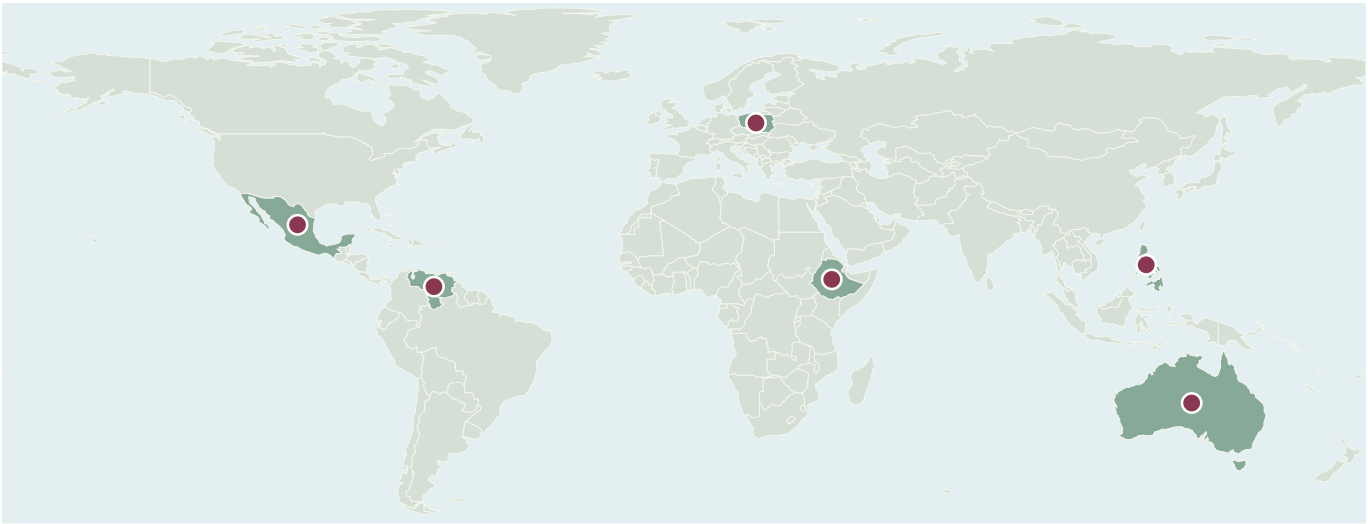
What Does Christmas Look Like at Your House?

Classroom Companion

Sheryl Dotson · Magsico Press · Grades K–2 · Ages 5–8



Six Christmas cards for the class book, and the six places they came from in Ms. Hazel's atlas.

Inside the companion

Start here and teach the lesson	2	Optional activity menu	8
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TEACHER GUIDE | GRADES K–2 | AGES 5–8

Start Here

What Does Christmas Look Like at Your House?

Designed to accompany **What Does Christmas Look Like at Your House?** by Sheryl Dotson. Access to the book is required for the complete lessons. A purchased, school-owned, or borrowed copy can support a class.

A Wondering Heart™ | Atlas of Holidays · First edition, Magsico Press · ISBN 979-8-954374-04-9 · 12 story spreads plus learning pages · Ages 5–8 · Grades K–2

What does Christmas look like at different homes?

Children will match one Christmas tradition from the book to the place where it was drawn and tell one way two cards are alike or different. Use the story, one card match, and an exit question.

One complete 45-minute lesson

5 min — **Invite predictions**
Show the cover and read the title. What might be on a Christmas card? Who might send one?

12 min — **Read aloud**
Read Spreads 1–12. Pause at Spreads 2, 5, and 10 using companion p. 5.

8 min — **Talk together**
Revisit the six cards. Which things are different? Which things appear more than once?

15 min — **Try the card match**
Follow companion p. 6 with the cards on p. 7. Place the cards in the order Gus' friends opened them.

5 min — **Reflect**
Use the exit ticket on p. 19. Children match a card to its place, then show or tell one way two cards are alike or different.

