



# Imaginary theatre company

2008–2009 SEASON

Major Sponsor:



by Brian Hohlfeld

based on the story by Hans Christian Andersen

Original Music by Neal Richardson

Directed by Kat Singleton

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by Brian Hohlfeld

based on the story by Hans Christian Andersen

Original Music by Neal Richardson

Directed by Kat Singleton

**Musical Director**

Neal Richardson

**Scenic & Costume Designer**

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**Stage Manager**

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**Director of Education**

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**Artistic Supervisor**

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## The Company

Narrator, The Boy / **Briston Ashe**

Narrator, Aunt Julia / **Katie Consamus**

Narrator, Father / **Chauncy Thomas**

Little Fir Tree / **Amanda Williford**

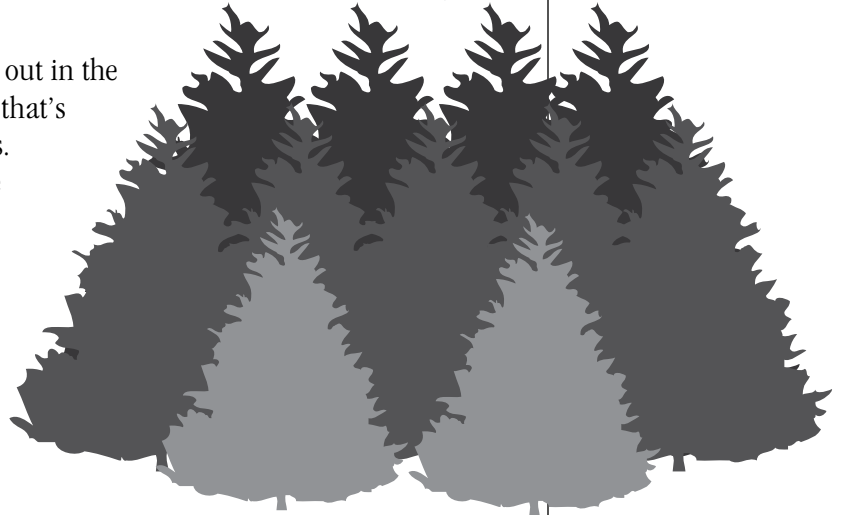


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# setting the scene



While *The Little Fir Tree* takes place way out in the middle of the field next to a forest, it's about something that's close to us all—fitting in, belonging and having friends. We all want to feel like we're well-liked and a part of the group, but sometimes we feel sad and alone like the Little Fir Tree in the field. The play shows us, however, that there's always someone around who loves us and wants us to feel better. Between friends, family and other loved ones, there's always someone around who cares about you. And when one of your loved ones is feeling down, you can be around for them too!



# who's who?

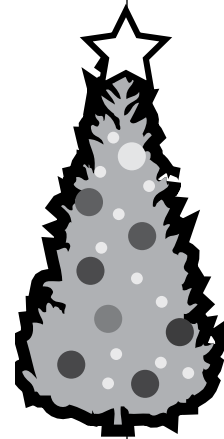


All alone in the middle of the field outside the forest, the **LITTLE FIR TREE** stands all by herself.

The Little Fir Tree isn't completely alone, though. Her friends **SQUIRREL** and **BIRD** come to visit her all the time, telling tales of the taller trees in the forest.

One day, as the snow falls in the middle of winter, **FATHER** comes to visit the Little Fir Tree. He wants to take her home and make her a part of Christmas.

The Little Fir Tree loves her new friend the **BOY**, a sick little boy who is unable to stand or walk.



# what's the story?



As the winds bustle about, a small seed blows by, landing in the middle of a field beside a forest. When the rains come, the seed sinks deep into the Earth and slowly begins to grow. As the seasons pass something magical happens—the seed becomes the Little Fir Tree.

