The Elf's World Tour



Teacher notes

From 1 December, two travelling elves, Cuppa and Bikkie, visit a new place every school day and send a postcard home. Pick the places that suit your class, in any order, and stop whenever you like. Read the front out, turn it over for the tradition, then do the five-minute activity together.

Print the pack on A4 or US Letter. Cut each page along the dotted line and glue the two halves back to back, or pin the front up and read the back from the sheet.

Every family celebrates differently, and some children won't celebrate Christmas at all. Each card says what people in a place do, so it works as a window on the world for everyone in the room.

No photos of children are needed or asked for, and nothing here needs a login or an app.

The fifteen places (use any, in any order)

Iceland: the Yule Lads
The Netherlands: shoes by the fire for Sinterklaas
Germany: the first advent calendars
Sweden: St Lucia's Day
Catalonia, in Spain: the Tió, the log that brings presents
Mexico: Las Posadas
The Philippines: parol star lanterns
Ukraine: spider web decorations
Poland: Wigilia and the first star
Norway: a Christmas sheaf for the birds
Italy: La Befana
Ethiopia: Genna in January
Australia: Christmas at the beach
Japan: Christmas cake
The UK and the US: crackers, and cookies for Santa

Sources for every fact are listed on the pack's page: elfoclock.com/guides/elf-world-tour



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Iceland: the Yule Lads

In Iceland, thirteen Yule Lads visit, one each night from 12 December until Christmas Eve. Children leave a shoe on the window sill, and each Yule Lad pops a small gift inside.

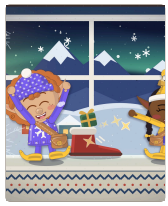
Remember this

In Iceland, children leave a shoe on the window sill, and a small gift appears in it.

Five-minute activity

The Yule Lads have funny names, like Sheep-Cote Clod and Candle Beggar. Invent a fourteenth Yule Lad for your class: give them a name, draw them and say what mischief they get up to.

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To:

Love from Cuppa and Bikkie



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The Netherlands: shoes by the fire for Sinterklaas

In the Netherlands, children put their shoes by the fireplace, the door or the window in the weeks before Sinterklaas, often with a drawing and a carrot or some hay for his horse. On 5 December, Sinterklaas evening, families celebrate with parties and presents.

Remember this

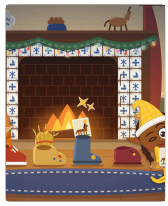
In the Netherlands, children put their shoes out with a carrot or some hay for Sinterklaas's horse.

Say it: Sinterklaas (SIN-ter-klahs).

Five-minute activity

Draw round your shoe on paper and cut it out. Inside it, draw a picture you would leave for a visitor, and add a carrot for the horse. Pin all the shoes up in a row.

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Germany: the first advent calendars

Printed advent calendars come from Germany: a printer called Gerhard Lang made some of the very first, in Munich, from 1908. By the 1920s some had little doors to open, just like the ones we count down with today.

Remember this

Some of the very first printed advent calendars were made in Germany.

Five-minute activity

Fold a square of paper in half to make a door. Number it, draw a surprise behind it, and add it to a class calendar on the wall.

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Sweden: St Lucia's Day

On 13 December, Sweden celebrates Lucia, when processions dressed in white carry candles and sing. Lucia herself wears a crown of candles, and people share saffron buns.

Remember this

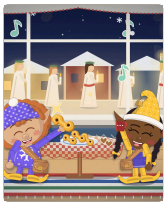
On Lucia Day in Sweden, people dress in white, carry candles and sing.

Say it: Lucia (loo-SEE-a).

Five-minute activity

Make a paper crown: a strip of card to fit your head, with paper candles and yellow flames glued on. Then sing a song you all know, softly, the Lucia way.

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Catalonia, in Spain: the Tió, the log that brings presents

In Catalonia, in the north east of Spain, families look after a log called the Tió from 8 December, keeping it warm under a little blanket. On Christmas Eve, children tap it with sticks and sing to it, then lift the blanket to find sweets underneath.

Remember this

In Catalonia, children tap a log with sticks and sing to it, then find sweets under its blanket.

Say it: Tió (tee-OH).

Five-minute activity

Draw your own Tió with a smiley face and a cosy blanket. Then make up a short, polite song asking it for a treat, and sing it together.

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Mexico: Las Posadas

In Mexico, Las Posadas runs for nine nights, from 16 to 24 December. Each night a procession remembers Mary and Joseph's search for somewhere to stay, with songs at the doors and a star-shaped piñata at the end.

