

Midwinter

Activity Packet



Longhouse



The Seven Dancers: Origin of Pleiades

When the Seven Dancers are directly above in the sky, this event marks the beginning of the Haudenosaunee New Year—often referred to as “Midwinter Ceremony.” It signifies the start of the ceremonial cycle and reaffirms our connections, responsibilities, and identity as Oneida people.

Long ago, the Lotinuhsyuni people forgot to teach their children important lessons about their way of life. The older adults were busy with their own activities and didn't spend enough time talking to the children. The children had many questions, but the adults didn't have time to answer them. To solve this problem, eight boys from a village decided to meet in a special spot in the forest. There, they would talk, sing songs, and practice music to learn more about their culture. One night, all eight boys had the same dream. In the dream, a special Being appeared and spoke to them. The Being told the boys that what they were doing was good, but it was sad that the older people were ignoring the children. The Being said that the older people

needed to learn a lesson, and the boys could help. The Being told the boys to meet again the next night and gave them a song and dance to perform. The Being said that something important would happen while they did this, and a change would take place. The boys were told not to look back when they heard their parents calling during the change. The next night, the boys gathered at their meeting place. Their parents and other grown-ups followed them secretly and watched from the dark forest. The boys started singing their song and doing their dance. Suddenly, they began to rise off the ground and go up into the night sky. The parents got scared and called to their children, but the boys kept rising. The parents cried out

louder, trying to stop them. One boy looked back at his parents and fell back to the ground. The other boys kept rising and became a group of stars called the Seven Dancers.

This story teaches the people that they should not take their children for granted. The Seven Dancers star group reminds everyone to think about the next seven generations and how they can help their community.

Throughout the year, the Seven Dancers appear in the night sky to remind the people to do their spiritual duties. This story is told during the winter to help people remember their responsibilities and take care of each other.



Midwinter Ceremonies

During the beginning of midwinter, the faithkeepers gather to determine the timing of the new moon, which marks the start of the new year. They count five sleeps, and on the sixth day, a series of ceremonies commence.

Day 1: The Great Feather Dance

This day features three dances, each with its own significance. The first dance is performed for the titleholders to give thanks for their ability to fulfill their responsibilities. The second dance is for the community, expressing gratitude for their continued ability to uphold the ceremonies given by the Creator. The third dance is a universal thanksgiving to the Creator, acknowledging the ongoing cycle of creation and the preservation of life on earth.

Day 2: The Stirring of Ashes

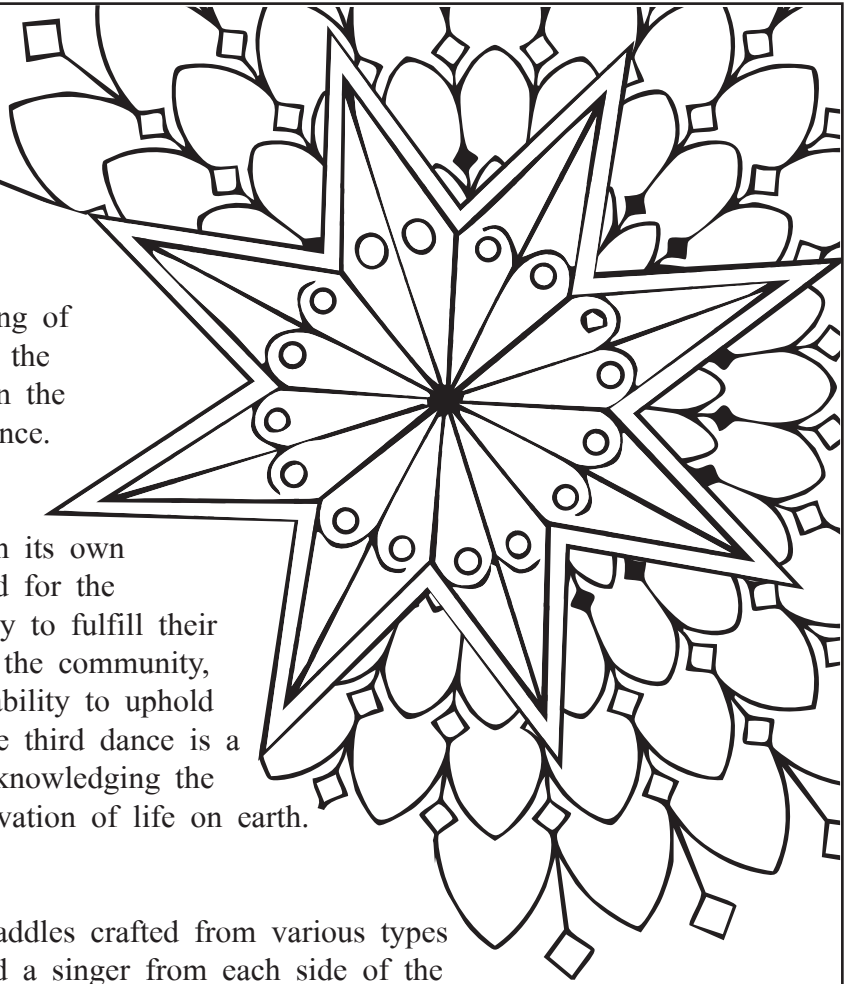
This ceremony involves using wooden paddles crafted from various types of trees. Participants select a speaker and a singer from each side of the Longhouse. The ceremony begins with the opening for stirring the ashes, symbolizing renewal. Participants pass paddles back and forth, starting with the title holders and then the community members, accompanied by singing. The purpose of stirring the ashes is to renew the earth for the upcoming year and to honor all of creation.