Prepare and print

Teacher: Use pp. 2, 5, and 6 from one copy or a screen. Keep the script and the uncut card sheet out of student view. The exit ticket is on p. 19.

Pairs or small groups: Print one p. 7 per group. An adult cuts apart the six picture cards and six place labels before class.

No-print choice: Sketch the six card pictures on the board, or hold up the book at Spreads 3–11. Write the six place names on scrap paper.

Optional sheets and the certificate: Choose from the menu on p. 8. Print US Letter at actual size. The separate Coloring & Fun Pack is optional.

For kindergarten, the reading and talk can come first, with the card match and reflection in a second meeting. Children can point, draw, act, or dictate. The core lesson uses paper and pencils only.

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TEACHER GUIDE | PLANNING

Choose Your Time

What Does Christmas Look Like at Your House?

Pick one route. Sessions can be taught on consecutive days or spaced apart. Times are planning estimates, not tested completion times. Give the full read-aloud enough time, and split it when needed.

One lesson About 45 minutes	Read the book, talk, do the card match (pp. 6–7), and reflect (p. 19).	Print p. 7: one per group.
Session 1 · Read and Wonder About 20–30 minutes · core	Read Spreads 1–12. Pause at Spreads 2, 5, and 10. Retell the order of the cards with p. 11 or by pointing in the book.	Print p. 11: one per child (optional).
Session 2 · Match and Sort About 20–30 minutes · core	Card match (pp. 6–7). Sort what is real and what is imaginary using the book's "Story or fact?" question.	Print p. 7: one per group. Optional p. 10.
Session 3 · Connect and Create About 20–30 minutes · core	Return to Gus' question on Spread 12. Each child makes a card about one moment worth sharing (p. 16).	Print p. 16: one per child.
Extension A · Map work About 15–25 minutes · optional	Follow the Cards (p. 13): find each place in story order and Gus' home in Pennsylvania.	Print p. 13: one per child or pair.
Extension B · Voices and numbers About 15–25 minutes · optional	Who Said It? (p. 14) as a short reader's theater, and Count the Cards (p. 15).	Print pp. 14–15 as chosen.

Labels. Teacher pages say TEACHER GUIDE or CORE LESSON. Pages 9 to 15 are optional student sheets. Page 16 is the core student sheet for Session 3. Only the teacher needs the guide pages.

Make it fit. Use one main activity per session. Every sheet has a no-print choice: talk, point in the book, act, or draw on scrap paper.

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TEACHER GUIDE | SKILLS AND STANDARDS

Skills at a Glance

What Does Christmas Look Like at Your House?

Use the chart to see the skills each activity practices. For K–1, read directions aloud and accept pointing, drawing, oral answers or dictation. Grade 2 learners can give a reason and support it with a story detail.

Activity · companion page	Grades K–1	Grade 2
Read-aloud and talk · 5	Ask and answer questions about key details	Use story details to explain an idea
Card match · 6–7	Match a picture to a named place	Describe what one family does
Meet the friends · 9	Name characters and what they do	Tell how a friend helps, with a story detail
Words from the cards · 10	Use picture and story clues for new words	Use a word in a sentence
Card order · 11	Order numbers 1 to 6	Retell the cards in story order
Think about the story · 12	Choose an answer from the story	Write a full sentence with a detail
Follow the cards map · 13	Point to places on a map with support	Compare two places on the map
Who Said It? · 14	Name characters and what they say	Read a line in a character's voice
Count the cards · 15	Count to 6; add or take away within 10	Subtract within 100
Make a card from home · 16	Draw or dictate a moment to share	Write a caption and a question for a reader

Standards-friendly notes

Reading and listening. Asking and answering questions about key details, describing characters, using illustrations, and retelling events in order are common K–2 reading goals. The discussion on p. 5 also supports speaking and listening in small and large groups.

Geography and social studies. Children use a map to locate places and compare how families in different places celebrate Christmas, such as summer in Australia and snow in Pennsylvania. Keep each family as one example, not a rule for a whole country.

Math and writing. Children count to six, add one more, and, in grade 2, subtract within 100. On p. 16 they draw, dictate, or write about one moment to share.

This chart names skills practiced. It is not a formal alignment; match the activities to your own state or district standards.

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TEACHER GUIDE | READ ALOUD

Read, Talk & Wonder

What Does Christmas Look Like at Your House?

Before reading

Show the cover and read the title. What might someone draw on a Christmas card? Explain that an atlas is a book of maps. Invite predictions about where the cards might come from. Children may talk about the story instead of sharing family practices.

During reading · three planned pauses

Spread 2. How many children are sending cards? How many envelopes did Ralph count? Where could the last card be? Keep the question open.

Spread 5. What is Las Posadas? Listen for singing at a door to ask for a place to stay, and being welcomed in. The song tells how Mary and Joseph looked for a place to stay before Jesus was born.

Spread 10. When did Rocky bring the last envelope? One January morning. What does January 7 mean to the child who sent it? That's when the family celebrates Christmas, called Genna.

After reading · choose a question to revisit

Spreads 1–2. What did Gus draw on his card? Why does Sam want a tail? What will Ms. Hazel do with the cards?

Spreads 3–6. Why does the girl in Australia wear shorts in December? Who sang back at the door in Mexico? Why does Sam say, "They're both presents!"?

Spreads 7–9. What did the child in the Philippines make with Grandpa? What did the child in Poland watch for? What did Gus add to his card?

Spreads 10–12. What is Genna? What did the child hear before seeing the priests? What question did Gus write on the back of his card?

Words to say together

An **atlas** is a book of maps. An **envelope** holds a card or letter. **Las Posadas** (lahs poh-SAH-dahs), **hallacas** (ah-YAH-kahs), **parol** (pah-ROHL), and **Genna** (GEH-nah) are words from the cards. See p. 10.

Guide the conversation

Gus and his friends are imaginary, and so are the children who wrote to them. The places and traditions in their cards are real. For Christians, Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus. Several cards connect to that story: the Las Posadas song about Mary and Joseph, the star that led the wise men to Bethlehem, and church on Genna. Say "Christians believe…" or "In this family…". Families celebrate in different ways, and some families do not celebrate Christmas. Personal sharing is always optional.

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CORE LESSON | TEACHER SCRIPT | 15 MINUTES

Card Match

What Does Christmas Look Like at Your House?

Keep this page with the teacher. Give each pair or small group one prepared set from p. 7: six picture cards and six place labels. Story connection: Spreads 2–11.

1. Remember the cards

Shuffle the six picture cards and spread them face up. Ask, "Which card do you remember? What did the child draw?" Children can point, act, or describe.

2. Match each card to a place

Groups put each place label under its card. Revisit the book to check: the cherries came from Australia, and the paper doors from Mexico.

3. Put the cards in story order

Ask, "Which card did Gus open first?" Groups line the cards up 1 to 6. Ask, "Which card came last? When did it come?" (Ethiopia, one January morning.)

4. Look for things that are alike

Ask, "Which cards show a star?" (the parol and the first star in Poland). "Which cards show sharing or welcoming?" (hallacas for a neighbor, Grandma opening the doors). "Which cards show a grandparent?" (Mexico, the Philippines, Ethiopia).

5. Look for things that are different

Ask, "Why is the Australia card sunny when Gus' card is snowy?" December is summer in Australia. "Why is Christmas on January 7 for the child in Ethiopia?" That is when the family celebrates Genna.

6. Check the big idea

Read Gus' question from Spread 12. Ask, "Does Christmas look the same at every house?" Listen for "no," with a detail from two cards.