Remember this

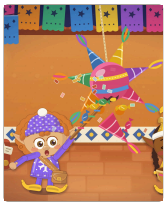
In Mexico, Las Posadas parties often end with a star-shaped piñata.

Say it: Las Posadas (lahs poh-SAH-dahs), piñata (peen-YAH-ta).

Five-minute activity

Draw a star piñata with a point for each person on your table. Decorate every point with a different pattern, then add the colourful tassels.

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The Philippines: parol star lanterns

In the Philippines, homes and streets shine with parols: star lanterns, traditionally made from bamboo and paper, that stand for the Star of Bethlehem. The city of San Fernando holds a festival of giant lanterns.

Remember this

In the Philippines, people hang star-shaped lanterns in their homes and streets.

Say it: parol (pa-ROLL).

Five-minute activity

Draw a big five-pointed star and fill it with bright patterns. Add two paper tails to the bottom points and hang your parols in the window.

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Ukraine: spider web decorations

In Ukraine, some families hang little spider ornaments and webs on the Christmas tree. An old story tells of a family with nothing to decorate their tree, who woke on Christmas morning to find webs that shone silver and gold in the sun.

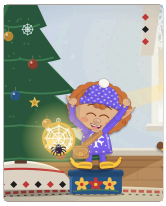
Remember this

In Ukraine, some families hang little spider webs on the Christmas tree.

Five-minute activity

Draw a web with a ruler: a cross, two diagonal lines, then join them round and round. Add one tiny, friendly spider and a little gold.

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Poland: Wigilia and the first star

In Poland, the Christmas Eve supper, Wigilia, begins when the first star is spotted in the evening sky. Families share a thin Christmas wafer, wish each other well, and often lay one extra place at the table for an unexpected guest.

Remember this

In Poland, the Christmas Eve supper starts when the first star is seen in the sky.

Say it: Wigilia (vee-GEEL-ya).

Five-minute activity

Draw a night sky with one big first star. Then go round the class and each say one kind wish for the person next to you.

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Norway: a Christmas sheaf for the birds

In Norway, many people hang up a julenek, a sheaf of oats, for the birds to eat at Christmas. Families also share rice pudding with one almond hidden inside, and whoever finds it wins a marzipan pig.

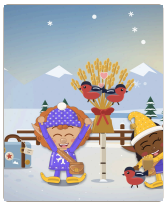
Remember this

In Norway, many people hang up a bundle of oats for the birds to eat.

Five-minute activity

Draw a sheaf of oats and the birds that come to visit it. Then talk about one way your class could help garden birds this winter.

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Italy: La Befana

In Italy, La Befana is a kind old woman who fills children's stockings with sweets and small presents at Epiphany, on 6 January. An old story says she was too busy to travel with the Three Wise Men, and she has been looking for them ever since.

Remember this

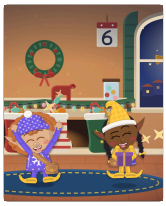
In Italy, La Befana brings sweets and small presents on 6 January, after Christmas.

Say it: La Befana (lah beh-FAH-na).

Five-minute activity

Draw a stocking and fill it with five small, kind surprises you would give a friend. They can be things, or things to do.

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Ethiopia: Genna in January

In Ethiopia, Christmas is called Genna, and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church celebrates it on 7 January. Many people wear white for church, and on Christmas Day some play ganna, a game a bit like hockey.

Remember this

In Ethiopia, many people celebrate Christmas on 7 January.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church follows its own calendar, so Christmas falls on 7 January.

Say it: Genna (GEN-na), ganna (GAN-na).

Five-minute activity

Find 25 December and 7 January on a calendar and count the days between them. Talk about how different families can celebrate on different days.

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Australia: Christmas at the beach

In Australia, Christmas comes in the middle of summer, so it can be very warm. Many people spend Christmas Day by the beach, cooling off in the sea, and eat seafood and salads.

Remember this

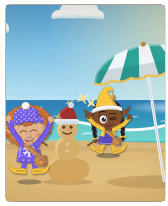
In Australia, Christmas comes in summer, so many people go to the beach.

Australia is in the southern half of the world, below the equator, so December is summer there.

Five-minute activity

Draw Christmas in summer: what would you wear, eat and build on the beach? Swap your snowman for a sandman.

