



Sesame Family Newsletter

December 13, 2006

The nonprofit organization behind Sesame Street and so much more



For Parents

Keeping the Holidays Sweet & Simple

by *Jordan Brown*

Holiday stress got you down? A dad offers some antidotes.

Featuring:

- Countdown to Christmas
- Dreidel, Dreidel, Dreidel
- Is He the REAL Santa?
- Homemade Gifts
- The Gift of Giving

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Games and More: Happy Holidays!

Celebrate the holidays Sesame style with these merry-making activities.

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From the Workshop



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Sesame Store



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Keeping the Holidays Sweet & Simple

COUNTDOWN TO CHRISTMAS

Now that the novelty of going to kindergarten has worn off, waking up my son Finn for school is sometimes a challenge. "I need another five minutes. Pleeeeeease," he begs for the umpteenth time. To sweeten the deal, I offer to make his favorite breakfast dish "eggs in a nest." "Nah, I'd rather sleep, Daddy," Finn replies drowsily, pulling the covers over his head.

Then, I get a brainstorm. I remember the Christmas paper chain he started in school. "If you get dressed now, you'll have time to cut off the next loop on your Christmas chain." This does the trick. Finn bolts out of bed, throws off his pj's, and is dressed in a flash!

Finn's paper chain is made of 25 interconnected paper loops, each with a number from 1 to 25, representing the days in December leading to Christmas. Attached to the last loop is a piece of construction paper in the shape of a bell with Finn's name written in glitter. Finn is giddy with excitement about the magical day when Santa and his reindeer will deliver presents.



MEMORIES ARE MADE OF THIS

[It's not the big toys they'll remember when they think of the holidays; it's the little traditions.](#)

CATCH THE SPIRIT!

[Readers tell how they make the holidays meaningful in their homes.](#)

HAPPY HOLIDAYS

[Learn more about the holidays in the "Elmo's World: Happy Holidays" video.](#)

DREIDEL, DREIDEL, DREIDEL

A few hours later, I drive to Finn's elementary school where I've been volunteering in his classroom since October. Without a doubt, it is one of the highlights of my week. I get a chance to know Finn's classmates, lead small groups in fun, educational activities, and--best of all--hug Finn in the middle of the school day! On this particular day, his teacher Mrs. Wallace tells me that in honor of Chanukah (which begins the evening of December 15) I'll be teaching the kids how to play the dreidel game. For those unfamiliar with this game, children take turns spinning a special 4-sided top called a dreidel. Players take turns spinning the dreidel, and depending on which side is facing up when it stops, the player either earns or loses chocolate coins wrapped in foil.

As a "lapsed Jew," I smile when I hear my assignment. I am excited about playing this game with Finn's classmates,



SIMPLY JOYFUL

[Don't feel harried about the holidays. Here's how to get happy!](#)

HAPPY HOLIDAYS

[A father prepares to celebrate both Christmas](#)

most of whom were unfamiliar with it. While I have many happy memories of Jewish traditions growing up, in recent years, I've fallen out of the habit. The fact that my wife Ellen is Christian, and is very enthusiastic and organized about Christmas, means we lean toward celebrating the traditions of this holiday, rather than Chanukah. I've enjoyed buying and decorating Christmas trees, singing carols with neighbors, baking cookies, and so on. As I mentioned in an earlier newsletter (see "Happy Holidays" link to the right), since Finn was born, I've even harbored a fantasy of dressing up as Santa some year.

Anyway, playing the dreidel game in Finn's classroom teaches me two life lessons. First, it is never too late to revive a fun holiday tradition with your children. I leave the class hoping to buy a dreidel for the kids to play at home. Second, I learn that if you give a group of feisty kindergarteners a bunch of chocolate coins, and ask them to please not open them until the dreidel game is over, about 1 in 5 kids will listen to you!

After school, Finn and I are driving home, when out of the blue he announces, "We need to light a menorah! But you need to remember to light the Shamash first. That's the candle in the middle." Finn explains that he had learned this from a book that his teacher read to the class.

"Oh, one more thing, Dad," Finn says a few minutes later. "I want to celebrate Kwanzaa, too." It seems Finn has been bitten by the holiday bug, and is eager to celebrate in every way he can.

[and Chanukah.](#)

HANUKKAH HIGHLIGHTS
[Fun games for holiday celebrations.](#)

A KWANZAA CELEBRATION
[Giving and sharing the harvest with this new tradition.](#)

IS HE THE REAL SANTA?

The following Sunday, we arrive at our local firehouse for a special "Breakfast with Santa" event. As we get out of the car, my 2-year-old daughter Olivia spots the red jolly fellow near the entrance, laughing and hugging children. "Santa!!!!" she shouts.

