



ALASKA JUNIOR THEATER'S 2025 - 2026 SEASON

TEACHER STUDY GUIDE 2025-2026 SEASON

Holiday Tales: A Season of Miracles



School Shows: December 9-12, 2025

10:30 AM & 12:15 PM

Public Show: Saturday, December 13, 2025

2:00 PM Matinee

Discovery Theatre



Alaska Junior Theater * 430 W 7th Ave, Suite 210 * Anchorage, AK 99501

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- Curriculum Connections
- Activities for the Classroom
- Learning Resources
- Theatre Etiquette
- Performance Background

Curriculum Standards

Alaska Junior Theater, we believe that every child deserves the chance to experience the transformative power of live professional theatre, regardless of their financial circumstances.

Since 1981, Alaska Junior Theater (AJT), a private nonprofit organization, has been dedicated to bringing the best in professional theatre from around the world to Alaska's young audiences. Each year, more than 25,000 students experience live performances at the Alaska Center for the Performing Arts. For many, these school-time shows are their only opportunity to experience the magic of live performing arts.



Each production we present is carefully selected for its strong educational value and direct connection to Alaska Content Standards. In addition to performances, AJT offers enriching teacher and student workshops, in-depth study guides and classroom transportation to ensure accessibility for schools across the region.

We are deeply committed to equity and access. By keeping our educational ticket price at just \$10, we make live theatre affordable for all students—though that amount covers only half the actual cost of each ticket. To bridge this gap, we actively seek support from corporations, foundations and generous individuals. Their contributions help subsidize ticket prices and provide full scholarships to students with financial need.

To support educators in aligning classroom learning with live performances, Alaska Junior Theater invited area teachers to review our 2025/2026 Season offerings for direct connections to Alaska Content Standards. These curriculum-aligned connections help assure teachers and administrators that AJT programs not only inspire students through the performing arts but also support classroom goals.

To get a complete copy of the Alaska Content Standards, visit the following web address: www.eed.state.ak.us/contentstandards. Additional information about these standards can be found at the National Association for Music Education via <http://www.menc.org/resources/view/national-standards-for-music-education>.



Discovery Theatre, ACPA

Special thanks to Tina Johnson-Harris, Joan Pragman and Renee Wade for their help in this effort.

Alaska Standards

English/Language Arts: A, D
Math: A, B, C, D
Science: A, B
Geography: A, C, D
History: A, B, C
Art: B, C, D
Library: A, B, C, D

Common Core Standards K-5

Writing Standards:
W 2, W 7

Math:
Geometry 1-8
Measurement & Data 1-8
Physical Science 4

National Music Standards

Creating: Imagine, Plan and
Make, Evaluate & Refine

Respond: Analyze, Interpret



Resources related to *Holiday Tales: A Season of Miracles*



Fiction:

Jan Brett's The Nutcracker by Jan Brett
Together for Kwanzaa by Juwanda G. Ford
Boris and Stella and the Perfect Gift by Dara Goldman
Gift of the Magi by O. Henry
The Nutcracker by Susanne Koppe
Moishe's Miracle: A Hanukkah Story
Li'l Rabbit's Kwanzaa by Donna L. Washington

E BRETT
E FORD
E GOLDMAN
E HENRY
E KOPPE
E MELMED
E WASHING

Non-fiction:

Christmas by Rachel Koestler-Grack
The Miracle of Hanukkah by Seymour Chwast
We Celebrate the Light by Jane Yolen
Kwanzaa by Rachel A. Koestler-Grack
Wonders and Miracles: A Passover Companion by Eric A. Kimmel
Norman Rockwell's Christmas Book by Norman Rockwell
While the Bear Sleeps: Winter Tales and Traditions by Caitlin Matthews

E 263.915 KOESTLE
E 296.435 CHWAST
E 394.261 YOLEN
E 394.2612 KOESTLE
J 296.437 KIMMEL
J 394.268 NORMAN
J 398.236 WHILE-TH

Audiobooks:

A Christmas Carol and Other Favorites by Jim Weiss
Bible Stories and the Miracle of Hanukkah by Doni Zasloff
Thomas

CD J WEISS
CD J 220.9505 ZASLOFF

DVDs:

