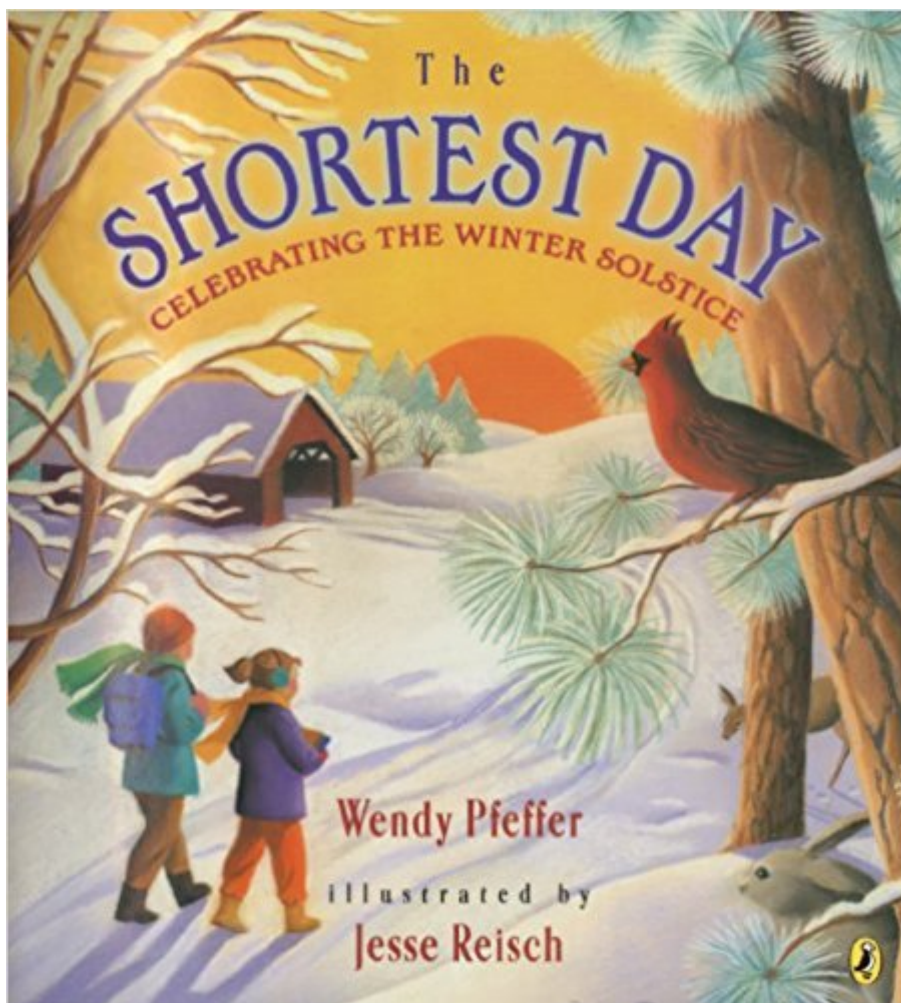


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The Shortest Day: Celebrating The Winter Solstice



Synopsis

The science, history, and cultural significance of the shortest day of the year: The Winter Solstice! The beginning of winter is marked by the solstice, the shortest day of the year. Long ago, people grew afraid when each day had fewer hours of sunshine than the day before. Over time, they realized that one day each year the sun started moving toward them again. In lyrical prose and cozy illustrations, this book explains what the winter solstice is and how it has been observed by various cultures throughout history. Many contemporary holiday traditions were borrowed from ancient solstice celebrations. "Using clear, concise language, Pfeffer discusses important ideas behind the shortest day of the year, such as the change from autumn to winter as well as the concept of the Earth's tilting away from the sun. While appealing to a younger audience, this treatment combines the cultural approach of Ellen Jackson's *The Winter Solstice* (Millbrook, 1994) and the activities of Sandra Markle's *Exploring Winter* (Atheneum, 1984; o.p.). Pfeffer uses an easy, comfortable tone for conveying the basic information, and the end pages will provide additional opportunities for would-be astronomers to explore the principles on their own." •School Library Journal Simple science activities, ideas for celebrating the day in school and at home, and a further-reading list are included.

