

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Kids learn what holidays are really about

Mia Geiger *Special to The Washington Post*

Long after the batteries need to be replaced or toys no longer hold their luster, these children's books will keep the spirit of the holidays alive for both old and young:

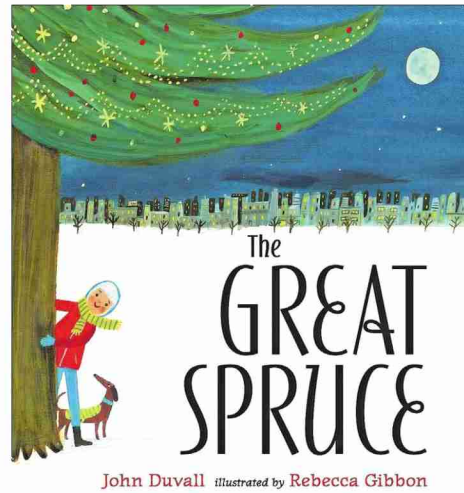
"The Great Spruce": by John Duvall, illustrated by Rebecca Gibbon. Alec loves climbing the giant spruce outside his house, and he loves hearing his grandfather explain how, many years ago, he replanted the then-tiny tree from a shady part of the forest to a sunny spot near their house. When townspeople see how beautiful the tree is, they ask if they can chop it down and place it in the town square during Christmas. Alec finds a way to save the tree while still allowing it to be enjoyed by the community, relaying a message of conservationism in a kid-friendly way. Soft colored-pencil drawings and saturated acrylic ink illustrations give the artwork depth, warmth and vitality.

"Kwanzaa": by Rebecca Pettiford. Kids eager to learn about Kwanzaa can find lots to look at in this book, from the upbeat photographs of families celebrating to the rich, bold colors on each page. The slim volume answers questions such as "What is Kwanzaa?" and "What does Kwanzaa mean?" followed by concise, easy-to-understand answers. Originally published in 2014 and now available in paperback, the book includes a short picture glossary.

"A Hanukkah with Mazel": by Joel Edward Stein, illustrated by Elisa Vavouri. Misha, a talented yet poor painter, lives alone in an Eastern European village and has no one to spend Hanukkah with. One day he finds a hungry cat in his barn. Though he has very little to eat, he shares what he has with the cat, whom he names Mazel, Yiddish for "a drip from above," that is, "luck." "I think I'll call you Mazel. You're certainly a very lucky cat to have wandered out of the cold and into my barn," Misha says. The two happily celebrate Hanukkah, even though Misha has no candles for the menorah and just a few potatoes with which to make latkes. A knock on

the door the next day brings a friendly peddler with surprising news. The old-world charm of the drawings combines harmoniously with the holiday tale emphasizing the power of kindness and compassion.

"The Doll People's Christmas": by Ann M. Martin and Laura Godwin, illustrated by Brett Helquist. Based on the characters in the series enjoyed by tweens, this new book is geared to the younger set. Two main characters set the stage. Annabelle Doll, who is part of a delicate Victorian doll set; and Tiffany Funcraft, part of a family of modern plastic dolls. The dolls belong to sisters Kate and Nora Palmer, and, when the girls aren't around, the dolls come to life. When the dolls see that Kate accidentally breaks the angel that was supposed to top the tree, they're devastated. More mishaps follow and the dolls are sad, thinking the perfect Christmas they planned is ruined. But a surprise event and a little introspection ensures a happy holiday. The details in the full-page drawings, as well as the unexpected turns in the story, will capture kids' attention.



Together with Grandpa, a young boy finds a way to save his favorite tree in this heart-warming Christmas tale. *Penguin Random House*