Connect the game to the book

On Christmas Eve, five envelopes were already on the table. The friends opened them one at a time. Rocky brought the sixth one January morning. The friends learned about each place through the cards and Ms. Hazel's atlas. If children sort the cards a different way, ask them to show what they noticed in the book. Use the exit ticket on p. 19.

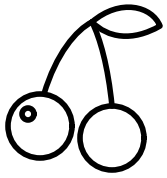
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CORE LESSON | ADULT PREPARATION

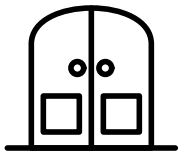
Card Match Cards & Labels

What Does Christmas Look Like at Your House?

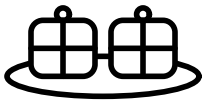
Prepare one set per pair or small group. Cut apart the six picture cards and the six place labels. Shuffle each pile separately before giving it to the group. Follow the teacher script on p. 6.



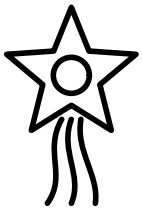
A bowl of cherries. A girl with a bat. Dad looks in the bushes for the ball.



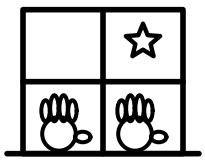
A card that opens like wooden doors. Children sing outside, asking for a place to stay.



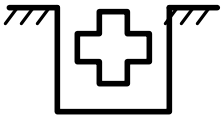
A child knocks on a blue door. A man holds a plate with two green parcels.



A star lantern with long paper tails, made with bamboo and yellow paper.



A silver star high above a rooftop. Two small handprints on a window.



A child holds Grandma's hand in the dark. A church is carved into the rock.

Place labels (cut apart)

AUSTRALIA	MEXICO	VENEZUELA
THE PHILIPPINES	POLAND	ETHIOPIA

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TEACHER GUIDE | OPTIONAL ACTIVITIES

Optional Activity Menu

What Does Christmas Look Like at Your House?

Choose only what fits your learners. Print one copy per child unless noted. Every sheet also works as a no-print talk, point, or act-it-out activity.

Page	Activity	Session	Route
9	Meet the Friends	1	Optional
10	Words from the Cards	2	Optional
11	Which Card Came Next?	1	Optional
12	Think About the Story	1 or 2	Optional
13	Follow the Cards (map)	Extension A	Optional
14	Who Said It?	Extension B	Optional
15	Count the Cards	Extension B	Optional
16	Make a Card from Home	3	Core for Session 3
17	Christmas Card Traveler certificate	Any	Optional

Low-print and no-print choices

Card order (p. 11): six children hold the picture cards from p. 7 and line up in story order.

Map (p. 13): show the book's map page, "Where the Cards Came From," on a screen and point together.

Who Said It? (p. 14): read each line aloud in a voice and let children call out the speaker.

Make a card (p. 16): fold any sheet of paper, following the book's "Make a Card from Home" page.

Just for fun

The separate **Coloring & Fun Pack** (3 pages) has a card to color, a matching page, and a little crossword. It can be enjoyed on its own at home or in class.

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OPTIONAL STUDENT SHEET | SESSION 1 | CHARACTERS

Meet the Friends

What Does Christmas Look Like at Your House?

Name _____ **Date** _____

Color each friend. Use the color clues so they look like the book. Tell a partner what one friend does in the story.



Gus · the groundhog
draws a Christmas card for the class book.

Color clue: green plaid scarf



Sam · the squirrel
wants Gus to draw his tail on the card.

Color clue: red scarf



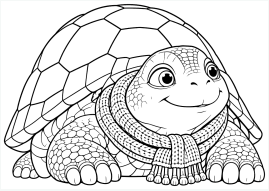
Ralph · the rabbit
counts the envelopes and passes around star cookies.

Color clue: red vest, gold buttons



Rocky · the robin
brings the mail and reads a card.

Color clue: cream hat with a pom-pom



Ms. Hazel · the tortoise
opens her atlas and puts the cards in a book.

Color clue: raspberry-plum scarf

Which friend would you like to help make the class book? Why?

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OPTIONAL STUDENT SHEET | SESSION 2 | VOCABULARY

Words from the Cards

What Does Christmas Look Like at Your House?

Name _____ **Date** _____

Read each word card with a grown-up. Then use the word bank to finish each sentence.

atlas
a book of maps

envelopes
paper covers that hold cards or letters

Las Posadas
before Christmas, people sing at a door to ask for a place to stay, then are welcomed in

hallacas
corn dough with a filling, wrapped in banana leaves

parol
a Christmas star lantern from the Philippines

Genna
The family in Ethiopia calls Christmas Genna. They celebrate on January 7.

atlas · envelopes · Las Posadas · hallacas · parol · Genna

1. Ms. Hazel opened her _____ to find each place.
2. Ralph counted five _____.
3. The boy and his cousins sang at the door for _____.
4. The family in Venezuela took two _____ to their neighbor.
5. Grandpa and the child made a _____ with bamboo and yellow paper.
6. The child in Ethiopia calls Christmas _____.

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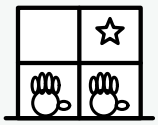
OPTIONAL STUDENT SHEET | SESSION 1 | RETELL

Which Card Came Next?

What Does Christmas Look Like at Your House?

Name _____ **Date** _____

Number the pictures from 1 to 6 to show the order the cards were opened.
Look back at the book if you need help.

☐ 

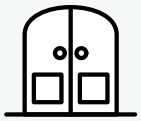
A star above a rooftop and two small handprints

☐ 

Cherries, a cricket bat, and a ball in the bushes

☐ 

A church carved into the rock

☐ 

A card that opens like two wooden doors

☐ 

A star lantern with long paper tails

☐ 

Two green parcels on a plate

The last card came in January. When is Christmas for that child's family?

_____

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OPTIONAL STUDENT SHEET | SESSION 1 OR 2 | COMPREHENSION

Think About the Story

What Does Christmas Look Like at Your House?

Name _____ **Date** _____

Listen to each question. Circle the best answer.

1. In Australia, what season is it in December?

summer winter spring

2. At Las Posadas, the children sing to ask for…

a cookie a place to stay a ball

3. How many hallacas did the child and Dad take to their neighbor?

2 4 40

4. What did Grandpa bend to make the parol's frame?

bamboo strips snow string

5. Before Christmas Eve supper, the family in Poland watches for…

the mail the first star the sun

6. When is Genna, Christmas for the child in Ethiopia?

December 25 January 7 New Year's Day

Draw or write: Why did Sam say, "They're both presents!"?

