

CONSERVANCY

FOR CUYAHOGA VALLEY NATIONAL PARK

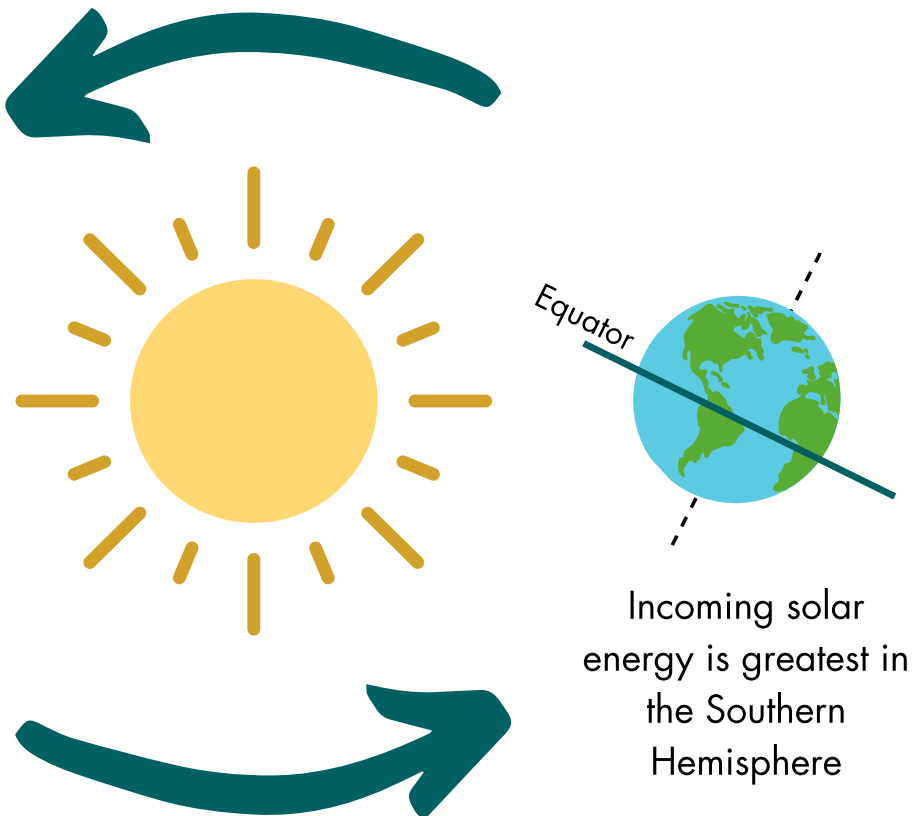
———— JOURNAL VOL 4 ————

The Winter Solstice

The Winter Solstice

For those of us in the Northern Hemisphere- above the Equator, like the U.S.- the winter solstice marks the longest night and the shortest amount of daylight of the year.

The Earth does not orbit upright, but instead, orbits tilted on its axis by 23 1/2 degrees. The winter solstice marks the exact moment half of Earth is tilted the farthest away from the sun.



The winter solstice happens on December 21 or 22, at the exact same time around the Northern Hemisphere. However, it takes place in June for people who live in the Southern Hemisphere. That's because the seasons are reversed below the Equator. For example, in Australia, winter takes place from June to August.

Imagine you woke up one day to the seasons switching. What do you do during this mysterious change in climate?



Celebrations Around the World

The winter solstice has been studied and celebrated throughout all of human history, all around the world. Here are three examples of winter solstice celebrations:

Shab-e Yalda is an Iranian winter solstice festival where people gather together to protect each other from evil on the longest night of the year. They feast on nuts, pomegranates, and watermelons, symbolizing dawn and the glow of life in their red color.



