate in the shape of a tree. Add a cheese star (cut with a cookie cutter) and a pretzel stick trunk. Bonus idea: cut out cheese circles for ornaments and let your little one “decorate” the tree before eating it!

6. SNOWMAN DONUTS

What you need:

- Miniature Powdered Sugar Donuts
- Brown Jimmies or mini chips
- Orange Slices
- Black Confetti Sprinkles -- mine are from a Halloween Mix
- Light Corn Syrup



Break off a small piece of an orange slice and form into nose. Dab nose with a bit of corn syrup and insert in donut hole. Insert brown jimmies in donut for mouth. Attach black confetti sprinkles by dabbing the back of confetti with a bit of corn syrup. If you don't have confetti, you could use miniature chocolate chips, food clay, fondant or icing or Gel. <http://redcouchrecipes.blogspot.com/2011/01/donut-snowmen.html>

7. MINI DONUT REINDEER

What you need:

- Chocolate Frosted Mini Donuts
- Peanut M&M's®
- Round Pearl Sprinkles
- Mini Pretzel Twists



Press a red peanut M&M® into the hole of the chocolate frosted mini donut. Press two round pearl sprinkles into the chocolate frosted mini donut for the eyes. Break a mini pretzel twist in half and press them into the top of the donut for antlers. <http://www.chef-in-training.com/2011/11/20-christmas-treatgift-ideas/>

Part VI: SIMPLE CHRISTMAS CRAFTS

1. YARN CANDY CANE

What you need:

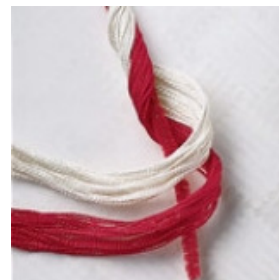
- 2 skeins of DMC Pearl Cotton, one red and one white
- Scissors
- Red pipe cleaners
- 1/2" to 5/8" ribbon



These canes were created with fine DMC Pearl Cotton, but younger kids may have an easier time with chenille yarn or cord.

Open a skein of cotton and snip the loop at each end so you have two bunches; repeat with the other skein. Then take one red bunch and one white bunch and tie them together into a single knot around the end of a pipe cleaner.

To make the stripes, twist the two colors around the pipe cleaner and knot the ends together around the other end. Trim the cotton at both ends and trim the pipe cleaner if need be. Bend into a candy cane shape and adorn with a ribbon bow. <http://spoonful.com/crafts/yarn-candy-cane>



2. COLORFUL CHRISTMAS CATS

What you' need:

- Wooden craft spoons
- Acrylic paint
- White card stock
- Glue
- Pipe cleaners
- Seed beads
- Fine-point permanent marker
- Green tissue paper
- Red beads or glitter
- String



To make each one, first coat a wooden craft spoon with acrylic paint. Paint a patch of the same shade onto a piece of white card stock and let the paints dry. Cut a 1/2-inch square from the card stock, then cut the square in half diagonally and glue the 2 triangles to the top of the spoon for ears. For a tail, curl a 6-inch piece of pipe cleaner and glue it to the back of the spoon.

Glue on black seed beads for eyes and draw a face with a fine-point permanent marker. Add a holly collar by twisting two or three 1-inch squares of green tissue paper around the tip of a pencil, then glue them in place, adding a few tiny red beads or glitter for berries. Glue on more beads for buttons.

Make a hanger by tying a piece of string into a loop and gluing the knot to the back of the spoon. Let all the glue dry completely before hanging. <http://spoonful.com/crafts/colorful-christmas-cats>

3. NUTTY LITTLE CHRISTMAS ELVES

What you need:

- Ballpoint pen
- Peanuts in the shells
- Brown pipe cleaners cut into 3-inch pieces
- Colored pipe cleaners
- Craft glue
- Mini googly eyes
- Pom-poms in assorted colors and sizes
- Fine-tip markers
- Scissors



- Felt, assorted colors
- Craft sticks
- Toothpicks
- Candy canes
- Ribbon



Use the end of a ballpoint pen to poke 4 small holes through each peanut shell, 2 for the arms and 2 for the legs. Push a 3-inch piece of brown pipe cleaner through one armhole, then out the other for arms. Push another piece through one leg hole and out the other, then wrap a small piece of different-colored pipe cleaner around the bottom of each leg for elf shoes.