Elmo's World: Happy Holidays!
Holiday Bonanza
Mickey's Once Upon a Christmas
20 Holiday Adventures

DVD J ELMOS-W
DVD J HOLIDAY
DVD J MICKEY
DVD J TWENTY



The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra by Benjamin Britten available for download on Hoopla. Check out ebooks and audio books at ListenAlaska and Hoopla and downloadable music at Freegal on the Anchorage Public Library

Website: www.anchoragepubliclibrary.org

About Pushcart Players

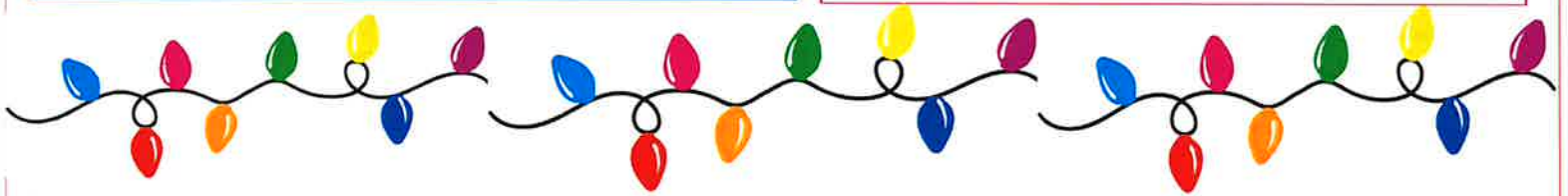
History: **Pushcart Players** was founded in 1974 as a professional ensemble of artists & educators whose primary goal was to increase the aesthetic world of children by introducing and involving them in the arts in schools.

Traveling to schools and theaters throughout the nation was, and continues to be, a high priority so that all children have the advantage of arts programming prepared, conducted and presented by outstanding professionals in this artistic field.

Because theatre is a synthesis of all the arts and provides an excellent vehicle for the introduction of music, dance, poetry, prose and other artistic expression, it became the centerpiece of many innovative residencies and workshops offered in **Pushcart's Arts** in education programming.

HIGHLIGHTS: **Pushcart Players** developed hundreds of replicable arts residency and workshop programs as well as wrote and produced twenty-seven original musical plays that address culturally diverse issues, make history vivid and social studies relevant for students. The company has traveled more than two million miles to bring these programs to 10 million young people in 35 states across the nation.

In 1991, **Pushcart** brought world of the arts to the former Soviet Union in a highly successful performance tour, for which they were commended and were recorded in the Congressional Record for "... their contribution to a greater understanding between our two cultures." U. S. Senator Frank Lautenberg stated, "**Pushcart Players** has proven how art can transcend cultural barriers."



MISSION: **Pushcart Players'** mission is to provide professionally produced theater, workshops and residencies for K – 12 students to foster in-depth understanding, discovery, participation and life long love for and support of the arts. The artistic philosophy of **Pushcart Players** is rooted in the belief that the arts – “an inseparable part of the human journey” – are an essential component of the educational process in that they help children grow intellectually, socially and emotionally and provide a powerful tool in reaching one's unique potential.

ACHIEVEMENTS:

- 1) The artistic impact and inspiration for more than 250,000 children each year across the nation – and the world.
- 2) New material and expanded roster generated by **Pushcart's** artistic team including in-roads in Holocaust Education through the arts with gentle introductions to this difficult subject. Our current production, “The Last . . . Butterfly” is an innovative and artistically beautiful production, linked to an Artists Residency and features an exhibit of art work by the children of the Terezin Concentration Camp.
- 3) Peer recognition of outstanding work resulting in selection for numerous national showcases (including the prestigious PACT and ARTS PRESENTERS showcases in NYC) that have led to national tours.
- 4) **Pushcart's** leadership role in collaborative efforts with other key arts in education organizations designed to maximize artistic strength and minimize duplication of effort. Over the past several years, **Pushcart** has collaborated with other art organizations on developing Sensory Friendly Performances for children on the Autism Spectrum and other needs.
- 5) International recognition and acclaim, including a highly successful tour of the Czech Republic in June, 2002 and arts education for teens in Ethiopia in 2006.