As the Little Fir Tree stands alone in the field, she feels lonely and wishes for company. Luckily for her, Bird and Squirrel drop by, cheering the Little Fir Tree up with stories of the big trees just off in the distance. They can't stay long though, and when they leave the Little Fir Tree finds herself sad and lonely again.

With the winter comes snow and also a human. Squirrel and Bird warned the Little Fir Tree about humans—they like to chop trees down. As he approaches, however, Father assures the Little Fir Tree that he's not here to chop her down. He's here to carefully dig her up, take her back to his home, and make her a part of Christmas. Though she's not sure what this Christmas thing is all about, she happily agrees.

As Father carries the Little Fir Tree back through the forest, she excitedly greets all the trees that she has only been able to look at from the field. But the best is yet to come, as she finds a new friend at Father's house in the Boy. He's a sick young man who isn't able to stand or walk which makes him feel sad and lonely too. The Little Fir Tree and Boy won't be sad or lonely for long though, as they quickly become the best of friends, enjoying Christmas and all its joy together.

After all the celebrating, dancing, eating and decorating are done, the Little Fir

Tree must return to the forest. While she's sad to go, Father assures her that he'll be back next winter to make her a part of Christmas again. Upon returning to the forest, she tells Squirrel and Bird of her Christmas adventures. They've missed her and have a hard time believing all the magic of her stories. Along with the big trees of the forest, they are jealous of all the fun she's had.

The Little Fir Tree was happy to celebrate Christmas with Father and Boy, and she can't wait to do it again. The seasons take forever to drag by, but finally Christmas comes once again. Father comes and takes her back to his home, and she and the Boy quickly renew their friendship. This year, however, the Boy seems sicker than last year. He isn't even able to try and put the special star on the Fir Tree's highest branch.

Returning to the forest when it's all over, the Little Fir Tree finds herself anxious for Christmas to come again. The seasons again pass slowly, and finally when winter comes the Little Fir Tree can wait no more. But this year, when the snows come, there are no humans. Bird and Squirrel tell her that the big trees don't think Father is coming this year, and the Little Fir Tree becomes sad and lonely again. She then remembers that the Boy wasn't doing so well last year, and she begins to wonder if something bad has happened. What if her friend isn't okay?

As the cold winds bustle about, however, they bring a familiar sound. It's the Boy, and he's able to stand and walk all by himself. The friends hug and celebrate many more Christmases together, as they grow stronger and taller every year.

Please feel free to adapt these materials to suit your classroom needs and reproduce them for future use.

The activities in this guide address the following Missouri Show Me Standards and Illinois Learning Standards.

MO: CA1, CA5, FA2, FA4, SC3, SC4, SC8

IL: 1, 3, 5, 12, 13

# words to the wise

**Lonely:** If you're lonely, that means you feel like you're all by yourself or that there's nobody around to help you out.

**Common:** If you have something in common with someone, it means that you share something with them or you have the same thing that they do.

**Dreary:** If something is dreary, then it's kind of dull and maybe even sad.

**Jealous:** If you're jealous of someone else, it means you're unhappy that they have something you don't have.

**Droning:** If the days are droning by, that means they're crawling really slowly by—like sometimes when it's Tuesday and it seems like it takes forever to get to Friday.

# read more about it

We encourage you to examine these topics in-depth by exploring the following books, DVDs and websites.

**Brown, Margaret. *The Little Fir Tree*, Harper Collins, 2005.**

Are you sad that the play is over? Don't worry, you can always check out the book!

***The Little Mermaid*, Walt Disney Home Entertainment, 83 minutes, 1989, DVD.** Hans Christian Andersen also gave us this favorite tale.

**Andersen, Hans Christian. *Hans Christian Andersen: The Complete Fairy Tales and Stories*. Anchor, 1983.** If you liked *The Little Fir Tree* you might like to read other fairy tales by Hans Christian Andersen.

**<http://www.arborday.org>**  
Want to know more about trees like the Little Fir Tree? Check out the Arbor Day Foundation website for all kinds of cool information!