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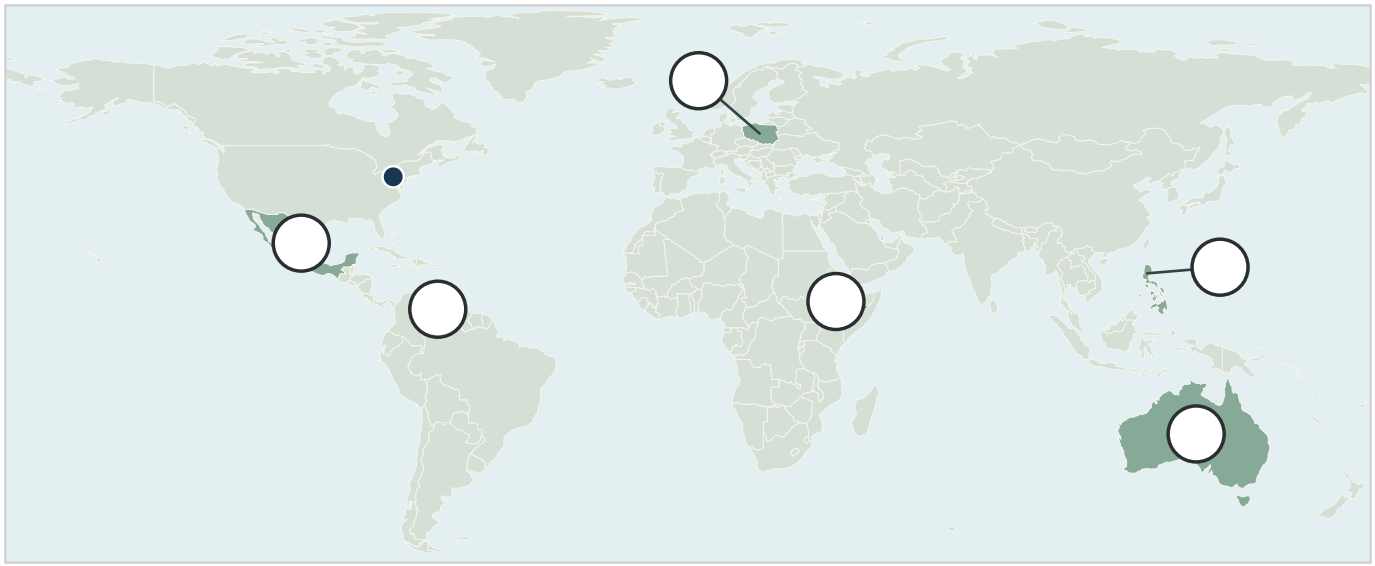
OPTIONAL STUDENT SHEET | EXTENSION A | GEOGRAPHY

Follow the Cards

What Does Christmas Look Like at Your House?

Name _____ **Date** _____

Write the numbers 1 to 6 in the empty circles to show the order the cards were opened. Use the key. The blue dot is Gus' home in Pennsylvania.



Land outlines: Natural Earth, public domain. Circles show approximate locations, not country borders.

Key

1. Australia: cherries and cricket
2. Mexico: Las Posadas
3. Venezuela: hallacas for a neighbor
4. The Philippines: a parol
5. Poland: the first star
6. Ethiopia: Genna, January 7

Which place is far from Gus' home? What was on that card?

_____

_____

Grade 2: Choose two places. How are their cards alike or different?

_____

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OPTIONAL STUDENT SHEET | EXTENSION B | CHARACTERS

Who Said It?

What Does Christmas Look Like at Your House?

Name _____ **Date** _____

Who said each line? Write the speaker's name. Then read one line aloud in that friend's voice.

Gus · Sam · Ralph · Rocky · Ms. Hazel

1. "Where am I?" _____
2. "Five. We're still waiting for one." _____
3. "Where shall we start?" _____
4. "I wonder who's in there." _____
5. "Which one do you think is a present?" _____
6. "I see another star." _____
7. "Is that a lantern, too?" _____
8. "Look at the date." _____

Give the characters a voice

Pick a line. How does that friend feel? Say it softly, excitedly, or in a whisper, and tell a partner why.

_____

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OPTIONAL STUDENT SHEET | EXTENSION B | MATH

Count the Cards

What Does Christmas Look Like at Your House?

Name _____ **Date** _____

Use the story to count. Show your thinking with pictures, numbers, or words.

Part A · Kindergarten



Ralph counted _____ envelopes.

One more came in January. Now there are _____ cards.

Part B · Grade 1

The class book holds 6 cards. Gus' card is in the pocket on the cover. How many cards are there in all?

6 + 1 = _____

Practice: Ralph has 10 star cookies. The 5 friends each take one. How many cookies are left?

10 − 5 = _____

Part C · Grade 2

The family in Venezuela made 40 hallacas. Dad and the child took 2 to their neighbor. How many hallacas were left?

40 − 2 = _____

Show how you know:

The envelopes, cards, and hallacas match the story. The cookie numbers are practice, not a count from the story.

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STUDENT SHEET | SESSION 3 | CORE

Make a Card from Home

What Does Christmas Look Like at Your House?

