



Celebrating December

Spiritual Literacy Month

Bingo Month

Antarctica Day

December 1

Cookie Day

December 4

St. Nicholas Day

December 6

Poinsettia Day

December 12

Winter Solstice

December 21

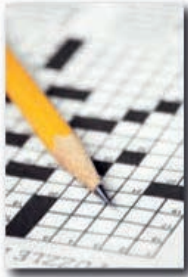
Hanukkah

December 22–30

Christmas

December 25

Across and Down



You don't need to be a *cruciverbalist*, someone skilled at solving or creating crossword puzzles, to celebrate Crossword Puzzle Day on December 21. On that date in 1913, the very first puzzle appeared in the Sunday *New York World* newspaper.

Even the most passionate cruciverbalists might be delighted to discover that the very first puzzle was called a "word-cross." Weeks after the first "word-cross" appeared, a typesetting error resulted in the puzzle being called a "cross-word," and it has been called that ever since.

No one knows what inspired Arthur Wynne to create the first crossword puzzle. Wynne was born in Liverpool, England, and moved to America at age 19, where he worked for newspapers in Pittsburgh and New York City. Word puzzles were fairly common in newspapers, but Wynne innovated many features of the crossword that still exist today. He created horizontal and vertical boxes for each letter, and he first used patterns of symmetrical black squares to separate the words into rows and columns. His first puzzle took the shape of a diamond with a hollow center. Numbered clues below corresponded to numbered boxes in the puzzle above, similar to today's crosswords, although the numbering system was slightly different. To help new puzzlers along, Wynne filled in the first answer with the letters F-U-N.

Crosswords have grown so popular that it's easy to forget that they are just over 100 years old. Wynne likely never imagined that his puzzle would appear in newspapers across the globe and spawn helplines where people pay for helpful clues. There are even annual crossword puzzle tournaments where the best-of-the-best crossword puzzle solvers compete against the clock and each other. Don't be intimidated or discouraged; crosswords are offered in a variety of levels, from easy to difficult, so on December 21, everyone can enjoy the satisfaction of being a cruciverbalist for a day.

Rub-a-Dub-Dub



On December 5, skip your worn-out shower routine and sink into a bath for Bathtub Party Day! Showers suffice if your only objective is to get clean, but there's something indulgent about reclining in a bathtub full of bubbles. What is more, using bath salts can transform a bath into a therapeutic experience. *Balneotherapy*, or immersion in mineral-laden water or mud, has been a medical remedy for millennia. Today's bath salts made from magnesium sulfate (Epsom salt) or sea salt replicate the experience. These minerals can have remarkable effects of reducing stress, relieving aches and pains, reducing skin irritations, and improving circulation. Add a few candles and some relaxing music, and your bathroom suddenly transforms into a world-class spa.

The Season of Sugar and Spice



December is chock full of holidays celebrating cookies. The first week of December is Cookie Cutter Week. The week of December 16–20 is Cookie Exchange Week. The 4th is Cookie Day, the 12th is Gingerbread House Day, and the 14th is Gingerbread Decorating Day. No wonder December is heralded as “the most wonderful time of the year”! Baking and exchanging sweets have been winter solstice traditions for hundreds of years.

The winter solstice has long been celebrated around the world by many cultures, and food has always been associated with these traditions. It was during the Middle Ages that dessert became an important part of winter solstice feasts. This was due to an influx of new and exotic ingredients, including spices like cinnamon, nutmeg, and black pepper, and sweet fruits like dates and apricots. Wealthy families added these fine new ingredients to their pantries, and their cooks created new and wonderful pastries and cookies. It became a sign of great wealth to send friends and rivals gifts of baked sweets.

One of the oldest and most popular cookies was springerle, the anise-flavored cookie that originated in the German province of Swabia in the 15th century. Anise was prized as a spice and a medicine, often grown in the cloistered gardens of monasteries. Springerle is easily recognized by the elaborate bas-relief pictures pressed into the cookies thanks to detailed molds carved into wood or clay. These cookies were not only delicious, but their pictures told important historical and religious stories. Like anise, ginger was considered both an exotic spice and a medicine. Recipes existed in China as early as the 10th century and finally made it to Europe during the Middle Ages, but it wasn't until the 16th century that the gingerbread house became popular. This was thanks to the Brothers Grimm and their story of Hansel and Gretel discovering a house made entirely of candy. These traditions have endured for centuries because they are so delicious.

Radio City Splendor



On December 27, 1932, at the height of the Great Depression, Radio City Music Hall opened in New York City. The theater was the pet project of billionaire John D. Rockefeller Jr. He envisioned a performance venue for the masses, an Art Deco masterpiece where rich and poor alike could see the highest-quality entertainment. One year after opening, Radio City debuted its *Christmas Spectacular*, featuring the high-kicking Rockettes on its Great Stage. The stage measures over 100 feet long and 60 feet wide, and was constructed to resemble a setting sun. Since its opening, over 300 million people have passed through its doors to enjoy movie premieres, stage shows, concerts, and more. Radio City Music Hall remains the largest indoor theater in the world today.

Nefertiti or Bust

On December 6, 1912, a German archaeological team led by Egyptologist Ludwig Borchardt was working in Amarna, Egypt, when they discovered the workshop of the sculptor Thutmose. Thutmose was the official sculptor to the pharaoh Akhenaten, given the title “The King’s Favorite and Master of Works.” It was within Thutmose’s workshop that Borchardt made his most famous and controversial discovery, the Nefertiti Bust.



Nefertiti was the Great Royal Wife of the pharaoh and Queen of Egypt from 1370 BC–1330 BC. The name *Nefertiti* means “the beautiful one has cometh forth,” and Thutmose’s bust ranks among the most beautiful and precious artifacts of ancient Egypt. Like Aphrodite among the

Greeks, Nefertiti is held as an icon of feminine beauty. No doubt, Borchardt recognized the value of the Nefertiti Bust the moment he laid eyes on it. He wrote, “Suddenly we had in our hands the most alive Egyptian artwork. You cannot describe it with words. You must see it.” What happened after its discovery is a debate that still rages.

At the time of the bust’s discovery, Germany and Egypt had agreed to share any significant archaeological finds. Some say Borchardt concealed the true value of the artifact in an attempt to smuggle it out of the country. Egypt claims that their officials were deliberately misled, while Germany claims that Egyptian inspectors were negligent in their duties. In the end, the Nefertiti Bust was brought to Berlin in 1913 and was not revealed to the public until 1924. Egypt immediately demanded its return. Germany refused. Today it resides in the Neues Museum in Berlin, but there is one more plot twist in the story of the Nefertiti Bust. Art historian Henri Stierlin has claimed that the bust is a fake, created by Borchardt. When the bust was admired by a German prince, Borchardt claimed its authenticity, and the lie has lived on ever since. It appears that Nefertiti is destined to remain as mysterious as she is beautiful.

Generosity on Tap



On December 31, 1759, Irishman Arthur Guinness signed a 9,000-year lease at £45 per year for the St. James’ Gate brewery in Dublin. The brewery still operates today as one of the largest in the world. Guinness

beer is famously known for its dark stout, but Guinness himself was much more than a successful brewer. He was a philanthropist deeply committed to improving social welfare. He ensured that working conditions at his brewery meant that both workers and their families were offered health insurance, meals, high wages, pensions, and even a free beer after a long day’s work. Guinness also donated to local charities offering the poor affordable health care, while he preserved Gaelic arts and culture and advocated for religious tolerance. Despite his wealth, fame, and generosity, only one portrait exists of Arthur Guinness, yet his signature appears on every bottle of his self-named brew.