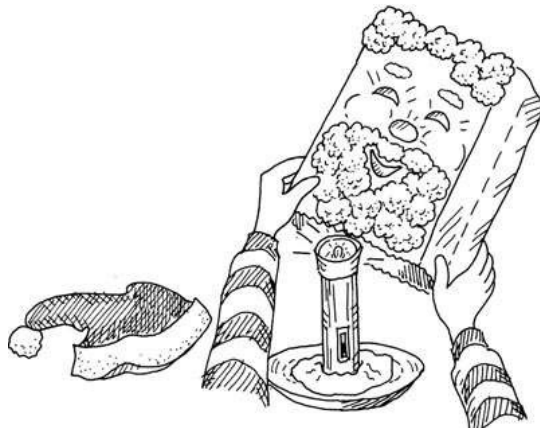
Give the peanut a face by gluing on a set of googly eyes and a mini pom-pom nose, then draw on a mouth with a marker. For an elfin cap, cut out a long, thin colored felt triangle with a base no longer than 2 inches, glue together the sides, and attach it to the peanut elf's head. Cut the point off the hat and glue a mini pom-pom to the top.

Now give the elf some props: a pair of craft-stick skis and some toothpick poles, or candy-cane cargo. For the finishing touches, glue a small loop of ribbon to the elf's hat to hang him on the tree. <http://spoonful.com/crafts/nutty-little-elves-holiday-ornaments>

4. SANTA LIGHT

What You Need:

- Paper bag
- Pencil
- Scissors
- Markers
- Cotton balls
- Glue
- Flashlight
- Clay
- Saucer
- Santa hat
- Tape



Flatten the bag along its creases and turn it so the opening faces you as you draw the face. Draw the outlines of Santa's eyes, nose, and mouth. Cut them out. Use markers to draw on his eyebrows, eyelashes, lips, and cheeks.

Glue cotton balls on for hair, mustache, and beard. Stand the flashlight (beam facing up) in clay on a saucer. Put the bag over the flashlight and add a Santa hat to the bag. When the light is turned on, Santa glows.

It's time to put your thinking cap on -- again! The next activity involves some serious measuring and pop quizzes for the entire family. Continue to the next page to learn how to make a wheel of measure.

<http://tlc.howstuffworks.com/family/christmas-activities15.htm>

5. HOLIDAY PLACE SETTINGS

Just change the front piece and names on these holiday place settings, and use them again and again.

What You Need:

- Toilet paper tube (1 or more)
- White craft foam or card stock
- Card stock: assorted colors
- Decorative items: chenille stems, faux gems, stickers
- Tools:
- Ruler
- Craft knife
- Scissors
- Craft glue
- Clothespins
- Decorative-edge scissors
- Decorative paper punches



Help your child cut the tube into several two-inch pieces with a craft knife. Cut as many pieces as you want to make, using more than one tube if necessary. Wrap white craft foam or card stock around each tube section and cut to fit, leaving about 1/4 inch more width than the tube. Cut two slits in the center top of the

foam to create a tab about 1/2 inch deep. Below this tab, cut a horizontal 1/2-inch slit. Glue this piece around the tube without gluing the tab or the slit. Hold in place with clothespins until the glue sets.

With card stock, decorative-edge scissors, paper punches, stickers, chenille stems, and gems, use your imagination and creativity to design place markers for every season to insert into the top tab. Make name tags on your computer or use markers. Cut around the name, leaving a 1/2-inch tab on the bottom to fit into the horizontal tab.

<http://tlc.howstuffworks.com/family/christmas-activities20.htm>

For Pin the Tail on Rudolf



From <http://knowin.wordpress.com/2010/12/20/reindeer/>

For Pin the Nose on Rudolf



Picture from <http://www.coloringpages7.com/coloring-pages/holiday-coloring-pages/christmas-coloring-pages/christmas-rudolf-the-reindeer-coloring-page>