Name _____ **Date** _____

Gus drew the old oak, his front door, and a snowman. Then he added Sam's tail. What one moment would you share on a card? You can draw Christmas, another special day, or a favorite moment from the book.

Front of my card

Add a detail someone will have to look for, like Sam's tail!

Back of my card

This is a picture of _____

My question for the reader: _____

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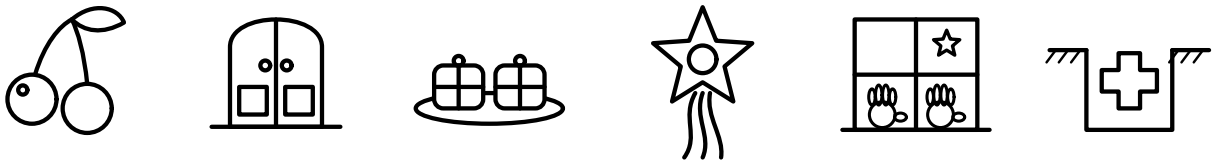
Christmas Card Traveler

Certificate

This certificate is proudly given to

_____

for enjoying **What Does Christmas Look Like at Your House?**
and discovering how six families celebrate Christmas.



_____ _____

Teacher Date

TEACHER GUIDE | ANSWERS

Answer Key & Assessment

What Does Christmas Look Like at Your House?

Page 9 · Meet the Friends

Colors follow the clues from the book. Accept any friend and a reason connected to the story, such as Ralph counting the envelopes or Ms. Hazel making the class book.

Page 10 · Words from the Cards

1. atlas 2. envelopes 3. Las Posadas 4. hallacas 5. parol 6. Genna. Accept matching oral answers or pointing to the word cards.

Page 11 · Which Card Came Next?

Top row: star and handprints 5, cherries 1. Middle row: church 6, wooden doors 2. Bottom row: star lantern 4, green parcels 3. The child's family celebrates Christmas on January 7 (Genna). Children may also say "January seventh," as Rocky reads it.

Page 12 · Think About the Story

1. summer 2. a place to stay 3. 2 4. bamboo strips 5. the first star 6. January 7. Sam's question: Sam thought only one parcel was a present, but both hallacas were a gift for the neighbor. Accept "they were both food to share" or "they were both gifts."

Page 13 · Follow the Cards

1 Australia, 2 Mexico, 3 Venezuela, 4 the Philippines, 5 Poland, 6 Ethiopia. The friends use the cards and Ms. Hazel's atlas. Accept any far place with its card detail. For Grade 2, accept a comparison supported by two cards. For example, the child in the Philippines makes a star lantern with Grandpa. The child in Poland watches for the first star in the sky.

Notice understanding and adapt

Look for: a child matches a card to its place and shows or tells one way two cards are alike or different. **If children need support:** show two cards side by side. Read the words aloud and invite children to point. **If children are ready for more:** ask which detail on each card supports their answer. **Likely misconception:** that the friends visited each country. They read cards and looked in the atlas.

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TEACHER GUIDE | ANSWERS

Answer Key & Exit Ticket

What Does Christmas Look Like at Your House?

Page 14 · Who Said It?

1. Sam 2. Ralph 3. Ms. Hazel 4. Gus 5. Sam 6. Rocky 7. Gus 8. Rocky. For the voice prompt, accept different feelings when children explain how the words support their choice.

Page 15 · Count the Cards

Part A: 5 envelopes; 6 cards. Part B: 6 + 1 = 7 cards; 10 − 5 = 5 cookies. Part C: 40 − 2 = 38 hallacas. Accept drawings, counting on, or a number line.

Page 16 · Make a Card from Home

Accept any moment the child chooses to share: Christmas, another special day, or a moment from the book. Look for a clear picture, one hidden detail, and a question for a reader. Children can draw, speak, write, or dictate. Family sharing is optional.

Page 7 · Card Match

Match each picture to its place in story order.

