



About the USA – Virtual Classroom Newsletter for English Teachers

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World AIDS Day December 1

December 1st is World AIDS Day. Established by the World Health Organization in 1988, World AIDS Day serves to focus global attention on the devastating impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Observance of this day provides an opportunity for governments, national AIDS programs, faith organizations, community organizations and individuals to demonstrate the importance of the fight against HIV/AIDS.

With an estimated 38.6 million people worldwide living with HIV at the end of 2005, and more than 25 million people having died of AIDS since 1981, December 1st serves to remind everyone that action makes a difference in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief - PEPFAR

PEPFAR works to combat HIV/AIDS around the world. Bilateral programs include a special emphasis on 15 focus countries in Africa, the Caribbean, and Asia that together account for approximately one-half of the world's 38.6 million HIV infections. In these focus countries over 5 years, the Emergency Plan has set goals of supporting prevention of 7 million new infections, supporting treatment for 2 million HIV-infected people, and supporting care for 10 million individuals, including orphans and vulnerable children and people living with HIV/AIDS.

Links

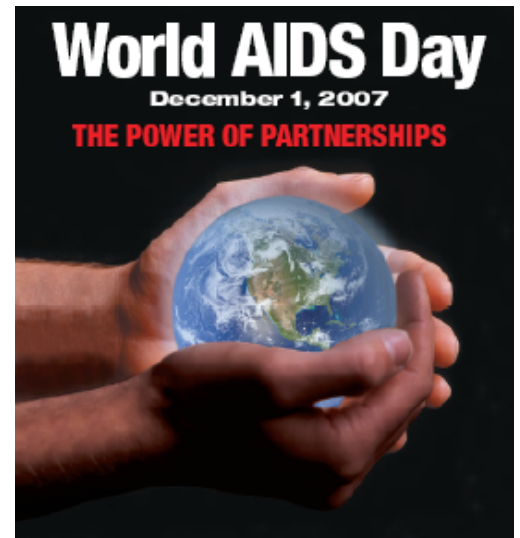
- U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS): [World AIDS Day](#)
- HHS Fact Sheets – [HIV/AIDS Awareness](#)
- White House: [HIV/AIDS Initiatives Archive](#)
- World Health Organization (WHO): [HIV Infections](#)
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: [AIDSinfo](#)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: ["HIV/AIDS"](#)
- U.S. Department of State: ["HIV/AIDS"](#)

Teaching Resources

- UNICEF: ["Hannah's story,"](#) a five page cartoon strip style story with suggested activities for 13 to 18 year olds.
- UNICEF: [HIV/AIDS teaching resources](#)



TREATMENT: Currently, there are no drugs or vaccines available anywhere that have been proven to cure AIDS or prevent HIV infection, although the search for such a drug or vaccine is being pursued vigorously. Some drugs have been found that inhibit HIV replication in the body. Though no treatment has yet been successful in fully restoring the immune system of an AIDS patient, doctors have had some success in using drugs to treat the various illnesses of AIDS patients. The earlier a patient gets tested and treated, the more effective the treatment becomes. Currently, a combination of therapies to combat the virus and restore the immune system has been the most effective treatment.



TERMINOLOGY

"AIDS" stands for acquired immunodeficiency syndrome. AIDS is caused by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).

The AIDS epidemic was discovered June 5, 1981. Today, AIDS is considered one of the most devastating public health problems in the human history. According to a 2006 UNAIDS report, "an estimated 38.6 million people worldwide were living with HIV in 2005. An estimated 4.1 million became newly infected with HIV and an estimated 2.8 million lost their lives to AIDS." The report also stated that in the U.S., "more people than ever were living with HIV in 2005: 1.2 million people." People and governments should be continuously reminded about fighting together against this disease.

UNAIDS
["Overview of the Global AIDS Epidemic"](#)
2006 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic





© *Third Term Panic* by Thomas Nast

How did Republicans pick the elephant, and Democrats the donkey, to represent their parties? - Their origin as symbols for the parties is attributed to a political cartoonist, Thomas Nast, who used the two animals in cartoons drawn for Harper's Weekly in 1874. Why Nast chose the donkey and the elephant is a complicated story. Over time, Republicans came to view the elephant emblem as a sign of strength and intelligence. Democrats seized the "jackass" label, and transformed it into a clever and courageous donkey. [More](#) C-SPAN: Capitol Questions

What does G.O.P. stand for when referring to Republicans? - "Grand Old Party" According to the Republican National Committee, the term originated in the late 1870's when publications such as The Cincinnati Commercial, and The New York Herald began using it in their headlines. Over the years, Republicans themselves often referred to their party as the Grand Old Party, based on their dominance of both the Congress and the Presidency for the period after the Civil War up until President F.D. Roosevelt took office in 1933. [More](#) C-SPAN: Capitol Questions

