

Winter Holiday Games

From late The Victorian and Edwardian Era



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Yule Log

Burning a log in celebration of Yule started well before medieval times. The symbolism of Yule Logs vary from culture to culture, so if you're secular just think of whatever reason makes you happiest, whether it's the ward off evil spirits, give you ashes that will bring luck to your home & land, or fulfill your arsonist desires.

Making A Yule Log. Ideally find a piece of wood you cut and grew yourself or grown. Different woods may have different intentions when you burn it, some examples:

Birch fertility and new beginnings

Aspen spiritual knowledge

Oak intellect and wisdom

Pine success and well-being

Ash wealth and prosperity

Holly opens your mind to accept revelations

Once a wood is chosen decorate the log with what makes you happy. Common items are fruits & peels, cinnamon, cloves, evergreens, any items that you think will both burn and bring you good fortune. Common Colors to celebrate the current season are red, green, and white. To represent the sun the colors gold, yellow, red, or white is added. And to represent the moon white, silver and black are often used.

Burning A Yule Log – When ready choose a day such a Yule or new year's eve and burn it. Some ways to make it more interactive is to have everyone in your group write down a habit they'd like to quit or a wish they want on paper and then add it to the yule log before lighting it.

It is said to keep a small piece of the Yule log under the bed will ward off misfortune, fires, and lightning.

Pomander

From the French phrase *pomme d'ambre* (Apple of amber) is a ball made for perfumes. This ball was attached to one as a necklace, in a ring, or on a holster and was believed to protect against infections, bad luck, and noxious smells. During Yule the most common version of this is a orange (or clementine) adorned with cloves.

To some Oranges represent the sun, love, fertility, prosperity, good luck and friendship. Cloves are said to bring positive energy, protection and money luck.

To make a pomander take an orange and use an item such as a toothpick, knife, or peeler to score designs in the orange and poke holes in the orange to help place the cloves in.

Some common designs are spirals, stripes, stars, and the sun. Ribbons are often added to allow them to hang



Birdfeed Garland

In the 1800s before store bought decorations were easily attainable stringing popcorn and cranberries was a common solution to decorate the home. Corn and cranberries were often chosen because they were both harvested in November and were able to last through the holiday season in the right conditions. Today as decorating is fairly easy to get the tradition of stringing fruits and popped corn on string is often used to feed birds.

Some other common and safe foods to add include fresh fruits and berries, soaked dried fruits, whole grain cereal without sweeteners or flavor, shell in nuts, firm cheese cut into festive shapes and whole grain bread or toast cut into shapes with cookie cutters.

To make your designs more intricate, you can wrap the garland around wires to make them into wreaths or unique shapes.

Some notes to consider for the birds/squirrels:

Some suggest to make your garland of small pieces instead of one long string, this prevents birds from being caught in the string.

Not many birds have much interest in the dried cereal and cranberries

Another popular thing to do is to make winter cookies. Coat peanut butter on the fronts and backs of seasonal wooden cutouts bought from a crafts store. Press dried cranberries and seeds and mixed birdseed, into the peanut butter and then hang.

Make A wish Ornaments

Admittedly this is just something I found in an e-book titled "A guide to celebrating the 12 Days of Yule" by Jenn Campus. I don't know if there is any historical significance, but it seems possible that something similar was done in the 1800s. At least it seems like an activity to pass time.

Ingredients:

1 cup Ground Cinnamon

½ Cup Applesauce

Dash of Cloves

Sprinkle of water

Supplies:

Cookie Cutters

Tooth Picks

String

Method:

- 1. Mix all ingredients in large bowl start with very little water (don't get too wet)*
- 2. Roll out dough like cookies*
- 3. Cut with cookie cutters and make a hole at the top of the ornament with a toothpick so you can string it later*
- 4. Use a toothpick to draw symbols on your ornament for aesthetic purposes or to represent your wish.*
- 5. Bake at 200F for 2 hours*
- 6. Let cook completely then decorate with paints, or sharpie if desired before stringing*

Author Note: if you don't decorate with sharpie or paint as it recommends you could probably eat it with intention of obtaining your wishes. But at that point you may as well make gingerbread or any better cookie. I believe this ornament is supposed to make the room smell like cinnamon.

Snapdragon

Snapdragon is a parlour game from the 16th century where people gathered on Christmas and heated brandy in a dish with raisins and then grab and eat the burning raisin while saying in poem about Snap the Christmas Dragon.

To Play:

1. Gather friends and ingredients and supplies
2. Take a large, flat plate, and sprinkle the raisins and almonds on top, making sure to space them out.
3. Pick where you'll play the game. A dim-to-dark room or outside at night is best for seeing the blue flames.
4. Pour $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of Brandy or Rum (50% proof). Add more if the bottom of the plate is not thoroughly covered. Then, add additional Brandy ($\frac{1}{4}$ cup) in a pot on the stove until it sizzles and steams. Carefully pour the hot liquor into a mug or a bowl.
5. Gather a large spoon, matches or a lighter, the mug, and the salt. When ready to start playing, pour the liquor into the large spoon and set it alight. Then, carefully tip the flaming liquor onto the plate, letting it light the rest of the alcohol. It may not take right away. Reheat more alcohol and try again if it doesn't work the first time.
6. Once the blue flames are leaping, players can reach for the raisins and almonds. Pinches of salt will make the fire briefly burn yellow and flare. Take care, since the plate will gradually heat up. To refresh the flames, carefully stir the mix with the spoon, or add more alcohol. Eat what you pull from the fire.