1. Cherries (Australia)
2. Wooden doors (Mexico)
3. Two wrapped hallacas (Venezuela)
4. Star lantern (the Philippines)
5. Star above a rooftop (Poland)
6. Rock-hewn church (Ethiopia)

For stars, use the lantern and the star above the rooftop. For sharing or welcoming, use the hallacas and the wooden doors. The doors, lantern, and church cards each mention a grandparent.

Exit ticket · 5 minutes

Let each child choose a card. Ask, “Where did this card come from?” Place a second card beside it. Ask, “Show or tell one way these two cards are alike or different.” Children can point, draw, or dictate. If time allows, invite them to finish, “On my card, I would draw _____.”

Return to the book

On Spreads 3–11, revisit each card and its place. On Spread 12, read Gus’ question again and notice that his card now shows his friends and Sam’s bushy tail. Ask what the class book shows about Christmas at different homes. Listen for “it looks different in different places” and for one thing that is the same, such as being together, sharing, or a star.

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TEACHER GUIDE | SOURCES AND PERMISSIONS

Teacher Notes & Sources

What Does Christmas Look Like at Your House?

For the teacher. Gus, his friends, and the children who send cards are fictional. The places and traditions in the cards are real. Customs vary among families and within each country. Use "in this family" and "some families" with learners. Story references use Spread 1 through Spread 12.

Background and sources

Christmas · Britannica, "Christmas." Christmas is a Christian festival celebrating the birth of Jesus, also observed as a family holiday. Many churches celebrate on December 25; churches that use the Julian calendar celebrate on January 7. In Mexico, Las Posadas reenacts Mary and Joseph's search for a place to stay.
https://www.britannica.com/topic/Christmas

Australia · Study Australia, "A Classic Aussie Christmas." Christmas Day falls in summer in Australia, and many people spend it outdoors.
https://www.studyaustralia.gov.au/en_in/tools-and-resources/tips-and-advice-for-students/a-classic-aussie-christmas

Australia · State Library of South Australia, "In the heat of a colonial Christmas." Local Christmas customs include backyard cricket, and celebration food includes cherries.
https://www.slsa.sa.gov.au/heat-of-a-colonial-christmas

Mexico · Secretaría de Cultura, México, "Las Posadas." Las Posadas take place on the nine days before Christmas, December 16 to 24. Singers outside ask for lodging, and those inside sing back before welcoming them.
https://mexicana.cultura.gob.mx/es/repositorio/x2aij4d0op-0

Venezuela · Ciara Hulet, KUER, on NPR, "A Venezuelan family celebrates Christmas from Utah with traditional dish of hallacas." Hallacas are made by spreading corn dough on banana leaves, adding a filling, and wrapping them.
https://www.npr.org/2023/12/25/1221536731/a-venezuelan-family-celebrates-christmas-from-utah-with-traditional-dish-of-hall

The Philippines · City of Las Piñas, "Parol Making." The parol is a star-shaped Christmas lantern that recalls the star that guided the wise men. Traditional parols use a bamboo frame covered with paper.
https://laspinascity.gov.ph/lifestyle/32/parol-making

Poland · Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange (NAWA), "Polish Christmas Traditions." The Christmas Eve supper, Wigilia, begins when the first star appears; children often look for it.
https://study.gov.pl/news/polish-christmas-traditions-how-do-we-celebrate-christmas-poland

Ethiopia · Fenet Hailu, Ethiopian News Agency, "Unique Features of Ethiopian Christmas 'Genna'." Genna is celebrated on January 7. Worshippers dress in white for church services, and in Lalibela priests sing with drums.
https://www.ena.et/web/eng/w/en_5346

Ethiopia · UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "Rock-Hewn Churches, Lalibela." Eleven medieval churches in Lalibela were carved out of solid rock and are still places of worship.
https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/18/

Sources reviewed November 22, 2026. The map uses Natural Earth land outlines, which are in the public domain.

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