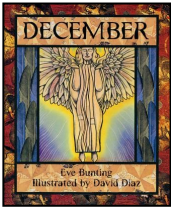




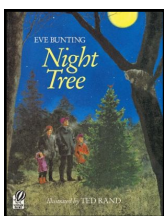
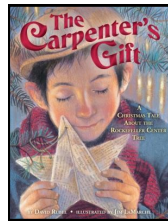
Bookmarks: Something Special for the Holidays

'Tis the season for the mall to be open extra hours and for the airwaves to be blanketed with advertisements for plastic toys. If the "spirit of giving" seems to be getting lost in the "spirit of getting" at your house, you may want to include a few of these books on your holiday reading list. Whether the setting is Christmas, Chanukah, Diwali, or Kwanzaa, the messages are universal and may help your children be more thankful for the things they have, more compassionate toward others less fortunate and more attuned to the spirit of the holidays. Most are more appropriate for family read-aloud ages 5 and up.



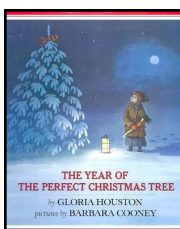
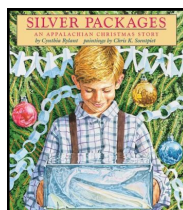
For most children, **December** by Eve Bunting will be an eye-opener. Simon and his mom live in a cardboard box, but they have a scrap of a Christmas tree, some found decorations, and an angel on the wall, named December, torn from an old calendar. On Christmas Eve, an old woman begs them to share their box, and they let her in, where Simon offers her one of the two cookies he is saving for Christmas day. In the morning, the old woman is gone, and the angel herself, singing softly, seems to fill the doorway before fading away. By the next Christmas Eve, Simon and his mother are in a real apartment. She has found a job, and the December angel is on their new wall. This is a visually dazzling, moving and magical holiday story.

The Carpenter's Gift: a Christmas Tale About the Rockefeller Center Tree by David Rubel is a book about how one gift can have ripple effects. During the Depression, a down-on-their-luck family selling Christmas trees donates one to the construction workers who are building the Rockefeller Center. Later, the workers bring wood and build a home for the family. An afterword describes Rockefeller Center owner Tishman Speyer's recent partnership with Habitat for Humanity, which uses the lumber milled from the iconic tree to build a Habitat home for a family in need.



Speaking of trees, the book **Night Tree** by Eve Bunting might inspire a new giving tradition in your family. In this warm and cozy story, a family makes an annual pilgrimage to decorate an evergreen tree with food for the forest animals at Christmastime.

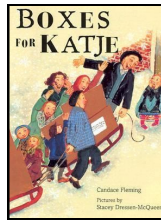
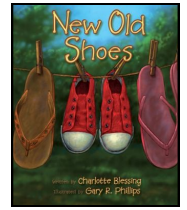
Silver Packages: An Appalachian Christmas Story by Cynthia Rylant tells a wonderful story of generosity and obligation. Every year at Christmas a rich man rides a train through Appalachia and tosses gifts to the poor children who are waiting, in order to repay a debt he owes the people who live there. And, every year, a young boy named Frankie waits alongside the train track hoping that his package will contain a doctor's kit. This gorgeously illustrated book is loosely based on a true story.



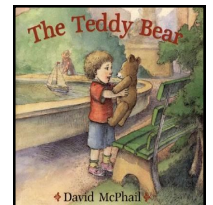
Another story set in Appalachia is **The Year of the Perfect Christmas Tree** by Gloria Houston. It is 1918 and Ruthie's father is away at war, but Ruthie and her mother are determined to fulfill their obligation of getting the perfect Christmas tree to the town for the holiday celebration. This book, which eloquently

speaks of love, family, sacrifice and community, seems especially relevant at a time when many Americans are deployed or unemployed and so many families are struggling. Reading this story will make you count your blessings and hug everyone in your family a little tighter.

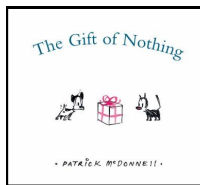
Though not a holiday story, **New Old Shoes** by Charlotte Blessing is a clever book that can show your children a way they can help the less fortunate. Narrated by a pair of red sneakers who journey from their first home with a young boy in America to Africa where they give joy to several more owners. An endnote from Soles4Souls.org shows children how they can help other youngsters around the world through something as simple as donating a pair of old shoes (or a sweater).