Note: The game comes with the poem from Robert Chamber's Book of days (1879)

*Take care you don't take too much,
Be not greedy in your clutch,
Snip! Snap! Dragon!*

*With his blue and lapping tongue
Many of you will be stung,
Snip! Snap! Dragon!*

*For he snaps at all that comes
Snatching at his feast of plums,
Snip! Snap! Dragon!*

*But Old Christmas makes him come,
Though he looks so fee! fa! fum!
Snip! Snap! Dragon!*

*Don't 'ee fear him but be bold –
Out he goes his flames are cold,
Snip! Snap! Dragon!*

Though this would likely be done during step 5, if easier do it before the fire starts as a fun little chant if you enjoy pointless ceremonial words. I imagine that you grab the raisins as you say “Snip! Snap! Dragon!” But I can't find any proof on it. Here is an article I found that has some good tips if this is something you're interested in doing (they also give additional links to follow)

<http://mattfife.com/?p=4825>

Fictionary

About: Fictionary also known as The Dictionary Game is a word game where players guess the definition of an obscure words.

How to Play:

Before beginning the game, players create cards of obscure words in the dictionary and create fake definitions of what the word could mean

Example: Suppose the word is “callypygian.” The dictionary holder might generate the following definitions:

- A game played in Greece using a goat’s bladder. (fake)
- The flat notes on a steam organ. (fake)
- Having perfectly shaped buttocks. (real)
- A hardy perennial related to the lillium genus. (fake)

The other players write down what they think the definition is. If they get the right answer they get a point, if nobody guesses the word right the dictionary holder gets a point. Then the next player may say their card to the group.

The game continues until a player gets to an agreed upon number of points or all the pre-made cards of words and real & fake definitions are gone.

Alternative: you can have only one player chooses the words and definitions

The Minister's Cat

About: The Minister's Cat was a popular parlor game played in the mid to late 1800s. Like many word games at the time, it involved knowing a lot of vocabulary and having a lot of creativity.

How to Play: This game involves two or more players who will sit in a circle. Each player will take a turn reciting a phrase which describes the minister's cat with an adjective beginning with the next letter in the alphabet.

For example, the first player might say something like: "The minister's cat is an Awesome cat."

The second player: "The minister's cat is a Black cat."

The third player: "The minister's cat is a Cozy cat."

And so, on until you reach the letter Z!

If you cannot come up with an adjective within 5 seconds you are out of the game!

Alternative Version: the players agree that each round will be devoted to a single letter. Any player who cannot correctly recall all the previous adjectives, or who cannot think of new adjective, loses the game. The last player left is the winner.

Player 1: The minister's cat is an audacious cat.

Player 2: The minister's cat is an audacious and astonishing cat.

Player 3: The minister's cat is an audacious, astonishing, and astounding cat.

Blindman's Buff

About: Blindman's buff is a children's game played as early as 2000 years ago in Greece under many various names. The word buff's older definition is a small push. This game is basically Marco Polo on land.

How to Play: The first blindfolded player will begin the game by standing in the middle of the game area. Turn the blind man around three or four turns so that they become a little disoriented. Then the blind man starts to count to 50 so that the remaining players can walk away from the blindman.

Wherever the players are when the Blindman gets to 50 is where they have to stand for the remainder of the game. The players can try to move out of the blindman's way when they are searching for them, but they cannot move their feet. The Blindman calls out "Blindman's!" and the rest of the players have to answer "Bluff!" When the blindman finds a player then they are tagged and out of the game. The blindman then goes on to find all of the players. The last player to be identified is the new "it".

Variation:

1. When the blind man finds a player, they must feel the face of the player and say their name out loud. If the player is correctly identified, then they are out of the game and the blindman moves on to identify the rest of the players. If the blindman is wrong, then the players are given 10 seconds to move from their spot to a different location.
2. At different points during the game give a 5 second interval where the players can switch.

Bread and Honey

About: Bread and Honey is a card game based on the nursery rhyme "Sing a Song for Sixpence", was registered in 1896 and is played with a pack of fifty-three cards, consisting of four Clowns, four Queens, four Kings, four Maids (*top row*) and thirty-seven Blackbirds.

How to Play with standard deck:

Jacks = Clowns

Kings = Kings

Queens = Queens

Ace = Maids

You can omit the 53rd card or add in a Joker as a blackbird.

Cards are dealt one at a time, face down in a rotation until all cards are used.

