

Winter

When you think of winter, you probably think of cold, snow and ice. You may also think of winter holidays like Christmas, Hanukkah and Kwanzaa. Winter is also the time of year when daylight ends earlier and each day is dark longer than it is light.

Winter is one of four seasons. It begins and ends at different times in different countries and cultures. In North America, winter begins when the winter solstice occurs. This happens when the sun is farthest from the equator. There is a solstice twice each year. In North America, the winter solstice occurs when the sun is farthest from the equator in the southern hemisphere, which is in late December. In the southern hemisphere, the opposite is true. Winter in the southern hemisphere begins in June, when the sun is farthest from the equator in the northern hemisphere.

In Celtic countries, such as Ireland, the winter solstice is considered the midpoint of winter, not the beginning. There the winter season begins on November 1. In some other European countries and in China, winter also begins in early November. No matter when it begins in a particular area, winter is the coldest season and the season with the shortest period of daylight each day. While people often describe winter days as short, they are not really shorter. The days of winter are still 24 hours long. There are just more hours of darkness in each 24-hour period. For example, in the United States, it is usually dark by 5 pm in winter, while in the summer, it stays light out until almost 9 pm.

Another interesting thing about winter is that the part of the earth that is in the winter season is actually closer to the sun than it is at other times of the year. It might seem like the sun would be farther away during winter and that might be why it is so cold. But this is not the case! When it is winter in the north, the earth is close to the sun but tilted in such a way that the sun's rays are split up so that they cover a larger surface area. In a sense, the heat is spread out, making any one spot colder during winter than in summer when the rays of the sun are farther away but shining directly onto the part of the earth where it is summer.

Name _____

Date _____

Winter Questions

1-5. Tell whether each statement is true or false.

1. Winter always begins in December.
2. Winter has shorter days than summer.
3. Winter is the coldest season of the year.
4. It gets dark earlier in winter.
5. Winter is cold because Earth is farther away from the sun than it is in summer.

6. Name three winter holidays.

7. A solstice

- a. occurs when the sun is farthest away from the equator in one hemisphere.
- b. occurs twice each year.
- c. is the start of winter in North America.
- d. All of the above

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Winter Questions (Cont'd)

8. In winter, the days are
- a. shorter.
 - b. darker earlier.
 - c. both of these
 - d. neither of these
9. It is colder in winter because
- a. the sun's rays hit the earth at an angle and spread out.
 - b. the part of the earth where it is winter is farther from the sun than it is in summer.
 - c. the moon's gravitational pull causes water to freeze.
 - d. None of the above.
10. What do you think of when you think of winter?

Name _____

Date _____

Winter Answers

1. False
2. False
3. True
4. True
5. False
6. Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa
7. a
8. b
9. a
10. Answers will vary but will probably include references to cold weather, snow, ice, darker days, winter holidays, etc.