

Mimi & Papa's Everyday Amazing Almanac

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Customs long abandoned as well as long-held traditions are highlighted among the 365 entries in this overview of Americana, presented in a part almanac, part activity book, item-a-day format.

Covering history, healthy living, and the origins of holidays, the almanac will appeal to elementary-age children as well as their parents and grandparents, particularly those familiar with farm life or those living in middle America, where many historical events and activities mentioned originated.

Suggested activities include craft projects, recipes, and challenges to try new things. Along with fun trivia tidbits, needed advice and warnings about fire safety and other potential dangers are included. Items about the origins of religious holidays and spiritual beliefs range from Christian saints to Jewish holidays to Native American leaders.

Overall, the entries are likely to spark ideas for vacations, from the list of ten American sites to see; inspire a new hobby such as gardening, which is covered extensively each month; generate ideas for school projects; and even encourage children and adults alike to invent new trivia-based games using the information provided. Adults nostalgic for the “good old days” will welcome suggestions to take the family to a state fair, cook chuck wagon stew, or make an old-fashioned pomander as a holiday decoration.

Most recipes and activities are appropriate for teens to complete on their own, but will require adult assistance or supervision for younger children. Brief entries may require further explanation as well, but ultimately can provide daily opportunities for the entire family to interact through a shared interest.

The author's heavy focus on older practices, many pre-electricity—for example, how pioneer women created a button lamp or washed clothes by hand—will introduce young readers to information they would not otherwise encounter, and may prompt further research.

A poem and a full-page, theme-oriented black-and-white illustration marks each new month, and entries throughout the book are accompanied by smaller black-and-white illustrations, but many are too small to fully enhance the text, and with a lack of color, no individual entry stands out.

The almanac ultimately fulfills a utilitarian purpose: to serve as a reference that will educate, entertain, and inspire.

MARIA SIANO (February 28, 2012)

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