Children may also be deeply moved by **Boxes for Katje** by Candice Fleming which tells how boxes of food and clothes from America helped the desperate Dutch people after World War II.

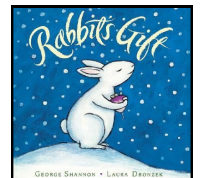


The Teddy Bear by David McPhail is not technically a holiday story, but is a perfect tale for the season. A little boy realizes that the homeless man who found his lost but much-loved teddy bear needs the teddy bear more than he does in this quiet, gentle story of generosity and compassion.



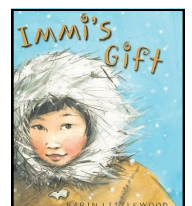
In **The Gift of Nothing** by Patrick McDonnell, Mooch the cat searches for the perfect gift for Earl the dog. "What do you get someone who has everything?" he wonders. Mulling it over, he comes up with "Nothing!" But where to find nothing? Mooch tries shopping but finds "nothing was not for sale." His solution is pure delight, reminding young readers that the greatest gift is friendship, not things, in a book that is both simple and profound (with delightful wordplay as well).

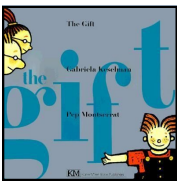
Sometimes the best kind of giving is giving away. **Rabbit's Gift: a Fable from China** by George Shannon tells the story of a Rabbit who has gotten lucky: he's found an extra turnip in the snowy field. But realizing his friend Donkey may not be as fortunate, he deposits the turnip on her doorstep. Donkey, in turn, leaves the turnip for Goat, who delivers it to the home of Deer, who generously but unwittingly returns the vegetable to its original owner. Rabbit then brings all the animals together for a small winter feast.



Similarly, in **The Present** by Bob Gill, a young boy imagines all the things that can be inside a present he found in his parent's closet until he decides to give it to a family in need.

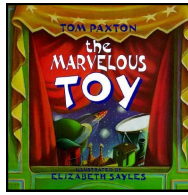
Another wonder fable of what goes round comes round is the magical **Immi's Gift** by Karin Littlewood. While ice-fishing, an Inuit girl finds a painted wooden bird, followed by an orange starfish, a green leaf, and a purple feather, which she uses to adorn her igloo. The decorations bring animal visitors who share "stories of faraway lands." When the igloo melts, Immi drops the bear from her necklace into the water, and on the final pages a boy on a tropical beach finds it in the sand.



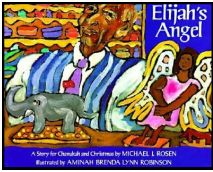


For a lighter look at gift-giving, check out **The Gift** by Gabriela Keselman. When Mickey tells his parents that he wants something big, strong, smooth, sweet, warm, funny and long-lasting, his parents think of all sorts of outrageous possibilities in this fun and funny book which suggests that a hug may be the best present of all.

The Marvelous Toy by Tom Paxton is a charming picture book adaptation of Paxton's song, in which a father gives to his young son the same marvelous toy that his father had given to him many years before.



Sometimes gifting can be problematic, especially when it crosses cultural traditions.



In **Elijah's Angel: A Story for Chanukah and Christmas** by Michael J. Rosen, an elderly African-American barber gives a hand-carved guardian angel to his young Jewish friend, who struggles with accepting the Christmas gift -- concerned that his

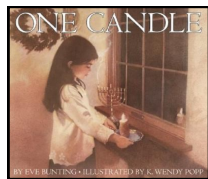
parents or God may frown upon this "graven image" -- until he realizes that friendship, love and protection mean the same thing in any religion. This exquisite story is based on the real-life Elijah Pierce (1892-1984), a lay minister, barber and woodcarver from Columbus, Ohio.