**<http://mdc.mo.gov/nathis>**  
If you want to know more about Missouri's wildlife and conservation, check out the official Missouri Department of Conservation website!

**Conrad, Heather. *Lights of Winter: Winter Around the World*, Lightport Books, 2001.**  
The Little Fir Tree learns about Christmas, and you can learn about other winter holidays in this book.

# Starting Small

We all know what trees look like when they're all grown up, right? They're big, strong and tall with lots of leaves, branches, bark and wood. But where does all that stuff come from? Just like you, me and the Little Fir Tree, everything has to start out small before it can grow big and tall.

All plants and trees, from dandelions to giant sequoias, start out as just a seed. Seeds can be found in various shapes and sizes (from almost too small to see to as large as 50 pounds!), but regardless of what a seed looks like, it contains an infant plant. These infant plants are called embryos, and while inside the seed they don't have their leaves, branches, bark or wood just yet. With a seed surrounding them, however, they do have food and shelter until they find a suitable place to germinate (or spring from the seed and start growing into a mature plant).

What does it take for a seed to germinate? While every plant needs slightly different conditions, most need the right kind of soil and the right amount of light and water. After a seed falls from a parent plant, drifting through wind and water to the ground, it waits for the perfect conditions to pop up. While it's waiting, the seed is dormant, which means it's not growing. Some seeds can be very patient—the oldest recorded seed to germinate was about 2,000 years old before it germinated in 2005!



Just after a seed germinates, it's not quite a mature plant. It's actually a seedling, consisting of a root, a shoot (what will become its stem or trunk later on), and seed leaves. At this point, the plant is still graduating from food in the seed to using the sun, water and soil as food, much like a baby goes from milk to baby food and then to solid adult foods.

Also kind of like babies, seedlings often don't always look like the plant they'll grow up to be, and in some cases they look absolutely nothing like their adult counterpart. For example, the great redwood tree (which grows to nearly 400 feet tall) starts out looking like a miniature blade of grass.

After spending some time as a seedling, the plant will begin to take on its true shape and color. Now it's using sun, soil and water as its only food sources, and given the right amount of time and luck, the plant will grow into a fully matured adult. This time period varies from plant to plant. Some will grow and die very quickly like dandelions while others, like the sequoia, take hundreds (or even thousands!) of years to reach their full potential.



# In Your Own Backyard

While little fir trees may grow up to be big and tall Christmas trees, they're not the only cool trees out in the forest. Did you that here in Missouri alone there are around 140 different species of trees? Check out just a few of the many trees that might be right in your own backyard!

## Flowering Dogwood

As Missouri's official state tree, the flowering dogwood is most majestic and glorious during the spring when its flower-filled branches are in full blossom. They can grow to around 30 feet tall with a diameter between 6 and 8 inches. Their fruit is a forest favorite among wild turkey and other forest birds.

## Hawthorn

The Missouri state flower, the hawthorn, grows on the hawthorn tree. The tree is typically small and shrubby with thorny branches, and is most often found in open fields or pastures. Closely related to the apple tree, the hawthorn tree produces a fruit similar to a small crab apple, which feeds various Missouri animals like the deer, raccoon, squirrel and wild turkey. The thorny branches also serve as great protected nesting areas for birds.

## White Oak

While there are a wide array of oak tree species (eight in Missouri alone), the white

oak is usually the tree we think of when we say "oak tree." Typically growing to heights between 65 and 85 feet tall, the tree is most famous for its strong and durable wood. You can find the tree in every county in the state, and if you're lucky, you might find one as old as 600 years (or older!).

These (and many other) trees are great for climbing, shading us from the sun and building treehouses in, but don't forget all the other reasons trees are so important to us.

