

Thanks First

 COLOR THE PICTURE



The sky over Sunny Square was dark blue and full of stars, and the snow crunched and squeaked under everybody's feet as they came. The fire crackled inside its sparkly gravel ring, and the squash lantern glowed on the Wishing Tree, and next to the Moose home's door, the little green pine was covered in painted circles, gold and red and white, all turned to the trunk.

Ricky stood up on a stump with his old bark roll. The one with all the Swap rules on it.

"Everybody," he announced. "We are going to give the Swap pile away. The other way. Not a swap. Just giving. So I need new rules."

"Oh no," whispered Mr. Monkey.

"But first," said Ricky, "I'm getting rid of the old ones."

He unrolled the bark and read the first one out loud. "Rule two. All the presents have to be the same size." He took a lump of charcoal from the fire and scratched it out. *Skritch.*

"Rule nine. No presents that are alive." *Skritch.*

"Rule fifteen. No presents that are Bruno." *Skritch.*

Bruno sat up very straight. "So now I CAN be a present?"

"I guess so," said Ricky.

Bruno grabbed the biggest leaf he could find, wrapped it around his tummy, tied a vine around himself in a big floppy bow, and sat down in front of Mama Monkey.

"For you," he said.

Mama Monkey looked at the big bear in a bow. "Bruno," she said, "you're just what I wanted."

"Haw haw haw!" went Bruno.

"Hee hee hee... *SNORT!*" went Hazel.

Ricky kept going. *Skritch. Skritch. Skritch.* Rule twenty-two, no peeking. Rule thirty-five, all presents wrapped. Rule thirty-six, the size of a present is how far it came. He scratched out every single one, all the way down the bark, until there was nothing left but a long row of black scratches.

Then he picked up his brand-new bark, the one that said WHO NEEDS THEM? at the top. He held the charcoal over it. He thought. He thought some more.

"I don't know what rule comes first," he said.

Mr. Monkey and Mr. Moose looked at each other. Mr. Monkey could see that Ricky really wanted to get it right this time, and that he didn't know how.

Mr. Moose was thinking about Thanksgiving. The Swap had fallen down, and nobody had minded. And what everybody had talked about, all night, was the leaves. The thank-you leaves had come first. And then, after, everybody wanted to give.

"Ricky," said Mr. Moose. "What did we do at the Feast, right before the Swap?"

Ricky thought. "We opened the leaves."

"And after the leaves?"

"We wanted to give the lantern away," said Mr. Monkey.

"And the presents."

Ricky looked down at his bark for a long time. Then he wrote one rule, in big letters, right under WHO NEEDS THEM?

THANKS FIRST.

He looked at it. He didn't add any more.

"That's all?" asked Shiloh.

"That's all," said Ricky. "One rule."

So they started the way the rule said. Thanks first.

Mama Moose brought out a tall new candle and set it on a flat stone by the fire, where everybody could see it. "This is the first one," she said. "The first light of December. We get it from the lantern, and then we give it away."

Mr. Monkey took a little twig, held it to the lantern, and carried the tiny flame across the snow with both hands, very slowly, so it wouldn't go out. He touched it to the new candle. It caught. And now there were two lights in Sunny Square, the little lantern and the tall new candle, side by side.

"Now," said Mama Moose, "everybody find the gold circles with your own face on them."

So everybody went to the little green pine. Daddy Moose found his, with his frosty face on the front. Mama Monkey found hers. They took them down and turned them over, and sat by the candle, and looked.

Daddy Moose looked at the back of his for a long time: the big moose in the dark snow with a candle in his mouth, and the little dark house behind him. Then he looked at Mr. Moose and nodded, just once, slowly, the way he did when something really mattered.

Mama Monkey saw herself handing a little monkey a big, dripping honey spoon. "You remembered that?" she said, laughing, and she pulled Mr. Monkey into her lap and kissed the top of his head.

Then Sammy zipped up the little pine and found four red circles with her own face on them. She turned every one over, hanging upside down by her tail to read the backs. And for once in her whole life, Sammy stayed in one place for a long, long time.

Then Mr. Moose found one more gold circle on the little pine, with his own face on the front. He hadn't made it. He turned it over. On the back, somebody had painted a little moose in the dark, with icicles on his antlers, and a little monkey sliding across the ice beside him.

"From me," said Daddy Moose. "For coming out in the cold to see."

Mr. Moose held it against his chest for a long time.

Then Tessie cleared her throat, very slowly.

"When I was small," she said, "my grandmother told me a story. About somebody who had more than he needed."

Everybody scooted in close.

"One winter," said Tessie, "he heard about a family... who didn't have enough. Not enough food. Not enough to keep warm. So in the night... when everybody was asleep...

he crept up to their door... and left a gift. And he went away... before anybody saw."

She stopped. She stopped for so long that Bruno, still wrapped up in his leaf and bow, fell asleep against Hazel. "Hrrrrrrr-snoooo," went Bruno.

"Heh... heh... heh," went Tessie, very slowly. Then she went on.