Prologue:

*T'was the night before Christmas
And Chanukah too.
Kwanzaa was happenin'
And everyone knew
That all 'round the world
Folks in their own way
Were fixing and fussing
For a grand holiday*



Thus begins “*A Season of Miracles*”, continuing with the introduction of Clara and Fritz (siblings from “*The Nutcracker*” story) who are anxiously waiting for the 10 o’clock chime. This is the time when the doors of the Great Room will finally open. Here they will see the magical tree, laden with decorations, and the holiday gifts and surprises that await them. They open a book to help pass the time and as they move from story to story, it comes to life for us, the audience, to enjoy. The first story they read is “*The Gift of the Magi*.”

“*The Gift of the Magi*” by O. Henry

This is perhaps one of the most precious of holiday stories - one that readers and audiences enjoy hearing over and over again. A young loving couple wants only to make each other happy. Having a pitifully insufficient amount of money to spend on gifts, the young bride, Della, decides to cut her splendid, long hair and sell it. With the money she gains for her hair, she buys her husband, Jim, a silver chain for his prized possession - an heirloom pocket watch. In the meantime, unbeknownst to Della, Jim has sold his watch to get the money needed to buy special decorative combs for Della to wear in her beautiful hair. With neither hair for the combs or a watch for the chain, Della and Jim realize that they, after all, have the most precious gift of all -- their love for each other and the great joy and fulfillment of giving.

Discussion Points

- What does this story have to do with the spirit of the holidays’?
- What can we learn from Della and Jim’?
- What do you think Della and Jim learned about themselves’?
- Discuss “values” and “perspectives” (i.e. focusing on what we have rather than what we don’t have, counting our blessings, etc.)
- Share stories or anecdotes about having done something for or given something to someone that made them happy.



“The Kwanzaa Kite” by Ruth Frost

Set in Nigeria, this is the story of a little girl, Kito, who wants to be like her older brothers and sisters and make a kite for the Kwanzaa Festival of the Flying Kite. They scoff and tell her she is “too young,” but she is undaunted and resourceful. Over time she finds many opportunities to collect pieces of fabric and string. With patience, industry and artistry, Kito creates a patchwork kite, which, in the end, is the most beautiful of all! Everyone wants a kite like hers. So Kito and her family go into the business of making Kwanzaa kites that they sell in abundance each year at the marketplace. This story represents and illustrates the seven principles of Kwanzaa: unity, self-determination, collective work, responsibility, co-operative economics, purpose, creativity and faith.



Special symbols of Kwanzaa

- Fruits and Vegetables - symbolize the harvest
- Seven Candles - one black, three green and three red are lighted. These symbolize the Nguzo Saba (en- GOO-Zoh SAH-bah) or seven principals to be carried into daily life throughout the year.

They are as follows:

- 1) **Unity** - Umoja (oo-MOH-jah) - To strive for and maintain unity in the family, community, nation and race.
- 2) **Self-determination** - Kujichagulia (koo-jee-cha-goo-LEE-ah) - To define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves and speak for ourselves.
- 3) **Collective Work and Responsibility** - Ujima (oo-JEE-mah) - To build and maintain the community together and help solve the problems of our sisters and brothers as though they were our own.
- 4) **Co-operative Economics** - Ujamaa (oo-jah-MAH-ah) - To build and maintain stores, shops and other businesses and profit from them together.
- 5) **Purpose** - Nia (Nee-ah) - To make a collective vocation of the building and developing of the community in order to restore the traditional greatness of the African heritage.
- 6) **Creativity** - Kumba (koo-OOM-bah) - To always do whatever is possible to leave the community more beautiful and beneficial than when it was inherited.
- 7) **Faith** - Imani (ee-MAH-nee) - To believe whole heartedly in our people, our parents, our leaders and ourselves.



The Chanukah Miracle

In this story, a farmer loses his hayfork as he travels through the town of Chelm. Kitzel finds the hayfork in the road and he and his friend believe that it is a Menorah. They polish it up, put candles on the tines and bring it to the synagogue. The villagers are amazed and word quickly spreads about this big, shiny menorah. People come from far and wide to see it, including the farmer who recognizes it as his. An argument ensues as to whether it is a menorah or a hayfork and the dispute is brought to the wisest person in Chelm. She suggests that it may or may not have been a hayfork, but once it is made into a holy object, such as a menorah it must remain a menorah. The farmer objects but when the wise person says that Kitzel must pay the farmer to keep the menorah Kitzel objects. Humor saves the day and a spirited Hora (dance) celebrates the miracle of the moment.