- **Trees produce oxygen.** A big, leafy tree can make enough oxygen in just one season as 10 people need in a whole year. We couldn't breathe without trees!
- **Trees clean the soil.** Trees act like big filters, sucking up harmful pollutants from the ground.
- **Trees slow water and wind.** To help with flash flooding or with dangerous wind, trees are planted to act as natural barriers. They protect us!
- **Trees use carbon dioxide.** An excess of carbon dioxide is thought to be contributing to global warming. To produce its food, a tree takes carbon dioxide from the air and keeps it in its roots, wood and leaves.

Trees and forests may seem to be plentiful right now, but they are actually in trouble because of forest fires. Did you know that in 2007 there were 73,446 wildfires caused by people? Can you identify from the list below things that may be potential causes for forest fires?

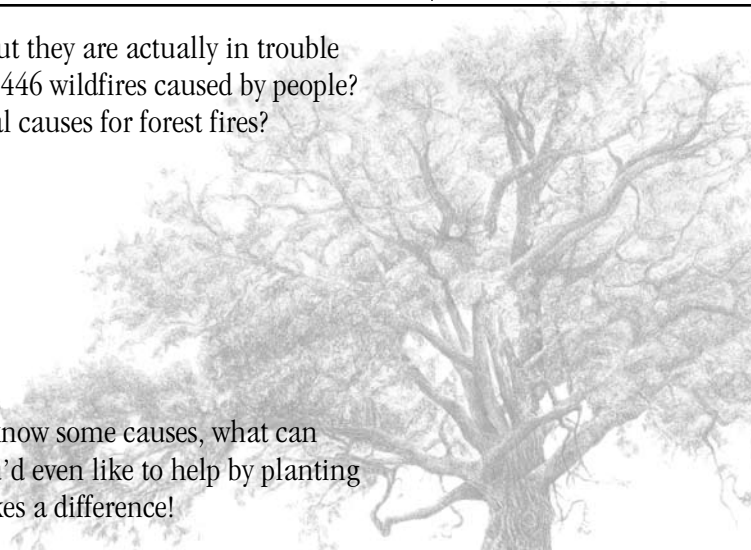
Smoking

Unattended campfires

Fireworks

Playing with matches or lighters

If you circled all of the above, then you're right! Now that you know some causes, what can you do to help prevent forest fires and save our trees? Maybe you'd even like to help by planting a tree. If so, ask your parents or teachers to help. Every tree makes a difference!



# Puppet Theater

You've seen them in the movies, on television and on stage in *The Little Fir Tree*, but did you know that besides being like the coolest things on the planet,

puppets have a rich history in storytelling for both children and adults?

Puppets have been referenced and used in storytelling for thousands of years. Modern day puppetry goes back as far as 2,000 years ago in China,

where **Chinese Shadow Theatre** made its first appearance. If you've ever seen someone make shadows of animals, people and other shapes on the wall with their hands, then you've seen shadow puppetry. In ancient China, they used real puppets to project shadows of action on the wall. The best puppeteers (or people who controlled the puppets) could make their puppets do lots of stunts and tricks in their shadows.

For hundreds of years in Japan, puppets have held an important place in telling tragic love and warrior tales for both children and adults. Instead of using shadow puppets like the Chinese, however, the Japanese use **Bunraku**. Bunraku puppets are

typically larger puppets controlled by two to three puppeteers. The puppets typically stand between 2 and 4 feet tall (or taller!), and are very colorfully decorated and costumed. The face and hands of the puppets are carved from wood and painted with great detail. To become a

puppeteer for Bunraku takes years of training,



but it's all worth it when the audience is dazzled by the life-like movements of the puppets on stage. Unlike the Muppets or puppet shows where the puppeteers are hidden, in Bunraku the puppeteers are on stage with the puppet, usually dressed in all black.

In Vietnam, a form of puppetry called **water puppetry** developed in flooded rice fields.