"The next night... he did it again. And the next night... again. But on the third night... the papa of that family was waiting by the door. And he caught him."

Benji's ears stood straight up. "What did he say?"

"He said..." Tessie looked around at all of them.

"Please... don't tell anybody it was me."

"Did the papa tell?" asked Mr. Monkey.

Tessie thought about it for a long time. "Well," she said, "somebody did. Or I wouldn't know the story."

"Hee hee hee," went Mr. Monkey.

Ricky looked down at his list. He looked at the pile of presents. Then he looked at his new rule. THANKS FIRST.

"Then that's how we do it," said Ricky. "We give them at night. At people's doors. And nobody knows it's us."

"Who's going to get them?" asked Mr. Moose.

Everybody turned to look at Benji, because Benji had the best ears in the whole woods, and Benji had been listening all week.

"The hedgehogs," said Benji softly. "I heard the little ones coughing when we were there. And the old badger past the meadow. His roof caved in under all the snow. And the birds at Munching Meadow can't find anything to eat."

Ricky wrote it all down under THANKS FIRST.

"Tomorrow, we help the birds," said Mr. Moose. "And then, the night after, the doors."

"And the night after that?" asked Mr. Monkey.

"We'll figure it out," said Ricky. "Rule one first."

Then, because it was a Celebrate night, Ricky stood up on his stump one more time. "I have a joke," he said. "Why did the candle go to school? To get a little... brighter."

Nobody laughed. The candle flickered. Ricky looked very pleased.

"What a day!" said Mr. Monkey as everybody started home. "Ricky scratched out every single rule. Bruno wrapped himself up and gave himself to my Mama. I carried the light from the lantern to the new candle, and we opened the gold circles. Tessie told a story, and Bruno snored in the middle. And now Ricky has only one rule. Thanks first."

Mr. Monkey whistled, and Mr. Moose hummed, and together they sang:

*We are better together,
Moose and Monkey forever.*

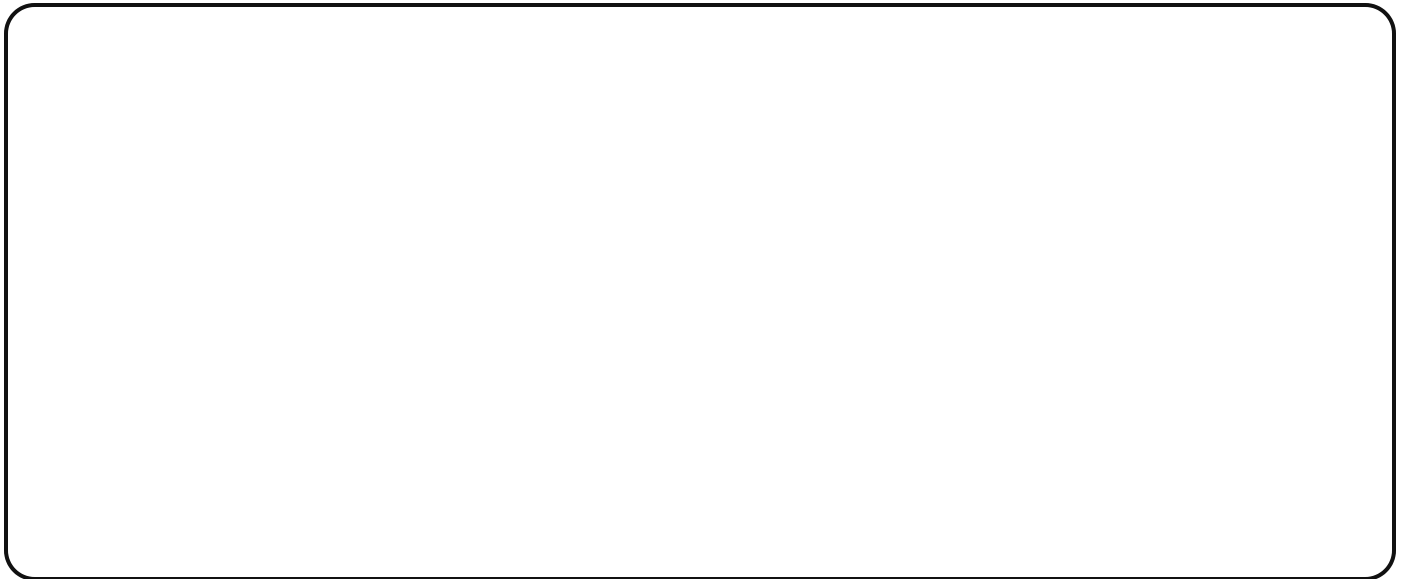
And in Sunny Square, the little lantern and the tall new candle burned side by side in the snow, two small lights where there used to be one.

Let's Talk

- 1 Ricky crossed out every old rule. What one new rule did he write?
- 2 Tonight your family hears about Nicholas and lights the first candle. Who do you think wrote you a gold ornament?

Your Turn

Tonight you'll hear about Nicholas, who gave gold in secret. Draw a secret gift you could give.