Both children are excited to see St. Nick in the flesh. Ellen and I are equally impressed with this Santa. His red suit looks worn enough for a guy who had traveled around the world, delivering gifts to kids. He has the perfect "ho-ho-ho!" and a marvelous twinkle in his eye. My kids are delighted when Santa reaches into his bag and pulls out some small toys for them.

On the car ride home, Finn asks us, "Is he the real Santa? Or is he just a man dressed up like Santa?"



Time seems to stop as we ponder how to answer this question. We want to support Finn's childhood fantasy, but not ignore his skeptical curiosity. Hmm... What to do?

Ellen and I eventually tell Finn that the Santa he met was one of Santa's helpers. We explain that the real Santa can't possibly meet every kid in the whole world, so he teaches his helpers how to dress and act just like him. Other parents might have taken a different tack, but for our child, we felt this was the best response.

Later that night, at bedtime, we ask Finn, "What was your favorite part of the day?" When he is silent, we ask, "Was it meeting Santa?"

Finn says, yes, but reminds us, "But he wasn't Santa, remember? He was one of Santa's helpers."

HOMEMADE GIFTS

The next morning, Finn comes up with another explanation for why the "real" Santa couldn't come to the breakfast at the firehouse. "He has to stay at the North Pole with the elves. Otherwise, they won't be able to finish making all the presents." As excited as Finn is about receiving presents, he takes equal delight in creating them.

While exchanging gifts is a big part of the holiday season, the gifts themselves don't have to be costly. Sometimes the simplest, least expensive gifts can be the most meaningful. I still fondly remember the sweaters and scarves that my grandmothers knit or crocheted as Chanukah presents. A special drawing, painting or clay sculpture from a child can be a gift that a relative treasures as if it were gold trinkets. A few years ago, one of my friends gave his wife a priceless present: a notebook, in which he wrote down many of the adorable things that their kids had done over the past year. By documenting those precious memories, my friend had given a gift that was filled with love and laughter. This year, in addition to giving our kids gifts from a toy store, we're thinking of creating a homemade comic book for our children, starring our family.

Children love to make homemade gifts for friends and family. One easy-to-make present is a coupon book with certificates for things like "Good for a Bear Hug," "Good for Cleaning My Room," and so on.



CHRISTMAS GIVING FUN
[Help your children create festive gifts for the holidays.](#)

THE BEST GIFT MY PARENTS EVER GAVE ME...
[Famous people share their favorite gifts.](#)

MAY I HELP YOU?
[The gift of time can be the best present of all.](#)

HOMEMADE CHRISTMAS ORNAMENTS
[The kids can create decorations for your tree!](#)

HANUKKAH AND

KWANZAA STARS

[Make the holidays stellar with star-shaped cookies.](#)

DAYS OF OUR LIVES

[A personalized calendar your child can make.](#)

THE GIFT OF GIVING

The teachers at Finn's school recently sent home a note about holiday gifts. In the spirit of the season, they want to help less fortunate people around the world. In particular, instead of giving the teachers money or gifts for themselves, they requested that families make a contribution to a particular non-profit organization that helps fight hunger and poverty by giving farm animals, trees, and other resources to destitute families around the world. Instead of giving families short-term relief, the idea is to give a source of food, self-reliance, and hope. The note explained that the students would vote on what animal they might purchase for a family in need, such as a llama. Ellen and I are deeply touched by this idea, and look forward to participating in this worthy venture.

Wishing you and your family a wonderful holiday season, filled with simplicity, family, and concern for the less fortunate.

Jordan Brown

Sesame Workshop



Weekly Trivia

Did you know Sesame Street goes by lots of different names around the world? It's true! In Spain, it's called Barrio Sesamo, in France it's Les Amis de Sesame, in Canada, it's Sesame Park, and in China it's Zhima Jie!

FROM THE WORKSHOP

In 1968 when it began, it was one little street. Now Sesame Street reaches around the world to over 120 countries. Your gift of support will allow Sesame Workshop, the non-profit organization behind Sesame Street, to use media for what may be the greatest good, helping children around the world reach their highest potential.

[Support the Workshop today!](#)

COMMENTS? QUESTIONS?

[Tell us what's on your mind.](#) Kindly note that we are unable to respond to every email received.

ABOUT THE WORKSHOP

Sesame Workshop is a nonprofit educational organization making a meaningful difference in children's lives around the world. Founded in 1968, the Workshop changed television forever with the legendary Sesame Street. Today, the Workshop continues to innovate on behalf of children in 120 countries, using its proprietary research methodology to ensure its programs and products are engaging and enriching. Sesame Workshop is behind award-winning programs like Dragon Tales and Sagwa, The Chinese Siamese Cat, Pinky Dinky Doo and ground breaking multimedia productions in South Africa, Egypt and Russia. As a nonprofit, Sesame Workshop puts the proceeds it receives from sales of Sesame Street, Dragon Tales and Sagwa products right back into its educational projects for children around the world. Find the Workshop online at www.sesameworkshop.org

Sesame Workshop

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