

Christmas customs

Site celebrates season

Christmas starts with the story of a child born in a manger a long time ago. The holiday still looms large in the minds of children around the world more than 2,000 years after the birth of Jesus.

Web designer James Cooper was asked by some teacher friends if he could build a Christmas-themed, child-friendly website that wasn't trying to sell them anything. The self-described "Christmas nut" was happy to oblige with **WhyChristmas.com**.

Cooper, a Christian from the United Kingdom, keeps the site focused on the religious nature of the season, but the writing and colorful graphics are geared toward young kids. Of course, it's impossible to tell a story about immaculate conception and a young teenaged mother without encountering some adult themes, so kids may have some questions.

The site also looks at secular traditions from various countries that celebrate Christmas in different ways. The different days of celebration, decorations, cere-

monies, foods, songs and iterations of Santa Claus are all covered. The history of many of the traditions is explored as well.

The "Christmas Around the World" section has an interactive world map and a list of countries, from Argentina to Zimbabwe, that celebrate the holiday. Clicking on a country takes you to a page with a description of how the people who live there observe the season.

"The Christmas Story" section contains many ways to learn the story of Jesus. There's an illustrated narrative, comic book, audio, video and animated musical versions. This section also has interactive crafts and games. A history section explains the events, people and other beings of the story in more detail.

There's an activities section with plenty of games, puzzles, projects and more to keep the kids busy over the long holiday. They can decorate a virtual tree, build a manger scene, color in holiday scenes, do cross-words, read bad Christmas jokes, email Santa (and get a response) and more. There's

also holiday recipes from different countries.

I realize the site is mainly the work of a one-man band; however — it's in need of a redesign. Just because your audience is children doesn't mean the design can't be sharp — just look at Disney and Pixar.

The typography needs to be more engaging. The bright colors need to be used in smaller, more strategic doses. The mismatched clip art needs to be redone in a more unified fashion. And the writing could use a lit-

tle polish, especially ditching the overused exclamation points!

Despite its design deficiencies, WhyChristmas definitely has the spirit of the season in its heart, and young kids will find much to enjoy on it.

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