Book Information

Paperback: 40 pages

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Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 56 customer reviews

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in Books > Children's Books > Education & Reference > Science Studies > Nature > Weather

Age Range: 6 - 9 years

Grade Level: 1 - 4

Customer Reviews

Praise for *The Shortest Day*: "In a well-thought-out collection of ideas surrounding December 21 and the Winter Solstice, the author leads readers through what happens to the sun and why... Back pages include an interesting and useful variety of ideas, from more facts about the solstice with explanatory diagrams, four projects that teachers, parents, and adults who work with children would find fresh, and two "cooking" activities, one for a human party and one for an avian one." — *Children's Literature*

Using clear, concise language, Pfeffer discusses important ideas behind the shortest day of the year, such as the change from autumn to winter as well as the concept of the Earth's tilting away from the sun. The historical view provides a brief look at the days of prehistoric sun worship as well as chronological interpretations of the phenomenon from 5000 to 1000 years ago. Thus, young listeners are exposed to the ideas of ancient Egyptian, Chinese, Incan, and European astronomers and their efforts to explain this scientific wonder. The modern scene of the solstice celebration, though obviously at Christmas, features family, presents, and stockings on the mantle but has no religious overtones. The remaining pages feature more complete "Solstice Facts," four simple experiments, two party suggestions, and a short but up-to-date list for further reading. While appealing to a younger audience, this treatment combines the cultural approach of Ellen Jackson's *The Winter Solstice* (Millbrook, 1994) and the activities of Sandra Markle's *Exploring Winter* (Atheneum, 1984; o.p.). Pfeffer uses an easy, comfortable tone for conveying the basic information, and the end pages will provide additional opportunities for would-be astronomers to explore the principles on their own." — *School Library Journal*

Wendy Pfeffer is the author of many children's books, including the *Creatures in White* series with Silver Burdett, several *Let's Read and Find Out* titles for HarperCollins, and *A Log's Life* with S&S. Jesse Reisch has provided artwork for several children's and adult books.

I bought this book in the hope of finding some stories that explain the many roots of the holiday season we celebrate. As former Catholics, we grew up celebrating a Christian holiday season, but we are agnostic. Our kids love Christmas, so I wanted to give them some perspective on the many traditions and how we as non-Christians can still find meaning in the season - this book totally fit the bill!

A great book that includes a non-Christian view of celebrating winter. I feel it's important for my children to understand how traditions and celebrations were originally celebrated (as much as we know). I was surprised to find a few pages of science at the back which was great since I was using

this in homeschool.

I grew up loving christmas and as an adult became pagan! The winter solstice is my favorite holiday! I discovered this this past year and I had to have it. It came and i loved the story and the pictures! I was so impressed that I wanted to show it during my winter solstice festival! During the winter solstice festival I saw a young couple with a toddler boy who could not participate in the ritual because they were tending to their little boy. So I lent the book to them and the little boy loved the book and he was so absorbed that he stopped crying and fussing and the parents were able to briefly participate in the ritual. However I rate 1 star due to their horrible employee treatment.

My daughter was having a hard time wrapping her head around why the winter solstice was the shortest day of the year. I think this book helped her conceptualize how the earth rotates around the sun and why it's called the shortest even though it is still 24hrs.

I purchased this book after reading reviews here at and then previewing the book at our local library. I was looking for a picture book for my 6 year old that explains the Winter Solstice as well as the human traditions with which it is associated. This book fits the bill better than anything else I found, and the delightful illustrations are a nice bonus. It may come as a surprise to many people that a book about Winter holidays does not mention Christmas or Hannukah. However, this book reaches back farther in time to festivals and celebrations based on natural phenomena that occur in the Winter (shorter days, plants losing leaves). These very early celebrations gave rise to many of the customs that we still follow (bringing evergreens into the home, giving gifts, lighting candles). I love the anthropological perspective (I'm trained in this field), and was thrilled to find the suggested activities at the end of the book for children to make simple scientific observations and hold a secular celebration of the Solstice. This book would make a wonderful classroom resource as well as a read-aloud picture book to read as a family. It may be a bit too easy a read for children at a 2nd grade reading level or higher, but I enjoy the simplicity even as an adult. I also find the secular perspective refreshing. I understand that many Christians believe the only winter holiday of importance is the celebration of Christ's birth, but this book shows how it is possible to celebrate Winter for it's own sake and to recognize why so many festivals are held in winter.

Perfect, exactly what I was looking for, explains the winter solstice from a few different angles giving children a nice clear understanding of this magical earth event.

Mostly I'm very happy with this book, but the "chart the sunrise and sunset" exercise in the back doesn't work for New England. Boston's Winter Solstice sunset is around 4:15pm, and the sunrise is around 7:11am -- the chart misses these times by more than an hour! Boston has an even earlier sunset in early December and a later sunrise in early January.

I wanted to teach my young children about the winter solstice and the history of celebrations during this time of year, and this is a great book for that. The illustrations are beautiful. There is a very good graphic about the position of the earth and sun at each solstice and equinox in the back of the book, and there are suggestions for activities too. Great book. We'll be reading it every year.

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