YALDA
Activity Packet

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The Story of

**SHAB-E-YALDA**

(YALDA NIGHT)

Shab-e-Yalda (Yalda night), is an ancient Persian festival celebrated on the longest and darkest night of the year—the winter solstice. It’s a joyous occasion where family and friends gather at the homes of grandparents or elderly relatives to share stories, read poetry, play music, and fill the house with light and warmth as they await the sunrise. Yalda means ‘birth’ and Shab-e-Yalda is a night full of hope and happiness, celebrating the rebirth of Mithra or Mehr, the god of sun and the victory of light over darkness.
During Yalda night, family and friends enjoy the enchanting poems of Hafez, read verses from the epic Shahnameh, and savor delicacies laid out on the Sofreh-e-Yalda (Yalda table setting) such as watermelon, persimmon, pomegranate, and “ajil,” a colorful mix of dried fruits, nuts, and seeds.

De-seeding a pomegranate can be a fun and collective activity to enjoy as the night begins! Scan the QR code to learn how:

**TRADITIONAL DISHES OF SHAB-E-YALDA:**
Families across Iran celebrate Yalda night by indulging in traditional dishes. Khoresh-e Fesenjoon (a chicken stew with walnuts and pomegranates), Ash-e Reshteh (a thick soup with herbs and noodles), and Koofteh (delicious meatballs) are among the most famous dishes of Yalda night.

Scan the QR code to learn how to make a Pomegranate and Walnut Meatball. The recipe is a courtesy of Roshanak Yousefian from Popilee.
On our **Yalda Table**

On the longest night of the year, families gather around a Sofreh-e-Yalda arranged with various symbolic items. Some represent the rebirth of the sun (Mehr or Mithra), signifying the transition from the longest night to dawn. Others reflect the cherished traditions of the Yalda night—reading poetry, sipping tea, and sharing sweets to make the longest night more enjoyable together.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Symbolism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Watermelon</td>
<td>Symbolizing the “rebirth of the sun” with its vibrant red color.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pomegranate</td>
<td>Symbolizing fertility and the dawn’s crimson hues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persimmon</td>
<td>Adding sweetness to the celebration with its rich flavor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ajil (colorful mix of dried fruits, nuts, and seeds)</td>
<td>Symbolizing abundance and diversity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tea</td>
<td>Providing warmth and comfort during the winter night.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divan-e-Hafez</td>
<td>A collection of poetry by the revered poet Hafez, whose verses enrich the celebration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shahnameh</td>
<td>An epic poem by Ferdowsi filled with Persian mythology and heroic tales.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candles</td>
<td>Illuminating the night, symbolizing the transition from darkness to light.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweets</td>
<td>Bringing sweetness to the longest night of the year.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LET’S SET OUR TABLE!

Cut and paste the Yalda items from the next page and decorate your Yalda Table below.
On Shab-e-Yalda, some families gather around a special table called a “Korsi.” This short square table is covered with a thick blanket, and underneath, there’s a heater to keep everyone warm. People sit on cushions around the Korsi, sharing stories, eating delicious food, and enjoying each other’s company in the cozy warmth it provides.
MATERIALS: Printer, color pencils, scissors, and glue.

FIGURES:
1. Print out this page.
2. Color and add details to the figures.
3. Cut the figures out and fold them from the dashed lines to make them sit under the Korsi.
KORSI:

1. Print out this page.
2. Color and add details to your Korsí.
3. Cut out the Korsí and fold from the dashed lines.
4. Glue the yellow sections to the adjacent blue lines to make your Korsí table stand on its legs.
5. Seat your figures under the Korsí!
On Shab-e-Yalda, Iranians partake in a cherished tradition that adds a touch of magic to the night. Each person contemplates a secret wish or question in their heart, and then opens a book of Hafez’s poems. The poem written on the page is a secret message meant solely for the individual, offering guidance and insight into their wishes and questions. Similar to the joy of unraveling a riddle, it’s very gratifying to decipher the meaning behind each poem. This tradition brings the families and friends closer together, allowing them to relish the mystery and wonder of Shab-e-Yalda.
MY FAL-E-HAFEZ?

Think about a secret wish or question, and then open a page from Divan-e-Hafez. If you don’t have one, you can scan the QR code below. Kindly ask a family member or an elder to help you read your “fal” in either English or Persian!

What did you think of your “fal-e Hafez”? ____________________

________________________________________________________________________

Did it answer your question?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

What other messages do you think it had for you?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

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What time is the sunrise and sunset on Yalda where you live? 
__________________________________________________________________

How many hours is the Yalda night where you live?
__________________________________________________________________

How do you plan to celebrate the Yalda night with your family?
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________

My favorite thing about Yalda night is _________________
__________________________________________________________________

My favorite fruit of Yalda night is _______________________
__________________________________________________________________

Draw the scene of your Yalda night here: