Gather the Christmas Lights

A collection game for 2-4 players - all 20 cards

The aim

Collect three cards from one theme: Belonging, Wonder, Generosity or Renewal. Each theme has five cards. The first player to win three rounds wins the game; play a single round for a shorter game.

Set up

Shuffle all 20 cards. Deal three to each player. Put the remaining cards face down as a draw pile, then turn its top card face up to start a discard pile. The player to the dealer's left begins; play clockwise.

Take a turn

Draw one card from either pile. Then discard one card face up, leaving three in your hand. If you take the face-up discard, discard a different card. Keep your hand hidden from the other players.

Finish the round

At the end of your turn, reveal three cards from the same theme to win one point. You may claim a winning initial hand only after completing your first turn. Card numbers identify cards; they are not point values.

Keep play moving

If the draw pile runs out, leave the top discard in place and shuffle the other discards into a new draw pile. After a round, gather all 20 cards, change the dealer clockwise and deal again.

An optional storytelling finish

The winner arranges their three cards as a beginning, a turning point and an ending, then tells a brief Christmas story using all three. This adds no points and may be skipped. The next pages offer prompts.

A tale in three cards

Use exactly 3 cards - solo or shared storytelling

Draw and arrange

Shuffle the deck and draw three cards. Look at their pictures, titles and keywords. Arrange them before you begin; use every card in the finished story. You may exchange one card before starting, if desired.

Card 1: the beginning

Who is at the center of the story, and what do they need this Christmas? Where are they? Let the first picture introduce a place, a person or a wish.

Card 2: the turning point

What interrupts the plan? A secret, a gift, a visitor or an unexpected kindness may change everything. What choice does the character make?

Card 3: the ending

What changes because of that choice? What has been found, forgiven, shared or understood? End with a concrete action or image.

Choose your way to tell it

Tell a 1-3 minute story or write one paragraph per card. Alone, tell all three parts. In a group, pass the story along by stage; with two players, the first storyteller returns for the ending. With larger groups, rotate the starting storyteller between tales. Gather and reshuffle the cards after each complete story.

A Christmas beginning to borrow

The Candlelit Window introduces a traveler searching for shelter. The Hand-Knitted Scarf becomes a gift left at a gate. The Open Door ends the tale when a welcome leads the traveler to knit a scarf for the next visitor.

A longer Christmas story

Use exactly 5 cards - everyone may pass or contribute

Five roles, one connected tale

Draw five cards and arrange them as: 1. character and setting; 2. desire; 3. obstacle or secret; 4. helper or decisive choice; 5. outcome. Use all five. Aim for 3-5 minutes, or five short paragraphs. The cards remain in play until the tale ends; then gather and reshuffle.

Questions to unlock a story

Who has been overlooked? What must arrive before midnight? Which tradition needs to change? What is hidden inside a gift? Who needs a welcome? What can be mended? What small act of kindness travels farther than expected?

When a storyteller gets stuck

Describe one visible detail first. Turn it into a question: who left it here, who needs it, or what happens next? Use the card-specific prompts on the following pages. There is no required interpretation and no score for storytelling.

Make it collaborative

Share the five roles among the group, or let one person tell the tale while others offer details when invited. Anyone may pass. Keep the story comfortable for the people listening.

Reflect or make something

For personal reflection, draw one card and answer its question in your journal. For a creative project, draw three cards for a place, an object and a feeling, then write a scene or build a Christmas collage. Keep the cards removable if you want to use them again.

Card meanings & prompts

Cards 1-2 - Belonging

01 · The Candlelit Window

Welcome · Shelter · Connection · Belonging

Meaning: You do not need to earn a place beside the light. This card invites you to notice the people and places where you can arrive as you are. Welcome can begin with a small gesture.

Guidance: Offer a sincere invitation or ask for company.

Reflection: Where do I feel most at ease?

Story prompt: A traveler sees one window still lit. Who has been waiting?

02 · The Evergreen Wreath

Continuity · Tradition · Home · Belonging

Meaning: A circle returns to its beginning without becoming exactly the same. Traditions can hold memory while making room for who you are now. Keep the parts that nourish you and gently reshape the rest.

Guidance: Choose one tradition to keep or adapt.

Reflection: What makes a place feel like home?

Story prompt: An old wreath contains a ribbon nobody remembers tying. What does it mean?

Card meanings & prompts

Cards 3-4 - Belonging

03 · The Waiting Stocking

Anticipation · Trust · Receiving · Belonging

Meaning: Waiting is not the same as being forgotten. Leave room for kindness to arrive in an unexpected form. Receiving with gratitude can be as generous as giving.

Guidance: Accept one offer of help without minimizing it.

Reflection: What am I ready to receive?

Story prompt: An empty stocking holds a promise. Who finally fulfills it?

04 · The Christmas Hearth

Comfort · Rest · Restoration · Belonging

Meaning: Rest restores what effort alone cannot mend. Let warmth, simplicity, and familiar comforts bring you back to yourself. A pause can help you meet the next task with care.

Guidance: Make time for a quiet, comforting break.

Reflection: What would restoration look like today?

Story prompt: A stranger is offered a chair by the fire. What burden do they set down?

Card meanings & prompts

Cards 5-6 - Belonging & Wonder

05 · The Ribboned Keepsake

Memory · Ancestry · Appreciation · Belonging

Meaning: A keepsake carries a story, not a demand to live in the past. Remember what has shaped you while choosing what to carry forward. Appreciation can include both tenderness and change.

Guidance: Record the story behind a meaningful object.

Reflection: Which memory still gives me strength?

Story prompt: A ribboned box reveals a forgotten family custom. Who revives it?

06 · The Guiding Star

Hope · Direction · Possibility · Wonder

Meaning: You may not see the entire path, but one clear light can guide your next step. Hope becomes useful when it points toward something you can do. Follow the direction that feels honest and possible.

Guidance: Name and take one small next step.

Reflection: What light am I following?

Story prompt: A star appears where no star should be. Where does it lead?

Card meanings & prompts

Cards 7-8 - Wonder

07 · The Snow Globe

Perspective · Stillness · Imagination · Wonder

Meaning: Distance can change the shape of a problem. Pause before shaking everything into motion again. There may be beauty or possibility you can see only when the snow settles.

Guidance: Look at a concern from another perspective.

Reflection: What becomes clear when I slow down?

Story prompt: Inside a snow globe, one tiny window changes each night. Why?

08 · The Moonlit Reindeer

Courage · Journey · Discovery · Wonder

Meaning: A journey can begin before confidence arrives. Courage need not be loud; it can be a steady step through unfamiliar ground. Let curiosity travel beside caution.

Guidance: Try a manageable new route or experience.

Reflection: Where could curiosity lead me?

Story prompt: A reindeer waits at the forest edge. What journey does it offer?

Card meanings & prompts

Cards 9-10 - Wonder

09 · The Frosted Gate

Invitation · Threshold · Beginning · Wonder

Meaning: An invitation asks you to cross a threshold, not abandon your judgment. Notice what you are ready to begin and what you need to feel supported. A new chapter can start gently.

Guidance: Define the first step of a new beginning.

Reflection: Which threshold am I ready to cross?

Story prompt: A frozen gate opens only on Christmas Eve. What lies beyond?

10 · The Silver Sleigh Bell

Attention · Awakening · Joy · Wonder

Meaning: Joy may announce itself quietly. Pay attention to the small sounds and moments that call you back to life. You do not have to postpone delight until everything is finished.

Guidance: Notice and savor one ordinary pleasure.

Reflection: What has been asking for my attention?

Story prompt: A lost bell rings without being touched. Who can hear it?

Card meanings & prompts

Cards 11-12 - Generosity

11 · The Hidden Gift

Kindness · Surprise · Grace · Generosity

Meaning: Not every gift is wrapped, and not every kindness needs an audience. Look for help arriving in humble forms. Your own quiet generosity may matter more than you know.