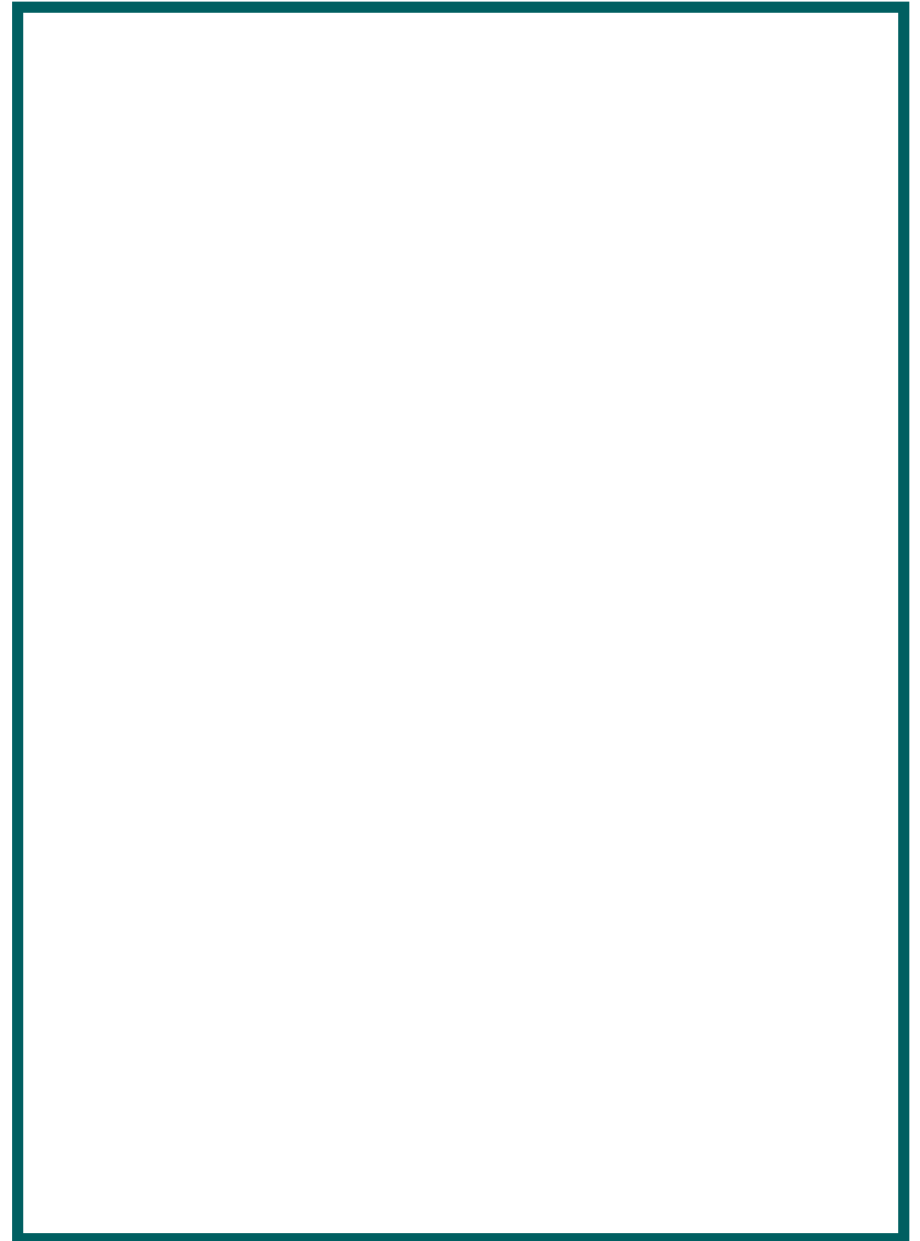
The Dongzhi Festival in East Asia celebrates the return of longer days. The celebration welcomes increased positive energy for the year to come and is celebrated by gathering together to enjoy traditional foods, like Tangyan, or rice ball soup, and dumplings.



Saturnalia was an ancient Roman festival in honour of the god Saturn, the god of agriculture and time. It was celebrated through feasting, drinking, gambling, and giving gifts.



Draw a picture of your own winter solstice celebration. What would you eat? What games would you play? Who would you celebrate with?



Traditions

People celebrate the winter solstice through all different types of traditions. Interview a family member or friend about their traditions. Come up with your own questions or use our questions below:

What is your favorite thing to do with loved ones during the holidays? What is the best gift you ever recieved? What is your favorite holiday food?

Shadows

At noon on the winter solstice, your shadow will be the longest noontime shadow you cast all year.

This is because when the sun rises and sets, it traces an arc across the sky. The height of that arc changes throughout Earth's orbit. During winter in the Northern Hemisphere, the North Pole is tilted away from the sun, so the height of the arc is low. This makes your shadow look long!