Day 3: Tobacco Burning, Hatuwah, and Drum Dance

On this day, several important rituals take place. First, tobacco is collected from representatives on each side of the Longhouse, followed by a speech on behalf of the community. Next, the Hatuwah, which are men's chants or personal songs to the Creator, are performed. This is also the day when children receive their Ukwehuwa names, or when those awaiting confirmation of their names are witnessed by the community. The day concludes with the drum dance, involving four roles: a singer, a speaker, a leader dancer, and a person with a strong voice. Additionally, a pail of blackberry juice is prepared.

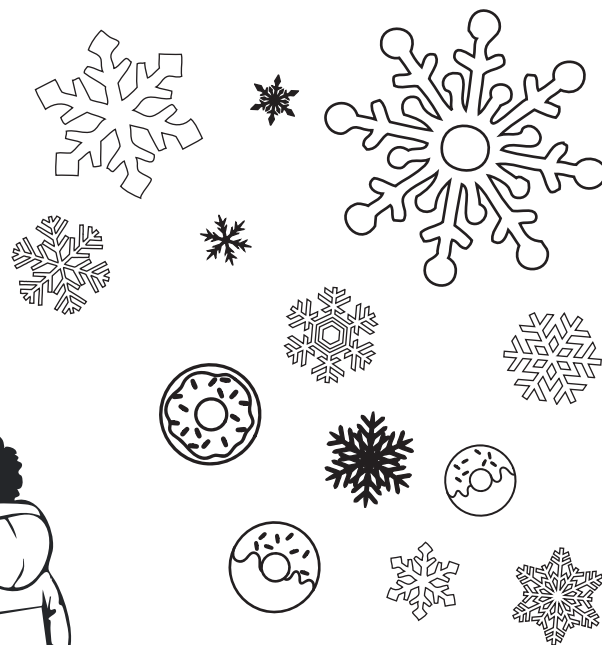
Day 4: The Peach Stone Game

After the ceremonies, runners from both sides are chosen to collect items early the next morning to be used in the game, which include four main objects: white wampum, Indian outfit, turtle rattle, and lacrosse stick. Certain items are prohibited, such as anything solid black, solid red, shiny objects, or anything you would throw away or has no value to you. The game uses 101 beans as counters, with one bean representing the Creator's decision on which side of the Longhouse will win. Two players from each side are chosen—one to hold the beans and another to set them down. Following the game, a feather dance, an old women's dance, and a bean dance are performed to conclude the day's festivities.



Hoyan

A Special Oneida New Year Tradition



What is Hoyan?

Hoyan is a word in the Oneida language that means “another.” People say hoyan to celebrate the start of another new year. On New Year’s Day, children and families take a bag or pillowcase and go from house to house shouting “Hoyan!” to greet their neighbors and share good wishes. In return, they receive treats like donuts, fruit, or other goodies. Some families still keep this tradition alive today. Many adults spend New Year’s Eve baking fresh donuts for the visitors. Sometimes, people also make other deserts like sweet cookies covered in glaze to share. This tradition may have been influenced by the Dutch. A long time ago, the Lotinuhsyuni made their first treaty with the Dutch, who also celebrate the new year with donuts in some places.

Midwinter Word Search

H I G F A D I B Q D W A J Z D M P B
I Q N H E C W G C A P S S O Y X E L
V T L A I A I I P L X C T H M O A S
Z G X H M H T N W Y O D W I E S C X
T R L O O E O H X O F S O B R S H B
R O F A D Y S P E K M I I N J D S N
O W B D F L A K E R Q E F N U N T U
D J W A M B O N H N D R N E G T O O
M R L N C Y E H V I I R C J A E N C
J L Q C Z C B A F X E N U D L S E K
C F W E V G O J N E W L G M Z O T V
X N B G B C H A N T K F O I R V H X

PEACHSTONE
TOBACCO
OPENING
FEATHER

CLOSING
ASHES
CHANT
DANCE

NAMES
WOMEN
FEAST
HOYAN

DONUT
STIR
DRUM
BEAN