

THEMATIC UNIT

# CHRISTMAS

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# Introduction

*Christmas* contains a captivating whole language, thematic unit. Its 80 exciting pages are filled with a wide variety of lesson ideas and activities designed for use with primary children. At its core are three high-quality children's literature selections, *Night Tree*, *The Wild Christmas Reindeer*, and *The Polar Express*. For each of these books, activities are included which set the stage for reading, encourage the enjoyment of the book, and extend the concepts gained. In addition, the theme is connected to the curriculum with activities in language arts, math, science, social studies, geography, art, music, movement, and life skills. Many of these activities encourage cooperative learning. Suggestions and patterns for games and ideas for the bulletin boards are additional time savers for the busy teacher. Furthermore, directions for making a class pillow, wall hanging, or quilt allow the students to produce products that can be shared beyond the classroom. All of these activities combine to make this book a very complete teacher resource.

This thematic unit includes:

- ❑ **literature selections**—summaries of three children's books with related lessons (complete with reproducible pages) that cross the curriculum
- ❑ **poetry**—suggested selections and lessons enabling students to write and publish their own works
- ❑ **planning guides**—suggestions for sequencing lessons each day of the unit
- ❑ **language experience ideas**—daily suggestions as well as activities across the curriculum, including Big Books
- ❑ **bulletin board ideas**—suggestions and plans for student-created and/or interactive bulletin boards
- ❑ **homework suggestions**—extending the unit to the child's home
- ❑ **curriculum connections**—in language arts, math, science, social studies, geography, art, music, movement, and life skills
- ❑ **group projects**—to foster cooperative learning
- ❑ **a culminating activity**—which requires students to synthesize their learning to produce a product or engage in an activity that can be shared with others
- ❑ **a bibliography**—suggesting additional literature and nonfiction books on the theme

**To keep this valuable resource intact so that it can be used year after year, you may wish to punch holes in the pages and store them in a three-ring binder.**

# Introduction *(cont.)*

## Why Whole Language?

A whole language approach involves children in using all modes of communication: reading, writing, listening, observing, illustrating, experiencing, and doing. Communication skills are interconnected and integrated into lessons that emphasize the whole of language rather than isolating its parts. The lessons revolve around selected literature. Reading is not taught as a separate subject from writing and spelling, for example. A child reads, writes (spelling appropriately for his/her level), speaks, listens, etc. in response to a literature experience introduced by the teacher. In this way, language skills grow naturally, stimulated by involvement and interest in the topic at hand.

## Why Thematic Planning?

One very useful tool for implementing an integrated whole language program is thematic planning. By choosing a theme with correlating literature selections for a unit of study, a teacher can plan activities throughout the day that lead to a cohesive, in-depth study of the topic. Students will be practicing and applying their skills in meaningful context. Consequently, they will tend to learn and retain more. Both teachers and students will be freed from a day that is broken into unrelated segments of isolated drill and practice.

## Why Cooperative Learning?

Besides academic skills and content, students need to learn social skills. No longer can this area of development be taken for granted. Students must learn to work cooperatively in groups in order to function well in modern society. Group activities should be a regular part of school life, and teachers should consciously include social objectives as well as academic objectives in the planning. For example, a group working together to write a report may need to select a leader. The teacher should make the objectives clear to the students and monitor the qualities of good leader-follower group interaction just as he/she would state and monitor the academic goals of the project.

## Why Big Books?

An excellent, cooperative, whole language activity is the production of Big Books. Groups of students or the whole class can apply their language skills, content knowledge, and creativity to produce a Big Book that can become a part of the classroom to be read and reread. These books make excellent culminating projects for sharing beyond the classroom with parents, librarians, and other classes. Big Books can be produced in many ways. This thematic unit book includes directions for one method you may choose.