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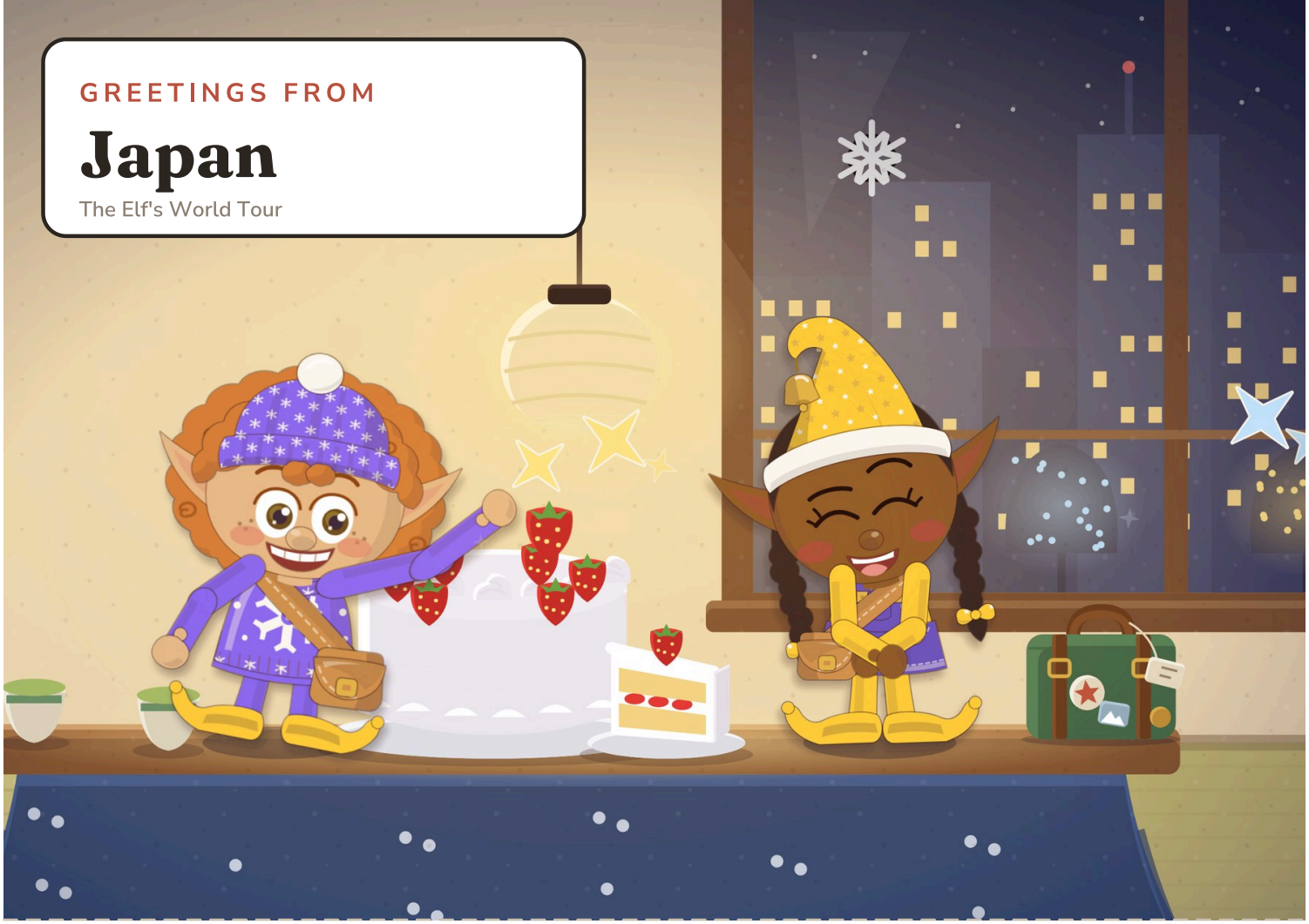
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Japan: Christmas cake

Christmas is not a public holiday in Japan, but many families enjoy a Christmas cake: a light sponge with whipped cream and fresh strawberries. Bakeries start taking orders for them weeks ahead.

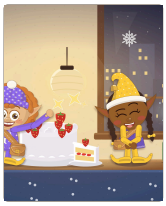
Remember this

In Japan, many families share a Christmas cake with cream and strawberries.

Five-minute activity

Design a Christmas cake on paper. Count your strawberries, give your cake a name, and decide who you would share it with.

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The UK and the US: crackers, and cookies for Santa

In the UK, people pull crackers at Christmas dinner: a London sweet maker, Tom Smith, made the first ones in the 1840s. Today they hold a paper hat, a joke and a small gift. In the US, many children leave cookies and a glass of milk out for Santa on Christmas Eve.

Remember this

A Christmas cracker holds a paper hat, a joke and a small gift.

Five-minute activity

Write a Christmas joke, roll it up inside a paper cracker and twist the ends. Swap crackers with a partner and read the jokes out.

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