Guidance: Give a small kindness without expecting recognition.

Reflection: What gift have I overlooked?

Story prompt: A mysterious present has no name tag. Who was it meant for?

12 · The Shared Loaf

Nourishment · Community · Enough · Generosity

Meaning: Enough becomes richer when it is shared wisely. Community grows around ordinary acts of nourishment and care. Offer what you can while respecting your own needs.

Guidance: Share food, time, or a useful skill.

Reflection: What can I share comfortably?

Story prompt: One loaf must welcome an unexpected guest. How does the table make room?

Card meanings & prompts

Cards 13-14 - Generosity

13 · The Hand-Knitted Scarf

Care · Patience · Devotion · Generosity

Meaning: Care takes shape through repeated, patient attention. The time invested in a small act can carry deep affection. Let devotion be practical rather than perfect.

Guidance: Finish one thoughtful gesture at a gentle pace.

Reflection: How do I show care through action?

Story prompt: A scarf is knitted for someone who never asks for help. How is it delivered?

14 · The Winter Robin

Small kindnesses · Resilience · Companionship · Generosity

Meaning: Small kindnesses can sustain us through a difficult season. Resilience includes accepting companionship and finding modest sources of warmth. You do not need a grand gesture to make a difference.

Guidance: Offer a simple, realistic act of care.

Reflection: Which small kindness would help today?

Story prompt: A robin returns every morning with a tiny clue. What is it trying to show?

Card meanings & prompts

Cards 15-16 - Generosity & Renewal

15 · The Christmas Letter

Honesty · *Reconnection* · *Understanding* · Generosity

Meaning: Words can open a door that silence has kept closed. Speak honestly and kindly, without trying to control the reply. Understanding begins when someone is willing to listen.

Guidance: Write a sincere note you can choose to send.

Reflection: What would I like to express clearly?

Story prompt: A letter arrives years late. Which relationship might it change?

16 · The First Snowfall

Freshness · *Quiet* · *Renewal* · Renewal

Meaning: A fresh beginning need not erase what came before. Quiet gives you space to choose your next mark deliberately. Allow a little simplicity before making new commitments.

Guidance: Clear one small space or obligation.

Reflection: What would a gentler start look like?

Story prompt: Fresh snow reveals only one set of footprints. Where do they end?

Card meanings & prompts

Cards 17-18 - Renewal

17 · The Mended Ornament

Healing · *Acceptance* · *Wholeness* · Renewal

Meaning: Repair does not require pretending there was no break. What has been mended may hold both vulnerability and strength. Give healing the time and support it needs.

Guidance: Tend something worth repairing.

Reflection: What can I accept while it heals?

Story prompt: A broken ornament is restored with a surprising material. What memory returns?

18 · The Midnight Clock

Completion · *Reflection* · *Readiness* · Renewal

Meaning: An ending deserves acknowledgment before the next beginning. Notice what you have learned, what is complete, and what no longer needs to follow you. Readiness can include uncertainty.

Guidance: Name one thing to finish and one to release.

Reflection: What am I carrying into the next season?

Story prompt: At midnight, an old clock offers one extra minute. How is it used?

Card meanings & prompts

Cards 19-20 - Renewal

19 · The Open Door

Forgiveness · *Welcome* · *Opportunity* · Renewal

Meaning: An open door can symbolize welcome, opportunity, or a kinder way forward. Choose invitations that honor your needs and boundaries. Forgiveness can be an inner release without requiring renewed contact.

Guidance: Make room for one healthy possibility.

Reflection: Which door feels safe to open?

Story prompt: Someone returns to a door they thought was closed forever. Who answers?

20 · The Christmas Morning Tree

Gratitude · *Fulfillment* · *Celebration* · Renewal

Meaning: Pause to recognize what has grown through effort, help, and patience. Celebration does not require a flawless season. Gratitude lets ordinary moments become part of the story you keep.

Guidance: Celebrate one small fulfillment.

Reflection: What is already worth appreciating?

Story prompt: Christmas morning brings something that cannot be wrapped. What is it?