The Origin of Chanuka

The Chanukah celebration is rooted in a miracle that happened to the Jews thousands of years ago in the land of Judea. The king of Syria, Antiochus ordered the Jews to give up their religion and worship the Greek gods instead. Some did, but others refused. One was Judah Maccabee who formed an army and after three years, was successful in driving the Syrians out of their land and reclaiming the Temple that belonged to the Jewish people. The Macabees went to rekindle the eternal light (known as the N'er Tamid) but found only enough oil for a single day. They filled the lamp with the small amount of oil, knowing it would take them at least a week to get more oil. Then, a miracle happened. The tiny amount of oil lasted for eight days, and the eternal light was still burning when they returned. To this day, Jews celebrate Chanukah to mark the victory over the Syrians and the re-dedication of the Temple. Chanukah is known as the Festival of Lights because it lasts for eight days to commemorate the miracle of the oil for the eternal light. It is symbolized by the lighting of the Menorah - one additional candle each night until all eight candles are lit, plus the "shammes," a ninth candle that sits higher than the others and is used to light the other candles.

Discussion Points

- Have you ever found something and not recognized it for what it actually was?
- Do you think Kitzel and Motke used their imaginations when they found the hayfork? Why?
- Discuss the concept of "thinking outside the box."
- Discuss the concept of not judging something by the way it looks; defining or judging ourselves or others by how they look or what they wear.



