

A Heartwarming Holiday in the Classroom

NationalDayClassroom.com

Did you know that a simple children's book helped launch a national tradition of secret, anonymous giving? December 6th is celebrated as **National Mitten Tree Day**, an unofficial, heartwarming holiday dedicated to spreading warmth by collecting and donating mittens, hats, and scarves to those in need. While many national days celebrate food or fun, Mitten Tree Day is unique because it's a powerful, tangible reminder of community compassion during the coldest time of the year.

History and Founding

While the tradition of using a "mitten tree" has appeared in community drives since at least the 1940s, the modern inspiration for Mitten Tree Day is widely credited to a beautiful children's book, *The Mitten Tree*, by Candace Christiansen. Published in 1997, the story focuses on an elderly woman named Sarah who is lonely after her own children have moved away. She watches the neighborhood children waiting for the school bus and notices a little boy who cannot join the snow play because he lacks mittens.

Inspired by simple kindness, Sarah secretly knits a pair of blue mittens and hangs them on a nearby blue spruce tree for the boy to find. This single act of anonymous generosity starts a "game" where Sarah knits new mittens every night for any child she sees without them, replenishing the tree's warm "decorations" each morning.

The core subject of the day—the mitten—is ancient. The word "mitten" itself is believed to come from the Old French word *mitaine*, which was a nickname for a cat, as early mittens were often made of animal fur. The oldest known mittens date back over a thousand years to around 1000 A.D. in Latvia, where they held deep cultural significance. In Latvian tradition, women were expected to have a hope chest filled with knitted mittens, each pattern carrying specific blessings for their homes and families. Even in the American Civil War, women organized drives to knit and supply the necessary hand coverings for soldiers. The mitten has always been more than just a piece of clothing; it's a symbol of care and protection.

The Journey to "National Day"

Inspired by Christiansen's book, schools, churches, and libraries across the United States began formalizing the Mitten Tree activity. They would designate a Christmas tree or even a coat rack to serve as the "Mitten Tree," asking the community to donate new or gently used winter wear. These items would then be distributed to local shelters, hospitals, and resource centers. The practice quickly solidified around December 6th, marking a simple, actionable way to begin the season of giving. Unlike days founded by large corporations, Mitten Tree Day grew organically from an ethical idea: the quiet, selfless joy of helping a stranger.

Success Because of You!

Mitten Tree Day is hugely successful precisely because it promotes a public good and requires active community participation. It transforms a festive, decorative tradition (the Christmas tree) into a functional symbol of charity. In cold climates, it addresses a genuine necessity—protection from frostbite and harsh winter elements—while also teaching children and adults the value of empathy and the power of anonymous giving, just like Sarah in the story.

Local and Global

While the Mitten Tree tradition is most common in North America and colder regions, the concept of decorating a tree with items for the less fortunate appears globally. It reinforces a universal seasonal theme of looking out for neighbors during winter. For classrooms, Mitten Tree drives are a hands-on lesson in civic duty and kindness, directly connecting the simple act of bringing in a pair of mittens to the immediate need in their local community.

The Joy of Anonymity

The most powerful element of Mitten Tree Day remains the secret nature of the gift. The children in Sarah's story never knew who left the mittens, and Sarah never knew who left the mysterious basket of yarn on her porch. This reciprocity and quiet understanding of shared humanity is what makes the tradition so moving and easy to replicate: you can leave warmth for a stranger, and feel the joy of giving, without ever seeking credit.

Go Out and Celebrate!

The Mitten Tree Day story reminds us that kindness doesn't need a grand stage or a public announcement—it often works best in the quiet corners of the world. It's a perfect way to shift focus from receiving gifts to giving them as the holiday season begins.

Go out and celebrate [National Mitten Tree Day](#) by hosting a Mitten Tree drive at your office, school, or church! If you don't have time for a full drive, just pick up an extra pack of mittens or gloves during your next shopping trip and drop them off at a local donation center. Share photos of your Mitten Tree (before it's stripped for donation!) with us using **#CelebrateEveryDay** and **#MittenTreeDay**!

