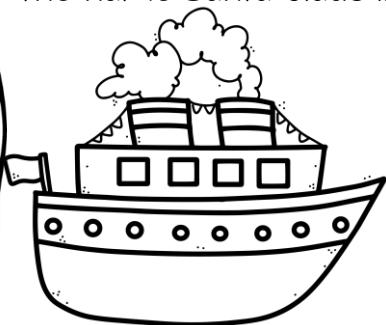


CHRISTMAS in the Netherlands

SINTERKLAAS

December 5th is when Sinterklaas or St. Nicholas brings children presents in the Netherlands. Saint Nicholas' Day is on December 6th, but the major celebrations are held on December 5th in the Netherlands. Sinterklaas evolved into the name Santa Claus in some places.



ARRIVAL

On the second Saturday in November, Sinterklaas travels to a city or town in the Netherlands. Dutch tradition says St. Nicholas lives in Madrid, Spain. They believe he chooses a different harbor to arrive in the Netherlands each year. This way as many children as possible get to see him. Sinterklaas travels with his servants, or "Zwarte Pieten" or "Black Peters." All the local church bells ring in celebration when Sinterklaas comes ashore on his steamboat. Dressed in his red robe, Sinterklaas leads a procession through the town on a white horse. Each town in the Netherlands has a few Sinterklaas helpers dressed the same as him to pass out presents.

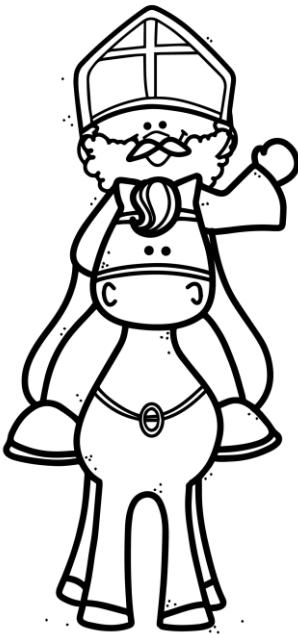
BEHAVIOR

Children are told that the Zwarte Pieten keep records of things they have done in the past year in a big book. If they are good, they will get presents from Sinterklaas. However, if they are bad, they will be placed in a sack and the Zwarte Pieten will take them to Spain for a year to learn to behave.



SHOES

Children leave out a shoe by the fireplace or windowsill on the night Sinterklaas arrives. They sing Sinterklaas songs and hope he will come in the night to leave them presents. Hay and carrots are left for Sinterklaas' horse. Children are told Sinterklaas rides his horse on the roofs of home. The Zwarte Piet climbs down the chimney or through a window to leave presents and candy in their shoes. Many families tell children that Sinterklaas and the Zwarte Piet make weekly visits. Children leave their shoes out each week until the main Sinterklaas party on December 5th.



SAINT NICHOLAS' EVE

December 5th is called St. Nicholas' Eve. Children receive their presents that evening. There may be a knock at the door with a sack full of presents waiting. Sinterklaas parties are often held on St. Nicholas' Eve. Treasure hunt games are often played with poems and riddles that give clues. Children follow the clues until they find presents left by Sinterklaas. Sweets and special biscuits are eaten at the party. A "letter blanket" or "banketletter" is made from marzipan or pastry. The biscuits are made in the shapes of the first letter of the names of the people at the party. A "pepernoot" is another sweet biscuit made from cinnamon and spiced.



SAINT NICHOLAS' DAY

Sinterklaas leaves the Netherlands by steamboat using the port of Rotterdam, Europe's largest port called the Hook of Holland, on December 6th. He travels back to Spain. Surprise presents are given on St. Nicholas' Day. There are many customs. At class parties everyone's name is put into a hat, and everyone picks out another person's name and must make a surprise present for that person. The presents are usually something the person would find useful for their favorite hobby. Presents come with a poem to give a clue to who may have sent the present, but it is meant to be a mystery.



CHRISTMAS EVE

Dutch children believe Santa Claus, or Christmas Man, comes from Lapland in Finland to deliver more presents on Christmas Eve. Children have already received most of their presents on St. Nicholas' Day though.

CHRISTMAS DAY

Christmas Day is a much quieter day than St. Nicholas' Day in the Netherlands. People often attend a church service and have a family meal. There is a special Christmas Day "Sunday School" in the afternoon at church. The Christmas story and other traditional stories are told. Christmas Day is known as "Eerste Kerstdag" (first Christmas Day). The day after Christmas is called "Tweede Kerstdag" (second Christmas Day). People tend to visit with their families on the second day and shop. Many people have Christmas trees in the homes in the Netherlands, but these are not put up until after Sinterklaas' arrival.

Name _____

CHRISTMAS in the Netherlands

MATCHING: Match each term with its description.

1. ____ church	A. Children believe he brings presents on Christmas Eve
2. ____ Sinterklaas	B. Left out for Sinterklaas' horse
3. ____ Spain	C. Sinterklaas' servants
4. ____ steamboat	D. Are left out for Sinterklaas each year
5. ____ white horse	E. Brings presents to children in the Netherlands
6. ____ St. Nicholas	F. Sinterklaas rides on this to deliver presents
7. ____ shoes	G. Many people attend this on Christmas Day
8. ____ Zwarte Pieten	H. Sinterklaas is thought to live in this country
9. ____ Santa Claus	I. This person is celebrated on December 6 th each year
10. ____ hay & carrots	J. Sinterklaas arrives on this each year



TRUE OR FALSE: Place a check in the correct column.

STATEMENT	T	F
11. Sinterklaas is thought to live in the Netherlands all year.		
12. Dutch children receive most of their presents on Christmas Eve.		
13. Dutch children are told they will be taken to Spain if they are bad.		
14. Sinterklaas and Santa Claus are considered the same person.		
15. Parties are often held on Saint Nicholas' Eve.		
16. Christmas trees are put up on Saint Nicholas' Eve.		
17. Children leave hay in their shoes for Sinterklaas' reindeers		
18. Church bells ring in celebration when Sinterklaas comes ashore.		
19. Saint Nicholas' Day takes place on December 25 th each year.		
20. The Zwarte Piete delivers presents for Sinterklaas.		

MULTIPLE CHOICE: Choose the best answer.

21. What is the main reason the author wrote this passage?

- A. To persuade the reader to visit the Netherlands.
- B. To explain how Sinterklaas arrives in the Netherlands each year.
- C. To inform the reader of the customs celebrated at Christmas in the Netherlands.
- D. To entertain the reader with an interesting story about Sinterklaas.

22. What is thought to happen to children who are bad throughout the year in the Netherlands?

- A. They receive coal in their shoes.
- B. They are taken back to Spain to learn to behave.
- C. They do not get any presents.
- D. They will receive sticks instead of presents.

23. How are presents thought to be delivered in the Netherlands?

- A. Santa Claus delivers them on St. Nicholas' Eve.
- B. Sinterklaas delivers them on Christmas Eve.
- C. The Zwarte Piet climbs in the window or down the chimney for Sinterklaas to deliver them on St. Nicholas' Eve.
- D. Sinterklaas climbs down the chimney or through the window to deliver them on Christmas Eve.

24. What is the main reason hay and carrots are often left in Dutch children's shoes?

- A. To feed Santa's reindeers.
- B. To feed Sinterklaas' horse.
- C. To feed Sinterklaas.
- D. To feed Santa's horse.



25. What happens when a person's name is chosen at their class party on Saint Nicholas' Day?

- A. They must sing to the class.
- B. They receive a special present.
- C. They have to give out presents to everyone in their class.
- D. They are given a secret present by the person who chose their name.