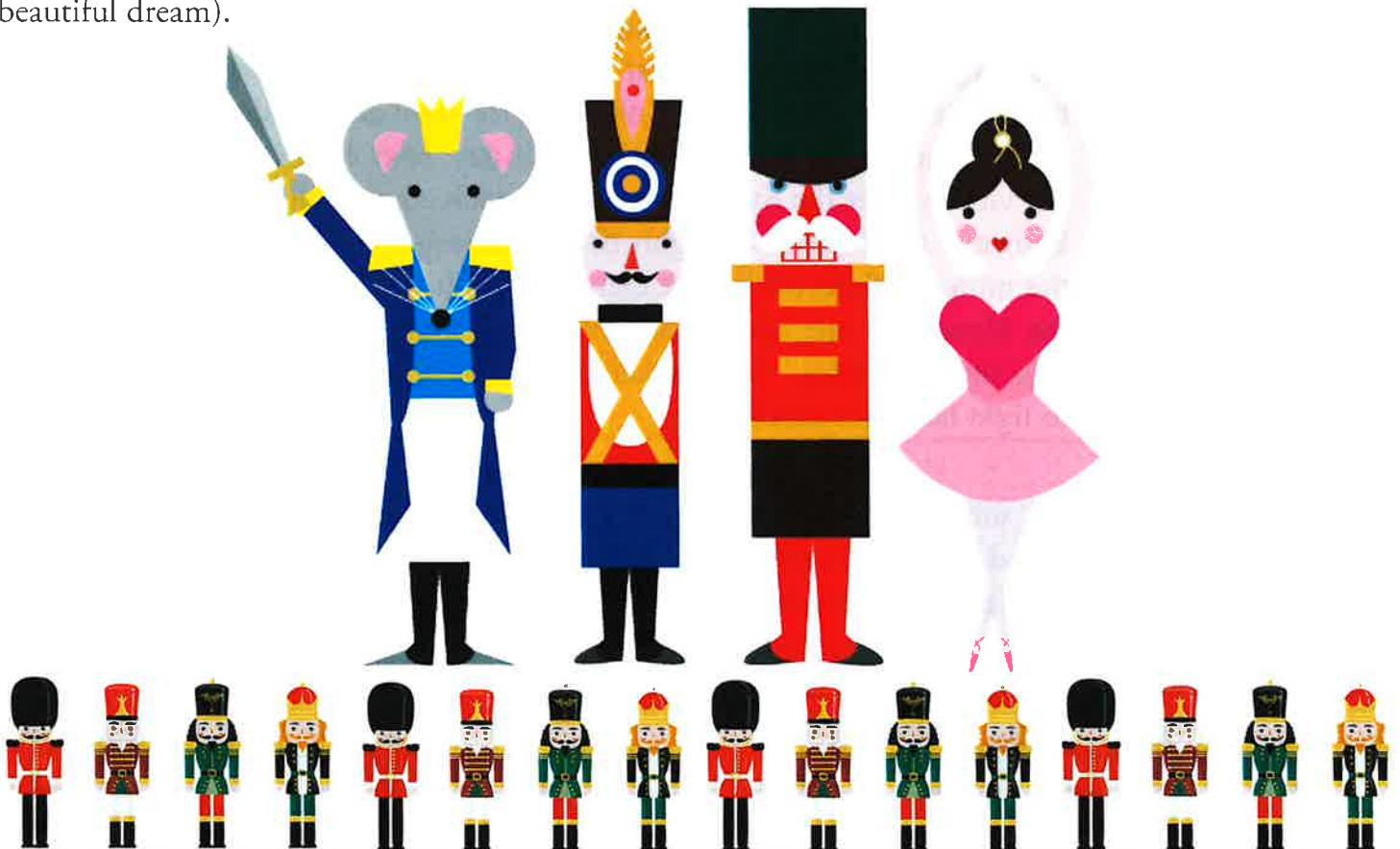
“The Nutcracker” by E.T.A. Hoffman

In this abbreviated version, adapted from E.T.A. Hoffmann’s classic tale, Clara and Fritz have been waiting all day for the Christmas Eve festivities. Joy is abundant, until Fritz, Clara’s younger brother, damages the nutcracker that she found under the tree and instantly adored. Godfather Drosselmeier mends the nutcracker and sends Fritz off to bed. Clara lingers a bit longer and falls asleep in a chair by the tree. Clara dreams of a battle between the mice and the nutcracker and his men. She throws her shoe at the Mouse King, and once again, has come to the nutcracker’s rescue. He is grateful and takes her on an enchanted journey. When Clara is awakened, she tells her mother about the voyage and is surprised when the doorbell rings and Godfather Drosselmeier enters with his nephew, who bears a remarkable resemblance to her dear new Prince, the Nutcracker.



Discussion Points

- Have students share stories by telling or writing about a favorite surprise for the holidays.
- Ask students to discuss the following:
 - How much of what happens in “Nutcracker” do they believe is part of a dream?
 - What parts do they believe really happened? Why?
- Do a creative drama exercise (improvisation) on one small section of The Nutcracker story (i.e. The battle between the mice and the toy soldiers; A journey into an enchanted forest; Waking up from a beautiful dream).



History of Christmas

How Did Christmas Start?