What is meant by saying a politician is "on the right" or "on the left?" In political science theory, the various positions are described as on an "ideological spectrum," drawn in the shape of an arc, with liberal views placed on the left end of the arc, moderate views in the center, and conservative ones lodged on the right end of the spectrum. [More](#)

Links

- Library of Congress: [Political Parties](#)
- USinfo: [Political Parties](#)
- About the USA: [Political Parties](#)
- EdSiteMent: [Timeline of Events Related to the Development of the U.S. Party System & The First American Party System](#)
- Junior Scholastic: [What Do Parties Stand For?](#)
- PBS: [Donkeys and Elephants and Voters, Oh My!](#)
- Politics1: [Directory of U.S. Political Parties](#)

THIRD PARTIES

Today, the U.S. has a multi-party system. The Democratic Party and the Republican Party are the most powerful. Among the many third parties are:

- [Libertarian Party](#)
- [Independence Party](#)
- [Green Party of the United States](#)
- [Democratic Socialists of America](#)
- [Constitution Party](#)

January 2008: The Iowa Republican & Democratic state parties will hold their Caucuses on January 3, 2008. In our next edition we will look at Caucuses and Primaries.

ELECTIONS 2008 - Political Parties

President George Washington warned about "the danger of parties" and when America's founders wrote the U.S. Constitution in 1787, they did not envision political parties playing a role in the government. Rather, they expected constitutional provisions such as separation of powers, checks and balances, federalism and indirect election of the president by an electoral college would deter the formation of parties.

But even then, leaders didn't always agree. In the 1790s, a quarrel broke out between Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton over how much power to grant the federal government. The argument split their followers into two separate groups - the beginning of U.S. political parties.

Despite the aforementioned constitutional provisions, the United States in 1800 became the first nation to develop political parties organized on a national level and to transfer executive power from one party to another via an election. By the 1830s, political parties were an established part of the U.S. political environment.

Today, the Republican and Democratic parties are the two main political parties in the U.S. Most elected officials serving as president, member of congress, state governor or state legislator are members of one of these parties. The Republicans and Democrats have dominated American politics since the 1860s, and every president since 1852 has been either a Republican or Democrat.

Compared to political parties in other democratic nations, political parties in the United States tend to have relatively low internal unity and lack strict adherence to an ideology or set of policy goals.

The major focus for both political parties is winning elections and controlling the personnel of government. Given their broad sources of support in the electorate and their need to operate within an ideologically moderate society, American parties tend to adopt centrist policy positions and demonstrate a high level of policy flexibility. This enables the Republicans and the Democrats to tolerate great diversity within their ranks.

U.S. presidents cannot assume that their party's members in Congress will be loyal supporters of presidential programs, nor can party leaders in Congress expect all member of their party to vote along party lines. In addition, national party organizations do not involve themselves routinely in party affairs at the state level.

Although American parties tend to be less ideologically cohesive and programmatic than parties in many democracies, they do play a major and often decisive role in shaping public policy.



Democratic Party The older of the two major political parties in the U.S., the Democratic party's beginnings can be traced to the coalition formed behind Jefferson in opposition to the dominant Federalist party.

This group, first called the Republican Party, and then the Democratic-Republican Party, split into two during the presidential campaign of 1828. One, the National Republican party, was absorbed into the Whig party, and the other became the Democratic Party. Today Democrats are known as the more liberal of the two major political parties, esp. when dealing with social policies. Democrats usually support extended civil rights and privacy rights and are more inclined towards environmental controls, pro-labor policies, and consumer protection.



Republican Party The Republican Party was founded in the mid 1850s by a group composed of former members of the Whig, Free-Soil, and Know-Nothing parties, along with northern Democrats who were unhappy with their party's acceptance of slavery.

Early Republicans were united in their opposition to the extension of slavery into the western territories. Today Republicans are known as the more conservative of the two major parties in the sense of opposing high taxes, promoting pro-business policies, supporting a strong national defense, and favoring stringent law enforcement measures.

But these are broad generalizations: In U.S. politics, "conservative" Democrats and "moderate" or even "liberal" Republicans are not unusual.

Sources: USinfo [Article](#) (Jan. 2007) and [CongressLink.org](#)

Teaching Literature: Christmas

The Gift of the Magi by O. Henry

O. Henry (1862-1910) was a prolific American short-story writer, a master of surprise endings, who wrote numerous short stories about the life of ordinary people in New York City. Typical of O. Henry's fiction are a humorous tone, the description of realistic details, and a twist of plot, which turns on an ironic or coincidental circumstance and often ends in a surprise ending.

