

## Winter Celebrations

A vast number of Okemos students participate in a variety of culture specific holidays. Here, three of them share beliefs and traditions pertaining to their celebrations.

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### Feliz Navidad en España



At Okemos High School, there has been a crop of exchange students from all over the world. Many of them have different experiences come the holiday season. Nina Martinez (10), an exchange student from Spain, recounted how the holidays differ in her home country.

**Q:** How is Christmas different in Spain? Are there any interesting holiday traditions your family does?

**A:** It is not as much of a big deal in Spain. Christmas is more relaxed. We eat dinner with our family every Christmas. It is like a party in a way because there is music and we dance. In my family, my siblings wake up at 6 am and they wait in the living room until the rest wake up at about 9 am. We open presents all together and eat breakfast after.

**Q:** What American traditions do you like/not like?

**A:** Christmas in America is so American. It is such a big deal and everyone is in the holiday spirit. Also, there is snow at Christmas and in Spain there is never snow at this time of the year.

**Q:** What foods are common in Spain during the holiday season?

**A:** The “roscon de reyes” is a holiday cake that contains a toy in the middle of the cake that my family makes every year.

**Q:** Does your family celebrate The Three Kings? What is the Three Kings?

**A:** Yes, this celebration is a much bigger deal than Christmas. The Three Kings are essentially the same thing as Santa Claus but in Spain. On the evening of Jan. 5, the Three Kings come at night and leave gifts for everyone. Throughout Spain there are parades with floats and they throw candy to the children.

## Chanukah Hannukah Hanuka



**Madeline Robins**

Web Editor

celebratory meals. So with those jolly tunes playing on the radio, and everyone’s houses’ (except mine) lit up with lights, it is that time of year to debunk all those misconceptions about the “Jewish Christmas”.

The first thing I feel I should address is how the term “Jewish Christmas” should not exist. The holidays may fall around the same time of year, but otherwise, there is no correlation between the two. As a matter of fact, the reason they are around the same time is because Chanukah is based off of the Hebrew calendar. So although Chanukah may fall on Dec. 25 some years, it really just depends on when the 25th of Kislev (month on the Hebrew calendar) is.

The reason we celebrate Chanukah is to celebrate the Jews, their army

being called the Maccabees, defeating the oppressive Greeks when they took control of Jerusalem and their holy Temple. After their surprising victory, the Jews went back to the second Temple. When they arrived, they saw that there was only enough oil to last for one night. Miraculously, the oil lasted and kept the candles lit for eight nights.

This leads to the next misconception I wish to bring awareness to, that Chanukah is eight nights, yet we light a total of nine candles. No, it is not that the Maccabees just could not count (come on, we’re Jewish). The reason we have 9 candles on the menorah is because we use one, called the “shamas”, that is usually seen as higher on the menorah, to light the other candles. Each night, you light

the shamash, meaning “attendant” in Hebrew, first, and then use that candle to light the other candles, the number of them being whichever night of Chanukah it is.

Around this time of year, I tend to get asked a bit “So do you have, like, Chanukah Harry or something?” To this, I usually chuckle and take a quick glance around the room to see if there are any fellow Yids around I can make eye contact with in amusement. After my initial reaction, I then tell them no and explain why.

Unlike some Christian holidays I have learned about, Judaism has no jolly spokesperson or schtick to go along with any of its holidays. So unless you’re counting Ross’ “Chanukah Armadillo” there has never been any need for some magical creature asso-

ciated with Chanukah. The mystifying species that delivers things to us is just our parents, who are pretty magical without being accompanied by any flying reindeer.

Another thing to remember is that you don’t need schedule things around specifically around Chanukah for your one Jewish friend. Although some may prefer to be crucified than work on Christmas, Chanukah is just like a regular week for us. It is one of the most minor holidays we celebrate, regardless of it being probably our most known holiday.

Now, the thing about the presents. While many people associate Chanukah as a holiday to give and receive gifts, some Jews do not do any of it. While in my family and most others in America, it is our tradition to give

a present on each night of Chanukah the holiday has never been about giving gifts. Instead, it is about celebrating escaping the persecution of the Hellenistic Greeks. In many traditions, people just give money, or “gelt” (which is actual money too, not just delicious, chocolate gold coins).

The last thing I would like to leave you with is how I respond when people ask if I find anything offensive about the holiday season. My response to this in the past was always been no, however, this season I was able to give the an answer: when people use Chanukah snapchat filters on their stories when they do not celebrate the holiday nor does it relate to their story. It feels like you are making a joke about it and you are just gonna end up getting kvetched out by me.

**Janeen Zheng**

Guest Writer

## CHINESE NEW YEAR

My favorite holiday of the year is one we don’t get school off for. It fills every corner of my house with fragrances of my mother’s cooking, and unites my family to celebrate our roots with food, stories and new memories to last a lifetime. Chinese New Year typically falls around mid winter on the first day of the Lunar calendar, a calendar based on the moon’s cycles. My family has held the same traditions for Chinese New Year for as long as I can remember. Here are some highlights of how we ring in the Lunar New Year:



**Calling Relatives-** Since my extended family all live in China or neighboring asian countries, my parents always call them to wish them luck in the new year.

**The C.N.Y. Gala-** The Chinese New Year gala airs on TV four hours before midnight on New Year’s Eve. The program features various forms of entertainment, and attracts 800 million viewers annually. To put that into perspective, the superbowl gets 100 million on average. The acts my siblings and I look forward to most are the acrobats and comedy skits.

**Red Envelopes-** Red envelopes, or “Hong Bao”, date far back in Chinese history. They are filled with money and given to children for good luck and happiness. While some believe more money in the envelope equates to more good fortune in the new year, my parents have stuck to one crisp dollar meant for sentimental keeping rather than spending.

**FOOD-** Food is such a big part of the celebrating the new year. In the days leading up to New Year’s Eve, my family turns into an assembly line for mass making hundreds of dumplings, enough for my family (surprisingly) and to give away to friends. My mom always puts an almond in a handful of dumplings, and whoever ends up eating a nuttified dumpling is said to have extra luck for the new year. Other foods we make include Tang Yuan (boiled black sesame rice balls), Zhong Zi ( rice, dates, and sweet red beans wrapped in bamboo leaves), and Bao Zi (steamed veggie and pork buns).