Early Europeans celebrated light and birth in the darkest days of winter. Many people rejoiced during the winter solstice, when the worst of the winter was behind them and they could look forward to longer days and more sunlight. In Scandinavia, the Norse celebrated Yule from winter solstice, through January. In recognition of the return of the sun, fathers and sons would bring home large logs, which they would set on fire. The people would feast until the log burned out, which could take as many as 12 days. The Norse believed that each spark from the fire represented a new pig or calf that would be born during the coming year. In Germany, people honored the pagan god Odin during the mid-winter holiday. Germans were terrified of Odin, as they believed he made nocturnal flights through the sky to observe his people.



'The Christmas Party' by Robert D. Wilkie, c.1850

When Christmas Was Canceled

In the 17th century, religious reform changed Christmas in Europe. When Oliver Cromwell and his Puritan forces took over England in 1645, they canceled Christmas. By popular demand, Charles II was restored to the throne and, with him, came the return of Christmas. The pilgrims were even more orthodox in their Puritan beliefs than Cromwell. As a result, Christmas was not a holiday in early America. From 1659 to 1681, the celebration of Christmas was outlawed in Boston. Anyone exhibiting the Christmas spirit was fined five shillings. After the American Revolution, English customs, including Christmas, fell out of favor. In fact, Christmas wasn't declared a federal holiday until June 26, 1870.

Christmas Facts

- Each year, 25-30 million real Christmas trees are sold in the United States alone
- In the Middle Ages, Christmas celebrations were rowdy — a lot like today's Mardi Gras parties.
- Construction workers started the Rockefeller Center Christmas tree tradition in 1931.