"The Gift of the Magi," included in *The Four Million*, his first collection of short stories, in 1906, is one of O. Henry's most famous stories. A major reason for its enduring appeal might likely be its affirmation of unselfish love. Such love, the story and its title suggest, is like the gifts given by the wise men, called magi, who brought gold, frankincense, and myrrh to the newborn Jesus.

It was Christmas Eve, and Jim and Della had sacrificed their most prized possessions for the perfect gift ... [The Gift of the Magi](#) (Literature Network)

A Christmas Memory by Truman Capote

A Christmas Memory, first published in 1956, tells the story of the seven-year-old Buddy and his aging cousin Sook's holiday traditions. Autobiographical elements in *A Christmas Memory* are apparent: Capote lived with relatives in rural Alabama as a child, and during this time his older female cousin, the childlike Sook Faulk, was his closest companion. Seven-year-old Buddy inaugurates the Christmas season by crying out to his cousin, Miss Sook Falk: "It's fruitcake weather!" Thus begins an unforgettable portrait of an odd but enduring friendship between two innocent souls--one young and one old--and the memories they share of beloved holiday rituals.

'Twas the Night Before Christmas...

Clement C. Moore is thought to have composed the tale, now popularly known as *The Night Before Christmas*, on December 24, 1822, while traveling home from Greenwich Village, where he had bought a turkey for his family's Christmas dinner. Inspired by the plump, bearded Dutchman who took him by sleigh on his errand through the snow-covered streets of New York City, Moore penned *A Visit from St. Nicholas* for the amusement of his six children, with whom he shared the poem that evening. His vision of St. Nicholas draws upon Dutch and Norwegian traditions of a magical, gift-giving figure who appears at Christmas time, as well as the German legend of a visitor who enters homes through chimneys. (Library of Congress, [Today in History, December 24](#))

Yes, Virginia, There is a Santa Claus

[Read](#) an editorial from the New York Sun in 1897. This little girl's question sparked history's most reprinted newspaper editorial. "Some of my little friends say there is no Santa Claus. Please tell me the truth; is there a Santa Claus?" – "Virginia, your little friends are wrong. They have been affected by the skepticism of a skeptical age. ..."

American Traditions & Customs

A Visit from St. Nicholas made an icon of Santa Claus and changed the way Americans celebrate Christmas. Before Moore's poem, American Christmas customs were in the European tradition. Dutch-American children, for example, were visited on December 5, St. Nicholas Day Eve, by St. Nicholas dressed like a bishop and riding a white horse. German-American youngsters expected gifts from Kris Kringle (the *Christkind*) on Christmas Day.

The contemporary **Santa Claus**, derived from the Dutch Sinter Klaas and the German Saint Nicholas, was born in the United States - thanks to a myriad of artists, writers, legends and the evolving nature of the country at the time. It was Washington Irving, who, in 1821, first described St. Nicholas as riding over the tops of trees, bringing his presents to children. During the course of the 19th century Santa Claus started to take on his present day signature style: red suit, pipe, and his reindeer and sleigh.



"One dollar and eighty-seven cents. That was all. And sixty cents of it was in pennies. Pennies saved one and two at a time by bulldozing the grocer and the vegetable man and the butcher until one's cheeks burned with the silent imputation of parsimony that such close dealing implied. Three times Delia counted it. One dollar and eighty-seven cents. And the next day would be Christmas. [...] The magi, as you know, were wise men--wonderfully wise men--who brought gifts to the Babe in the manger. They invented the art of giving Christmas presents."

Links

- E.notes: [The Gift of the Magi](#)
- Literature Network: [O. Henry](#)
- Lesson Plan: [The Gift of the Magi](#)
- Web English Teacher: [Lesson Plans](#)
- E.notes: [A Christmas Memory](#)
- PBS Lesson Plan: [A Christmas Memory](#)
- PBS American Masters: [Truman Capote](#)
- NPR: [HEAR](#) the original 1959 original recording of Truman Capote reading his holiday story.