## Why Journals?

Each day your students should have the opportunity to write in a journal. They may respond to a book, write about a personal experience, or answer a general “question of the day” posed by the teacher. Students should be encouraged to refer to the posted vocabulary list to check their spelling. The cumulative journal provides an excellent means of documenting writing progress.

# Night Tree

by Eve Bunting

## Summary

*This family has a unique Christmas tradition. Deep in a moonlit forest they have a special tree. They return to this tree every year to decorate it for all the forest creatures and to rekindle the Christmas spirit in their own way. The beautiful watercolor illustrations and the touching story make this a book children love to hear.*

The outline below is a suggested plan for using the various activities presented in this unit. You may adapt the ideas to meet specific needs in your classroom.

### Sample Plan

#### Day 1

- Post pictures of different types of trees on bulletin board. Discuss.
- Share the history of Christmas trees. (page 15)
- Read *Night Tree*, stopping at the page where they find their tree. What will the family do next? Discuss.
- Finish reading the book. Discuss.
- Begin making a Big Book. (page 8)

#### Day 2

- Continue work on the Big Book with story sequence strips. (page 8)
- Read the Big Book to partners.
- List “Animal Habitats.” (page 58)
- Make Stand Up Christmas Trees. (page 15)
- Write about your tree. (page 15)
- Do Christmas tree math. (page 53)
- Learn song “Let’s All Decorate the Night Tree.” (page 70)



#### Day 3

- Introduce Tagging Christmas Trees. (page 10)
- Find out where Christmas trees come from. (page 11)
- Do Geography questionnaire. (page 12)
- Play Wildlife Concentration. (page 58)
- Make Pop-Up Place Cards. (page 62)
- Continue singing “Let’s All Decorate the Night Tree.”
- Make Fox Sandwiches. (page 72)

#### Day 4

- Complete What Do Animals Eat Chart? (page 44)
- Write sentence strips from the chart. (page 44)
- Play Wildlife Bingo. (page 59)
- Color the Tree. (page 9)

#### Day 5

- Do Ornament Placement. (page 45)
- Make a stained glass Christmas tree. (page 63)
- Enjoy storytelling with your stained glass tree. (page 63)
- Make Christmas paper crackers.
- Decorate Popcorn Christmas Trees. (page 16)

# Overview of Activities

## SETTING THE STAGE

1. Find pictures of coniferous and deciduous trees and post them on the bulletin board. Check out books on trees and pinecones. Have them available for students to read.
2. Discuss the history of Christmas trees. (page 15)
3. Take a walk around the school grounds or to a local park and try to identify the trees. Discuss what was seen.
4. Contact a local Christmas tree farm and arrange a visit. If you don't live in an area that grows Christmas trees, find out where Christmas trees come from that are shipped to your area. (page 11)
5. Have a science center with small branches of various evergreen trees. Supply a magnifying glass and look at the differences in the needles. Have children identify the different types of evergreen trees after examining their branches. Have a tree identification book handy to help them label the branches. Supply 3" X 5" note cards for use in labeling the trees. Collect pine cones to place in the science center.
6. Send home the letter to parents about stocking stuffers. (page 78)

## ENJOYING THE BOOK

1. Read part of the book. Stop reading when you get to the page where the family finds the tree. Ask the children what they think the family will do next. Discuss.
2. Finish reading the book. Discuss this family and their tradition. Ask children how it differs from what their families do.
3. Discuss the order of events in the story. Make Big Books with the story sequence strips on page 8. Have the students read the Big Books to each other or place pages on a bulletin board or in a hallway in the correct order.
4. Look at the illustrations in the book from the illustrator's perspective. Was the illustrator up high looking down or down low looking up? Identify each page from a perspective viewpoint.
5. Make a picture pretending you are up on the ceiling looking down at the classroom. How would it look? Let the children stand on chairs and tables and look down at an object on the floor to get a feeling of drawing something as they look down at it.
6. Find out where children may have seen animals from the story. Use the chart on page 58 to determine animal habitats.