History of Kwanzaa

The Creation of Kwanza

Dr. Maulana Karenga, professor and chairman of Black Studies at California State University, Long Beach, created Kwanzaa in 1966. Dr. Karenga searched for ways to unite African Americans as a community. He founded US, a cultural organization, and started researching the African “first fruit” celebrations. Karenga combined aspects of several different harvest celebrations, to form the basis of the week-long holiday. The name Kwanzaa is derived from the phrase “matunda ya kwanza” which means “first fruits” in Swahili. Celebrations often include songs and dances, African drums, storytelling, poetry reading, and a large traditional meal. On each of the seven nights, the family gathers and a child lights one of the candles on the Kinara (candleholder), then one of the seven principles is discussed. The principles, called the Nguzo Saba (seven principles in Swahili) are values of African culture which contribute to building and reinforcing community among African-Americans.

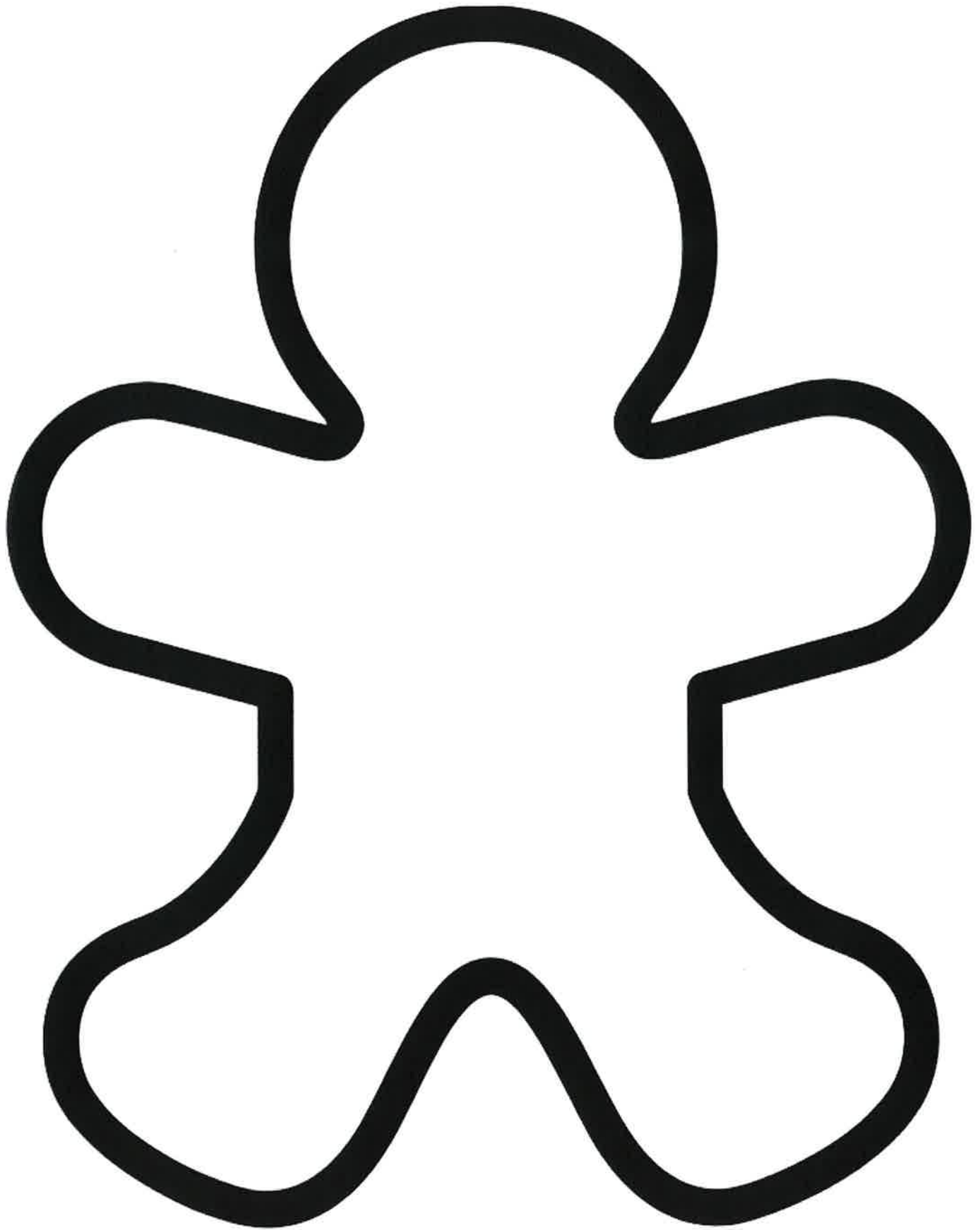


Facts about Kwanzaa

- An extra “a” was added to the name “Kawanzaa” spelling to make it a symbolic seven letters.
- Kwanzaa is a cultural, not a religious, holiday. It was designed to be celebrated by people of African descent of any faith.
- It is customary to pour libations during Kwanzaa ceremonies. This is a way to remember and honor ancestors. As a gesture of respect, many people pour a few drops of a liquid, such as water or wine.
- There is a special feast on the seventh day of Kwanzaa. On December 31st, families and friends gather to enjoy traditional African foods and music.



Decorate the Gingerbread Man



Pattern Recognition

Cut and glue the items into the correct spot.



Reindeer Games

- **Make a kite!**

Have students make their own Kwanzaa Kite out of scrap items.

To make a kite, create a frame by crossing two dowels in a 'T' shape, reinforcing the joint, and running a string around the ends. Cover the frame with a sail material like a plastic bag or paper, securing the edges. Attach a bridle string to the frame, create a tail, and tie your flying line to the bridle for a kite that is ready to fly.



- **Create your own dance to “*The Nutcracker Suite*”**

Have students (or groups) choreograph their own dance to a song of their choice.

- **Have a multicultural party.**

Have students make a holiday decoration for a holiday of their choice. Search the internet for symbols such as a dreidel, fruits and vegetables of the Kwanzaa Harvest, Christmas ornaments, etc.



- **Research foods associated with each holiday.**

Have students (or groups) research holiday foods. Prepare them in the classroom or bring in samples.

Color by Numbers

Color the Kinara by numbers.

COLOR BY CODE MULTIPLICATION

Name: _____



Solve the problem.



Color by code.

CODE:

18 - black

12 - green

54 - light blue

24 - dark blue

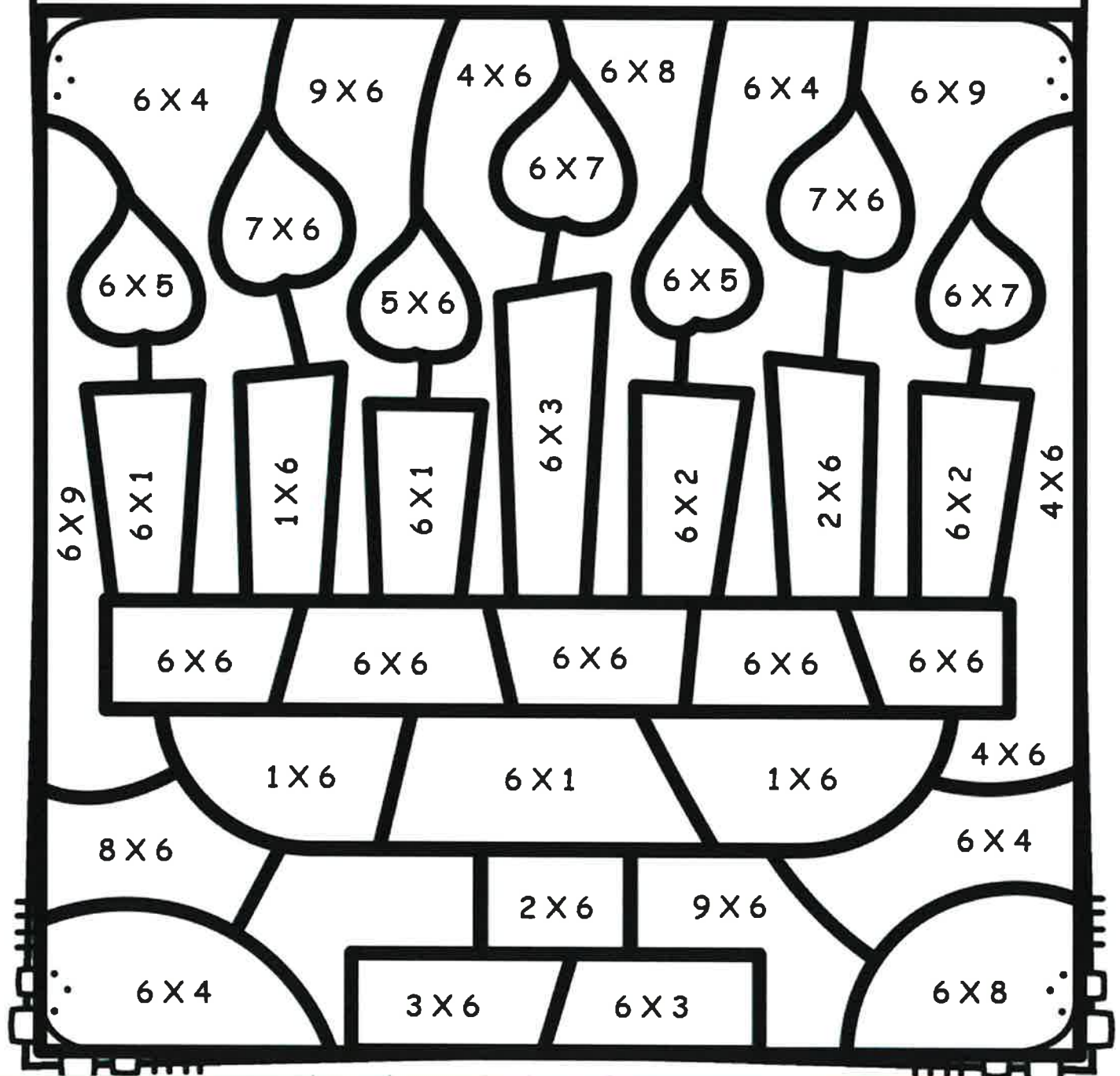
6 - red

42 - yellow

36 - brown

30 - yellow

48 - light blue



Matching Game

Match the item to the story



**THE KWANZAA
KITE**



The Channukah Miracle



**THE
Nutcracker**





Theater Etiquette

We have a wonderful opportunity at this performance to help youth learn about attending live performances. Please discuss the following with your students:

1. Concentrate to help the performers. The audience gives energy to the performer who uses that energy to give life to the performance. Sometimes young people do not realize how a live performance differs from watching a movie or television show. A live presentation has not been pre-recorded with the mistakes edited out. This makes it riskier for the performer and more exciting for the audience. It also means the audience has a real contribution to make to the overall event. Each audience member affects those around him/her as well as the performer. An usher will show you where to sit. Walk slowly and talk quietly as you enter the theater.
2. For safety's sake, do not lean over or sit on the balcony railings or box ledges. Please be careful on the stairs. Avoid horseplay and running throughout the building.
3. If necessary, use the restroom before the performance begins. Adults need to accompany young students. **After the show, we need the entire audience to go directly to their buses.**
4. You may talk quietly to the people next to you until the performance begins.
5. When the lights in the theater begin to dim, it is the signal that the performance is about to start. Stop talking and turn your attention to the stage.
6. Stay in your seat throughout the entire performance.
7. During the performance, listen quietly and watch closely. Talking during the performance will distract other audience members and performers. Try not to wiggle too much and don't kick the seat in front of you. These disruptions make it hard for others around you to concentrate on the show.
8. Sometimes during a performance you may respond by laughing, crying, or sighing. By all means feel free to do so! **LAUGHING IS APPROPRIATE.** (Teachers, please do not hush the students while they are laughing.) If something is funny, it's good to laugh. If you like something a lot, applaud. This will let the performers know that you are enjoying the show. **BUT PLEASE DO NOT TALK TO YOUR NEIGHBOR DURING THE SHOW!**
9. At the end of the show, **applaud to say thank you** to the performers. The performers will bow to acknowledge your appreciation and thank you for coming.
10. When the lights get brighter in the theater, the show is over. Stay in your seats until the OnStage Coordinator dismisses your school.
11. Please remember:
 - Taking photographs or using recording devices is strictly prohibited.
 - Beverages and food, including gum and candy, are not allowed in the theater.
 - You are only one person among several hundred in the audience.
 - Please respect the performers and your fellow audience members.

Please inform your adult chaperones that ushers will be available throughout the performance if there are any difficulties.

Thank You!