© The Night Before Christmas (Scholastic)

*'Twas the Night Before Christmas...
The stockings were hung by the
chimney with care,
In hopes that St. Nicholas soon
would be there ...*

- Lesson plan for advanced students - "[Moore vs. Livingston: Who Really Wrote 'The Night Before Christmas'?](#)" . Source: [Education World](#)
- Young students: ['Twas the Night Before Christmas](#)

Links

- About the USA: [Christmas](#)
- USinfo: [Americans Celebrate Christmas](#)
- Census: Facts for Features - [2007 Holiday Season](#)
- History of Christmas – [U.S. Christmas Traditions](#)

The First Christmas Tree – "Legend has it that Martin Luther invented the Christmas tree. One winter's night in 1536, so the story goes, Luther was walking through a pine forest near his home in Wittenberg when ... Alison Barnes, History Today, Dec 2006 [Download article](#)

Dec 4 th – 12 th	Hanukkah
Dec 6 th	Saint Nicholas Day
Dec 15 th	Sinter Klaas (The Netherlands)
Dec 16 th – 24 th	La Posada
Dec 24 th	Christmas Eve
Dec 25 th	Christmas
Dec 26 th	Boxing Day
Dec 26 th – Jan1 st	Kwanzaa
Dec 31 st	Omisoka

The Jewish holiday **Hanukkah**, the Festival of Lights recalls the war fought by the Maccabees in the cause of religious freedom and the rededication of the temple after recapturing it from the Syrians. Each evening candles are lit on the "menorah" (candleabra), adding one candle each night. [More](#)

Kwanzaa is an African-American holiday about the festival of the first harvest of the crops. It begins on Dec. 26, and lasts for seven days. *Kwanzaa*, or *Kwanza*, comes from a phrase which means "first fruits" in Swahili, an East African language. [More](#)

In Mexico, Christmas is an important holiday season with strong traditions. One of the most colorful traditions is the **Posada Party**, celebrated every evening from Dec. 16 to 24. These celebrations commemorate Mary and Joseph's journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem in search of shelter.

THIS MONTH

December: A Month of Multicultural Holiday Celebrations

Not everyone celebrates the holidays with tinsel, Santa Claus and eggnog.

"Do your students celebrate Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, or Three Kings Day? Maybe they celebrate St. Lucia Day or Ramadan. Chances are your class includes students who observe more than one of those events. Whether that is the case or not, December offers great opportunities for teaching about our multicultural world." (Source: [Lesson Plan](#))

Links

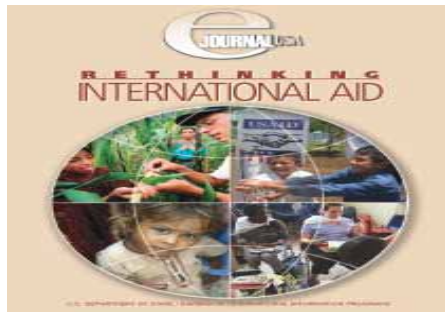
History.com: History of Christmas – [World Traditions](#)
 Kaboose Family Network: [All About Hanukkah](#)
 University of Rochester: [Multicultural Calendar](#)



Articles

Tools for Teachers. American Teacher, Nov 2007. "Here are some thoughtful ways to present Christmas, Hanukkah and Kwanzaa: Explore the historical tradition behind each holiday and incorporate it into your existing lesson plans." [Download article](#)

The story of Christmas around the world. Marites N. Sison. Anglican Journal, Dec 2006. This [article](#) gives a sampling of Christmas traditions around the world, which demonstrates that while countries bare their own unique celebrations, common themes still emerge in Syria, Tanzania, France, etc.



NEW eJournal: Rethinking International Aid

The *eJournal USA* [Rethinking International Aid](#), describes how U.S. foreign aid, directed through government and faith-based organizations, individuals, businesses, and a multiplicity of partnerships, has developed, how it fits into foreign affairs, and how it is related to advancing altruistic objectives.

Besides government funding, aid to the developing world is increasingly coming by way of private capital flows and private philanthropy. In addition, imaginative public-private partnerships, dramatic growth of Internet giving and new technologies together have shaped a new assistance landscape for the world's poor.

Webchat Station

Date: Monday, December 3, 2007, 16:00

WEBCHAT: [Rethinking International Aid: Public and Private Sector Aid to Developing Countries](#)

Date: Wednesday, December 5, 15:00

WEBCHAT: [World AIDS Day Discussion](#)

- [Register](#)
- [More USinfo Webchats](#)

EDUCATION USA

[EducationUSA Germany](#) * [Webchat zu Studium und Austausch](#)

[First-time International Student U.S. Enrollments Up 10.2 Percent](#) - The increase in international student enrollments at U.S. higher education institutions outlined in the report *OpenDoors 2007* "demonstrates the commitment of the U.S. government and U.S. higher education leaders to welcoming international students."

[U.S. Student Visas Reach Record Numbers in 2007 – "The best way to know America is to study here"](#) - In 2007, the United States issued a record number of student and exchange visitor visas, reversing a drop in student and other visa applications after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.



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About the USA is a digital collection of background resources on American society, culture, and political processes. In addition to featuring selected websites, it provides access to documents in full text format (E-Texts) on topics ranging from the history of German-American relations, government and politics to travel, holidays and sports.

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