

New Haven Times

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Celebrating December

Dec 5th

**Christmas Crafts with
Kindergarten**
9:30am

Dec 13th

**Christmas Carols with Hartman
Elementary**
9:30am

Dec 18th

**Christmas Carols with
Kindergarten**
10:00am

Dec 20th

Holiday Popcorn Bar
2:00pm-4:00pm
Christmas Party
6:00pm

Hanukkah

December 22–30

Christmas

December 25

Dec 27th

Birthday Celebration
2pm-4pm

Spinning into the Season

As the holiday season approaches, children gravitate to toy store windows to stare longingly at the wonders on display. Rarely do spinning tops make children's wish lists anymore, yet these toys are some of the oldest known to human civilization. A clay top discovered by archaeologists in Iraq's ancient city of Ur dates back to the 35th century BC—that's nearly 6,000 years ago! A wooden top dated to 1300 BC was found in King Tut's tomb. During the medieval era in Europe, *parish tops* measuring eight inches high and weighing two pounds were kept in town squares for play, exercise, and competition. Cultures all over the world have fashioned tops from whatever materials they have on hand, including fruits, nuts, seeds, and seashells. What makes these toys so fascinating and enduring? It's not just their simplicity, but the way they seem to defy gravity as if by magic.

Every spinning top is an experiment in physics. The toys remain upright thanks to angular momentum. In fact, precision balanced tops spun perfectly upright would spin forever if there were no friction between their points and the surface. However, this hasn't stopped engineers from trying to build a top that could conquer the laws of physics.

Traditional tops are still hand-built using a lathe and a discerning eye. The best of these handmade tops can spin for several minutes and even hours. New technologies now allow precise and perfectly balanced tops to be made on computerized machines using top-of-the-line materials. These tops cost thousands of dollars and may spin for hours. One top called LIMBO recently broke the world record by spinning for 27 hours, 9 minutes, and 24 seconds. How was this feat achieved? Hidden inside the top was a battery, flywheel motor, motion sensor, and a computer chip designed to monitor the top's stability and correct the motion of the spin. While LIMBO is not technically a top but a gyroscope, it is a demonstration of how far engineers will go to perfect this simple toy in an attempt to defy gravity.

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.

The Power of Gratitude

Being grateful has been linked to health benefits such as improved mood, better sleep, and more satisfying relationships. Thank You Note Day on December 26 offers us a chance to use the power of gratitude. Researchers recently explored how writing thank-yous increases one's sense of well-being. Writers of thank-you notes often feel nervous about the task. They worry that they will not be able to find the right words or that the recipients of their notes would feel awkward or surprised to receive a letter. But these worries are completely unfounded. Recipients of thank-you notes are almost always grateful. In fact, recipients find thank-you notes to be warmer and more articulate than the writers expect. As long as the intentions of the writer are sincere and heartfelt, the contents of the note are always well received. Researchers believe that thank-you notes are prosocial; that is, they are an important type of social glue linking people together. Self-consciousness should never stand in the way of giving thanks. So, let us express our gratitude to the researchers for conducting their experiment.

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.

The Magic of the Sahara

The city of Douz in southern Tunisia is known as the “gateway to the Sahara” and is considered the most celebrated corner of the world's most famous desert. From December 20–23, Douz hosts the International Festival of the Sahara, opening the Sahara's wonders to those brave enough to make the journey. The festival is a celebration of Berber life, those hardy nomads who wander the desert sands on camelback. Visitors can experience Berber music and food, and even take in a camel race or two, but the real magic of the festival is the desert itself. The cafés and *souks* lining the narrow streets of Douz come alive once the sun begins to set. Palm groves skirt the city, providing shade and the desert's most important crop: dates. Beyond the palms, the Grand Erg Oriental beckons, a vast field of sand dunes. The most intimate way to explore the sand sea is on camelback, and plenty of tours allow you to sleep among the soft, rippling dunes beneath clear skies spotted with a million stars. The desert here is so otherworldly that it has been the backdrop of four *Star Wars* movies. Indeed, visitors to the Sahara feel as if they have ventured to a distant planet.

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.

December Birthdays

In astrology, those born between December 1–21 are centaur archers of Sagittarius. Archers are curious, energetic, and enjoy change, the restless travelers of the zodiac. They are funny and enthusiastic, cherishing freedom as their greatest treasure. Those born between December 22–31 are the horned goats of Capricorn. As goats climb to great heights, Capricorns strive to get to the top, using discipline and common sense to find fame, prestige, and money.

Monica Seles (tennis star) – December 2, 1973
Walt Disney (animator) – December 5, 1901
Marie Tussaud (artist) – December 7, 1761
Sammy Davis Jr. (entertainer) – December 8, 1925
Bobby Flay (chef) – December 10, 1964
Frank Sinatra (entertainer) – December 12, 1915
Beethoven (composer) – December 16, 1770
Ray Romano (actor) – December 21, 1957
Clara Barton (nurse) – December 25, 1821
Tiger Woods (golfer) – December 30, 1975

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.