Trees of the Dancing Goats by Patricia Polacco is another beautiful interfaith story which is based on a true incident from the author's childhood. During a scarlet fever epidemic one winter in Michigan, a Jewish family helps make Christmas special for their sick neighbors by making their own Hanukkah miracle. By the same author is **Christmas Tapestry**, in which a tapestry that covers a hole in a church wall at Christmas miraculously brings together an elderly couple who were separated during World War II. This is a gorgeously illustrated tale of love and generosity between



people of different religious faiths. The Holocaust and World War II figure into several stories that add the depth of history to the holiday season. **One Candle** by Eve Bunting is the intensely-moving tale of a family who celebrates Hanukkah every year by retelling the story of how Grandma and her sister managed to mark the day while in a German concentration camp. In **One Yellow Daffodil: A Hanukkah Story** by David Adler, Holocaust survivor Morris Kaplan has spent his days generously filling his customers' orders for flowers and his nights trying to ignore his emotional emptiness. But an invitation to spend Hanukkah at the home of two of his young customers helps him to begin to have the courage to reconnect with humanity.

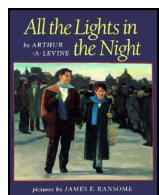
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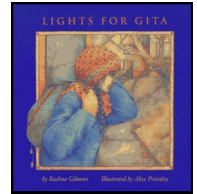
Hanukkah at the home of two of his young customers helps him to begin to have the courage to reconnect with humanity.

The Hanukkah miracle gets a true-life analogy in **All the Lights in the Night** by Arthur A. Levine. In Tsarist Russia, two Jewish boys set off on a long and dangerous journey to Palestine on the eve of Hanukkah, with nothing for comfort but a battered oil lamp given to them by their mother and a single night's worth of oil. But their small, battered lantern keeps on burning, providing them with heat, light and hope.

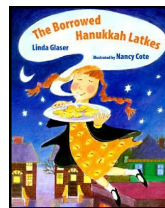


Another story of hope, also based on a true incident, is **Hanukkah at Valley Forge** by Stephen Krensky. It tells how on a cold December night at Valley Forge, at a point when victory was far from assured, General Washington came upon a young soldier lighting a Hanukkah candle. As the soldier explains the background of the holiday, Washington reflects that the Macca-bee's victory gives him hope for his own outnumbered forces.

Another winter festival of lights is Diwali. In **Lights for Gita** by Rachma Gilmore, Gita, recently emigrated from India, is looking forward to celebrating her favorite holiday, when a winter ice-storm descends crushing her plans. As the girl compares the day with her memories of joyfully observed traditions, Mummy reminds her, "Divali is really about filling the darkness with light. Fireworks can't do it for us. We must do it ourselves." The unexpected splendor of ice and dancing light gives Gita a meaningful new perspective.



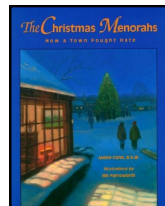
Sometimes the best gift of all is friendship. In **The Borrowed Hanukkah Latkes** by Linda Glaser, a young girl uses her ingenuity and determination to find a way to include her elderly neighbor in her family's Hanukkah celebration.



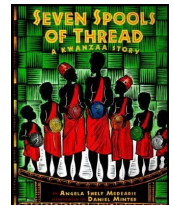
Welcome Comfort by Patricia Polacco shows what friendship, compassion and a little bit of magic can do for a "substantially-built" foster child named Welcome, teased relentlessly by his classmates. After meeting Mr. Hamp, the equally "substantial" school janitor, Welcome finds his life changed forever on one wondrous and surprising Christmas Eve. A loving book that helps children see their actions through another's eyes.



Friendship and conviction is also the theme of **The Christmas Menorahs: How a Town Fought Hate** by Janice Cohn. When a rock is thrown through a boy's bedroom window in which a menorah is displayed, the boy is frightened and unsure whether he wants to put the menorah back. Inspired by stories of the Danish people helping their Jewish neighbors during World War II, the people in Billings, Montana join together and place menorahs in the windows of every house in town. Based on a true story.



The principles of Kwanzaa, including "unity," "self-determination," "collective responsibility," "cooperation," "creativity" and "faith" typify the best aspects of all the season's holidays, and **Seven Spools of Thread: A Kwanzaa Story** by Angela Shelf Medearis is a wonderful original folktale that embodies them all. When they are given the seemingly impossible task of turning thread into gold, the seven Ashanti brothers put aside their differences, learn to get along, and find success working together to create the original Kente cloth.



We hope that the spirit of the season finds its way into your hearts and homes, whatever holidays you celebrate with your family.

Happy Holidays!



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