Water puppetry consists of puppets made of wood supported by a large rod in a four foot deep pool of water. The

grace of skilled puppeteers makes the puppets appear to magically glide and dance on the surface of the pool. Water puppetry developed as a form of entertainment for villages in Vietnam, becoming part of competitive puppet shows between rival villages.

Around the time of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, a form of puppet called the **marionette** was developed in Italy. Marionettes are puppets controlled by strings from above, and are commonly seen on stage, television and in the movies. Ever seen Pinocchio? He's a marionette for a while in the Disney movie.

Other popular puppets today include **hand puppets** (like socks or gloves on your hand) and **rod puppets** (like the Muppets, where little rods allow the puppeteer to control the puppet's movement). What kind of puppets have you seen on television? In the movies? On stage in *The Little Fir Tree*? Do you have a favorite?





# Puppet Project

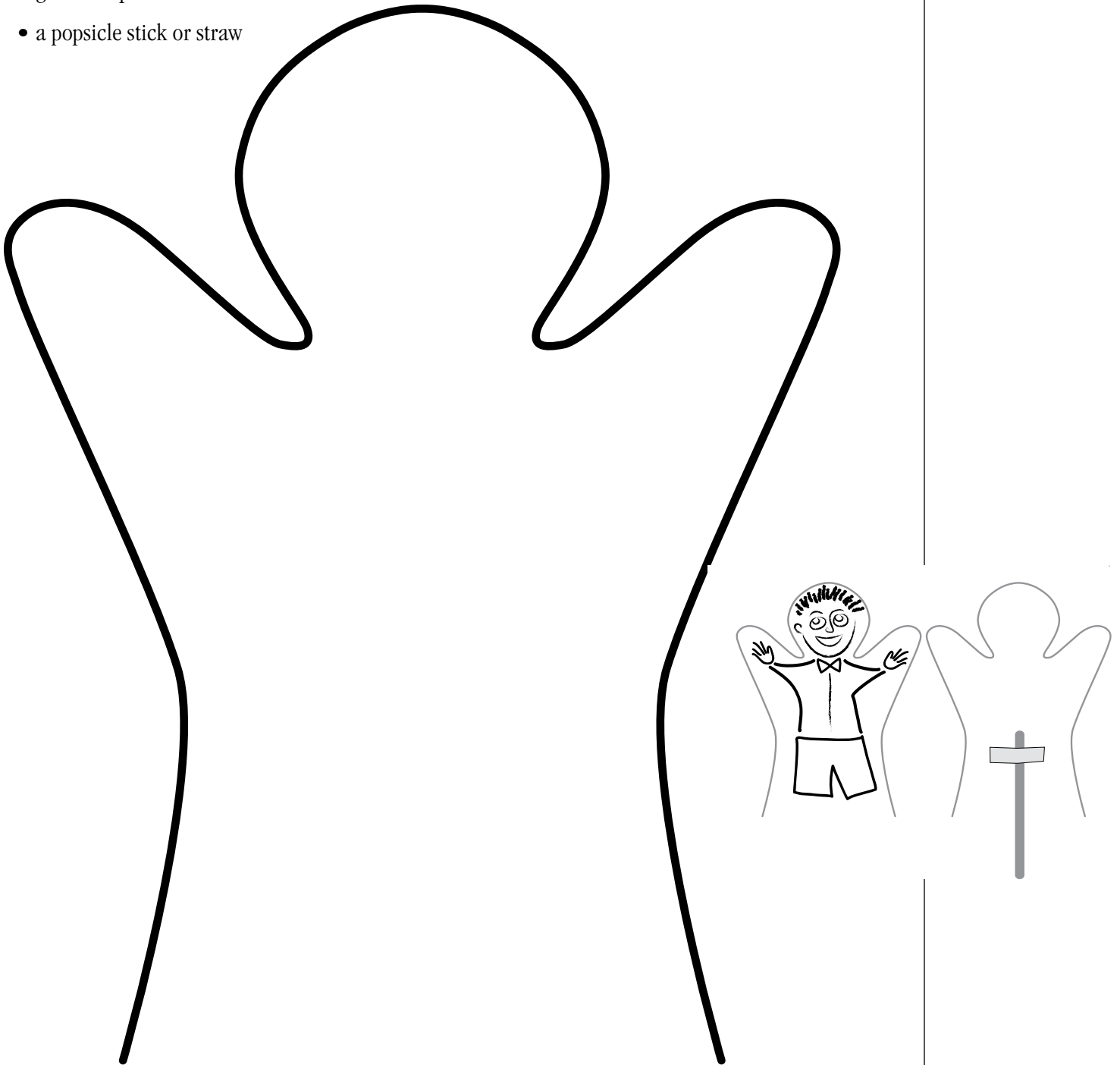
You saw the bird and squirrel in *The Little Fir Tree*. These puppets were made by skilled artisans in The Rep's crafts shop, but you can make a puppet yourself too.