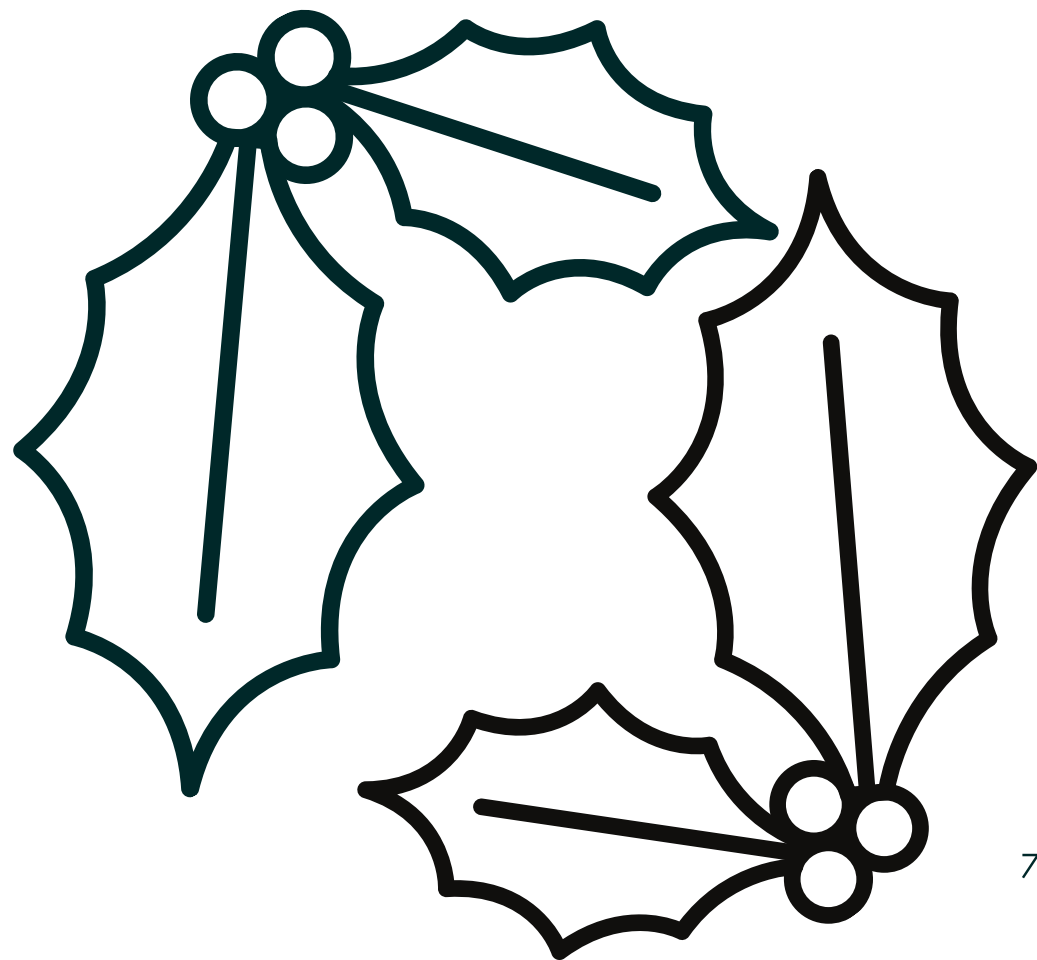
Challenge: On the winter solstice (December 21, 2020!), head outside and take a look at your shadow!

Experiment with shadows! Using a flashlight and a small toy, keep the toy on a table in a dark room. Move the flashlight in an arc, mimicking the sun rising in the east and setting in the west. Observe what happens to the shadow of the object. What happens when your arc is low and close to the toy? What about when it is farther away?



Reflection

This reflection is a Celtic tradition that aligns with the tale of the mythological twins, the Oak King and Holly King. The Oak King rules from Winter Solstice to Summer Solstice and the Holly King rules from Summer Solstice to Winter Solstice. Celts would contemplate challenges or personal habits that they would like to let go and symbolize that by throwing a holly leaf into the fire. Write inside of the holly leaves what you hope to let go of in the new year.



The Celts would then contemplate resolutions and goals for the new year, symbolized by the acorn. Looking back on 2020, write inside of the acorn things you hope to plant and grow within the new year.