I could give _____ in secret.

SAMMY'S JOKE

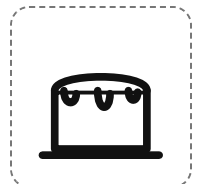


What does a snowman put on his cake?

Unscramble the letters to finish the joke. The picture is a clue!

o r t s f

CLUE



_____ing!

👁 Hidden Pictures

Find each hidden thing in the picture. Color it, then color its circle!



CAN YOU FIND THESE?



 Read With Me

DRAW THE STORY

**Is a Gift!**

gets in a big box.



sets a top on the box.

Is it a gift? It is .“I am a gift to ’s Mom!” said .

’s Mom hugs the big box.

It is the best gift!

PICTURE WORDS



Bruno



Ricky



Mr. Monkey



Color a star each time you read it.

♥ My Thank-You

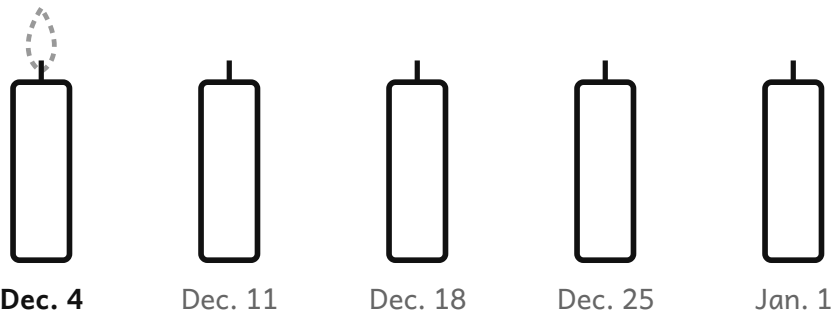
Trace the dark word, then the light words. Write their name on the line, or draw a tiny face. Read it to them!

Thank you.

for giving to me.

🕯 Tonight's Candle

Tonight your family lights the first of five candles. On each celebration day, one more candle gets lit, until all five shine on New Year's Day.



Dec. 4

Dec. 11

Dec. 18

Dec. 25

Jan. 1

Trace the flame on candle 1!

THE CANDLE WORDS: A GROWN-UP SAYS EACH LINE, AND YOU SAY IT BACK

Grace comes in.

(cup your hands)

Gratitude sees it.

(point to your eyes)

And graciousness passes it on.

(open your hands to the candle)

Grown-up: "What do we pass on?" You: **Generosity!**

One light. Passed along.

DRAW YOUR FAMILY WITH YOUR CANDLES

★ Celebration Night

Tonight your family celebrates. It has three parts:

1

Remember: Nicholas and the first candle

2

Rejoice: The Opening

3

Ready: Shoes and a plan

★ Remember: Who Was Nicholas?

A grown-up tells you the story of Nicholas. Then your family lights the first candle.



Nicholas was a real person. He lived about 1,700 years ago in a town by the sea. Today that town is in the country of Turkey.



His mom and dad followed Jesus. Jesus taught that when you give to help someone, you should keep it a secret.



A poor father had three daughters and no money. One night, Nicholas tossed a bag of gold through their open window and hurried away before anyone saw him. Later, he did it again!



The third time, the father caught him! Nicholas said, “Don’t thank me. Thank God.” Then he asked the father to keep it a secret.



This is a famous story, but nobody knows for sure how much of it really happened.



Today, kids in some countries set out their shoes the night before Nicholas’s day, December 6. They hope to find a treat inside.

For grown-ups: Nicholas of Myra (4th century) was a real bishop. The story of the three bags of gold, like most stories about him, is a legend. Jesus’ teaching on secret giving is Matthew 6:3–4.



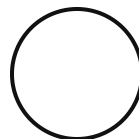
Rejoice: The Opening

Your family reads the gold ornaments by candlelight. Find the ones with **your** name on the front. A grown-up can read them with you.

I found gold ornaments with my name!

Write the number, or draw a dot for each one.

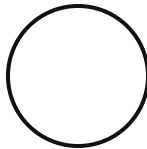
My favorite one is from: (Draw their face or write their name.)



Ready: Check Your Shoes

Did your family line up everyone's shoes by the front door? After the Opening, go check yours! Is there money inside? It's a gift you didn't earn, like Nicholas's gold. On December 6, Nicholas's day, you get to give it away in secret.

Who could my secret gift help? Draw their face or write their name.



Ready: Plan the Giving

Then plan the next three days of giving with your family. Draw or write your ideas in the boxes.



DEC. 5
Your time

Who will get your time, even when you'd rather rest?



DEC. 6
Your things

What will you give in secret?
Your shoe money goes here!



DEC. 7
Your words

Who needs a kind note from you?

EXTRA, IF YOUR FAMILY DOES IT

The Better Batch

Sometime this week, your family bakes two batches of a treat. Pick the batch that looks best and give that one to a neighbor or friend. You can leave it with no name, like Nicholas! Your family keeps the other batch.