## What you'll need:

- crayons or markers
- scissors
- glue or tape
- a popsicle stick or straw

## Steps:

1. Create a character using the outline provided. Color the puppet, give it a face, clothing, hair—whatever you like.
2. Cut out your puppet, following the line.
3. Paste or tape a popsicle stick, straw or other handle to the back of your puppet.
4. Put on a show!



# Holiday Time



*The Little Fir Tree* just can't seem to wait for Christmas to come each and every year because it means she gets to spend time with her dear friends. The same goes for children around the world, though not all of them are waiting just for Christmas. There are a variety of winter holidays that are celebrated by different people in different places. Check out just a few of the holidays below and see which ones you might already know about.

## Hanukkah

During the Festival of Lights, Jews celebrate an ancient victory over their enemies and a rededication to the temple. The holiday spans eight days, usually somewhere in late November to late December. On each of the eight nights, candles are lit on the menorah while friends and family observe traditions like eating potato latkes, playing dreidel games and exchanging gifts. It is a time to give thanks and revere the glory of God.

## Kwanzaa

Often called the fastest growing holiday in the world today, Kwanzaa was created in 1966 by professor Maulana Karenga. This holiday is a celebration of African culture, community and harvest, and it comes from the Swahili word for "first fruits." Kwanzaa focuses on beliefs to carry throughout the year including unity, responsibility, creativity and faith.



## Boxing Day

Boxing Day, a holiday with roots in the Medieval Ages, is celebrated in the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand and Australia annually on December 26. It is a holiday based on the principle of caring for those less fortunate than yourself, and in the old days it was when people would give gifts to their servants.

## Christmas

This winter celebration is the day in which Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. It is a religious holiday and time to honor God, but is also a time when families come together. Some Christmas traditions include giving gifts, decorating trees and singing carols.



## Winter Solstice

In the northern hemisphere, the winter solstice occurs each year at the end of December. This is the day the sun is the greatest distance from the earth, and therefore produces the shortest day of the year. Winter solstice is celebrated by many different cultures as a nature festival and day of rebirth.

Do you and your family celebrate any of these holidays? What are your traditions? What does your holiday mean to you?

# Holiday Greetings

Though all winter holidays are very different from each other, they also have one thing in common—togetherness. Even though different people celebrate in very different ways, everyone gathers together with their loved ones at this time of year to also celebrate each other. One favorite way people like to say “Happy Holiday!” is with a greeting card. You can make one yourself.

What you will need:

crayons or markers

scissors

Steps:

1. Using your crayons or markers, decorate the background of this card to celebrate your favorite winter holiday.
2. Write a special message to a friend, parent or grandparent.
3. Cut along the lines and give your card to the special person you made it for.



A large empty rectangular box for creating a holiday card.

# Oh Christmas Tree

*The Little Fir Tree* gets all kinds of different fruit, lights and ornaments as her special Christmas decorations. What do you think is the best way to decorate a tree?

