

Gingerbread houses.

Aren't holiday traditions great! I'm always fascinated by the many ways that people of different cultures celebrate special times. We use symbols, songs, colors, food, actions, religious rituals, and get together to express our humanity. And we all do it. When you think of just how different all of the countries on this planet are, how our histories have shaped us, and how we have developed our own traditions, looking at how we celebrate special occasions is similar to looking through a magnifying glass at us. Our celebrations reveal a lot about us. One of the traditions that we have adopted from other cultures is to decorate gingerbread houses around Christmas time. Gingerbread dates back to the early Greeks and Egyptians who used it in ceremonies. Monks brought ginger to France in 10th century. But it wasn't until around 11th century that crusaders brought ginger back to Europe from the Middle East. An early recipe for gingerbread was ground almonds, dry bread crumbs, rosewater, sugar, and ginger. This was pressed into wooden molds that depicted the news of that time, a bit like small edible newspaper. In the 16th century, the English replaced the bread crumbs with flour, and added eggs, making a lighter bread. The first gingerbread man is credited to Queen Elizabeth 1, who impressed visitors with gingerbread men made in their images. Gingerbread quickly became more and more popular. It was in 19th century that gingerbread houses appeared in Germany after the brothers Grimm published their stories, especially Hansel and Gretel. They are a common Christmas tradition in Europe and North America. There are even competitions to build the biggest ones, and there is also an annual gingerbread city in Bergen, Norway. So, you see, our tradition of making a gingerbread house didn't originate here at all. It's development has taken a long time, and each time it has reached a different country, it has been slightly changed. And that is the way that traditions evolve.

Grammar notes.

Related vocabulary: a magnifying glass, crusaders, to replace, to originate.

1. At school, the children examined bugs under a magnifying glass.
2. Richard the Lionheart was a crusader.
3. That light has gone out. Could you replace the bulb?
4. They originated in Russia, but their family has settled in many different countries.