The player to the dealer's left turns the top card of his back and places it face forward in the middle of the table. Everyone continues until a King, Queen, Jack, or Ace is played. When this happens the next player must place

1 Cards if a Jack (clown) is played

2 Cards if a queen is played

3 Cards if a king is played

4 Cards if an Ace (maid) is played

if the player does not have enough cards the next player must put down the cards still owed. If someone plays an King, Queen, Jack or Ace as an owed card that player takes cards in the middle and puts them in the bottom of their deck. To win this game a player needs to have the whole pack of cards or be the only player with cards left.

Ecarte

About: Ecarte is a centuries old game of French origin and came to Britain in the 1820s. Ecarte is a fast moving two-player game. The goal of the game is to score a total of 5 points. Points can be earned over rounds by winning most of the tricks or by completing certain requirements.

How to Play:

To make the modified deck, the 6s and lower should be removed from the deck. This leaves the Aces, Kings, Queens, Jacks, 10s, 9s, 8s, and 7s.

The first dealer is chosen at random and is passed between players throughout the game. They will shuffle the deck and deal each player a 5-card hand. Then the next card is revealed to determine the trump suit of the round. If the revealed card is a King, then the dealer may declare a point any time before the next deal.

The nondealer can now look at their cards and decide if they are happy with the hand they were dealt. If not, then they may make a proposal. If the dealer accepts both players may discard any cards, they are unhappy with and get redealt cards to form their hands up to 5 cards gain. This can be redone as many times as both players agree. Once a player is happy with their hand or if the dealer refuses the proposal or the nondealer never makes a proposal the game begins.

If either player, dealer or nondealer, holds the king of trumps in their hand they may declare it before the first card is played (or if nondealer, play it as the first card to declare it), and score a point.

Cards Ranking

Ecarte has a ranking system of King (high), Queen, Jack, Ace, 10, 9, 8, and 7 (low). The trump ranks above all other suits but follows the same ranking order as the other suits.

GAMEPLAY

The game starts with the non-dealer who may lead any card they wish for the first trick. The dealer must follow suit if able and must play to win the trick if they can. If they cannot follow suit, they may play any card. The highest trump wins the trick, or if no trumps were played the highest card of the suit lead wins. The winner leads the next trick. This continues until all 5 tricks are played and won.

SCORING

The player to win 3 of the 5 tricks wins a point, and two points if they win all 5 tricks. If the nondealer did not propose or if the dealer refused their proposal, and the non-dealer wins at least 3 tricks, they score 2 points. No additional points are scored for winning all 5 tricks though. There is a total of 3 points available to win in a round.

END OF GAME

The game ends when a player reaches 5 points earned and they have won the game.

Snap

About: Though this history of this game is relatively unknown this game has had its own deck in 1889 before being able to be played with the standardized cards today. It can be played with 2-12 people. You may need to combine multiple packs of cards depending on the number of players.

How to play:

The Deal

Deal out all cards face down, one at a time, beginning to the dealer's left. It does not matter if some players have more cards than others. Each player puts their cards in a pile, face down in front of them.

The Play

The player on the dealer's left turns over the top card of his pile and puts it face up starting a pile of cards next to their face down cards. The next player to the left does the same and so on around the table.

When someone turns up a card that matches a card already face up on another player's pile, the first person to notice the two matched cards calls out "Snap!" and wins both piles. This player adds the cards to the bottom of their face-down pile.

When two players shout "Snap!" at the same time, the two piles are combined and placed in the center of the table face up. These cards form a "Snap Pot." Play continues where it left off with the player to the left of the last player who turned over a card. If a player spots a card that matches the card on top of the Snap Pot, they shout "Snap Pot!" and win all of those cards. During the game, if a player runs out of cards in their face-down pile, the cards in the face up pile are turned down and the player continues to play.

Whist

About: As a predecessor to bridge, whist was a popular Victorian game. There are also variations of Whist that can be played with either two players or three players known as Single Dummy and Double Dummy.

How to Play Whist:

The game is played with a *52-card deck* (ace high). Four players split into two partnerships.

To begin, the dealer gives each player one card at a time, face down, beginning with the player on his left, until all cards are dealt with the exception of one. Each player should have thirteen cards. The last card, or trump card, is turned face up in front of the dealer to establish the trump suit. On her turn, the dealer will add that card to her deck.

The player to the dealer's left leads by playing any card face up. The next three players take turns, and must play a card of the leading suit if they have one. Only if a player has no cards of that suit may she play any card from her hand.

The four cards on the table constitute a trick. The trick is won by the team member who played the highest card of the leading suit, unless a card of the trump suit was played, in which case the highest trump card wins. The winner of the trick places it to the side and leads the next trick.

The object of the game is to score points on any tricks in excess of six, for one point each. The first team to score seven tricks (after their initial six) wins.

Sources

Forgot which sources were used for bread and honey and fictionary

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“A guide to celebrating the 12 days of Yule” by Jenn
Campus

Note:

This is a collection of texts from various websites I’m not claiming for any of this to be original. Just an easy source of different things to do.