

DAY 27 Christmas

1 Christmas origins

Christmas celebrates the birth of Christ, who was probably born between 11 BC and 4 BC (the death of King Herod, who plays a key role in the events surrounding Christ's birth). Some historians try to connect Christ's birth to the famous star that guided the three wise men. If the star were the

bright lights of Saturn and Jupiter in conjunction with Pisces, it would make the date 7 BC; however, if it was Halley's Comet, it would have been 11 BC.

Christmas as we know it today is really the work of the Victorians combined with a few traditions imported by the royal family from their native Germany. Until that time Easter had always been the

most important festival. In 1652 the Puritans actually banned Christmas.

A number of pagan traditions still survive, such as carol singing, the flames of the Christmas pudding, kissing under the mistletoe, excessive drinking, and bad luck if the Christmas tree is not taken down before the twelfth night.

2 Christmas scene



3 Christmas quiz

1 Can you match these Christmas greetings with their languages?

- | | |
|-------------------------|------------|
| a Boas Festas | Esperanto |
| b Buon Natale | German |
| c Feliz Navidad | Italian |
| d Fröhliche Weihnachten | Portuguese |
| e Gajan Kristnaskon | Spanish |
| f Glaedelig Jul | Danish |
| g Hristos se rodi | French |
| h Joyeux Noël | Malay |
| i Nadolig Llawen | Serbian |
| j Selamat Hari Krisna, | Welsh |
| Dan Tahun Bahru | |

- 2 a Exchanging Christmas presents derives from the three kings/wise men's example. (T/F)
- b The Christmas tree is a fairly recent invention. (T/F)
- c In Britain December the 26th is known as Boxing Day, as there is an annual boxing competition on this day. (T/F)
- d Christmas is only celebrated by Christians. (T/F)
- e Christmas cards are a derivation of a pre-Christian Jewish custom. (T/F)

4 Santa Claus



The original Santa Claus, or Saint Nicholas, was the Bishop of Smyrna (in what is now Turkey). He lived in the 4th century AD. He is remembered on 6 December for his generosity and love to children – he used to throw children gifts through their windows. His fame spread to Russia, Scandinavia and many parts of Europe.

Meanwhile in England, following the spirit of Saturnalia (a festival left behind by the Romans), masters served their servants at Christmas time, and people generally had a good time drinking and playing jokes on each other. The figure of Father Christmas grew out of these festivities. He was someone who, like Santa Claus, tried to help the poor and children.

Victorian children were the first to send messages to Father Christmas, saying not just what they wanted for Christmas, but also confessing their sins and renewing old promises.

The story of Santa Claus was brought to America by Dutch immigrants and was a variation of the Dutch Sinter Klaas.

Nowadays in Britain the names Father Christmas and Santa Claus are used interchangeably.

- Hand out photocopies and ask students to read the text and the letters to Santa Claus. Then tell them to imagine that Santa Claus really exists and that he could give them anything they wanted (not necessarily just presents, but also abstract things such as more intelligence, artistic talent). They should write him a letter with a list of four things they would really like.
- Then ask them to compare their list with other students and explain their choices.

Listening 3

- Students hear a Dutch girl (authentic recording, she spent a long time in Canada) recounting the origins of the Dutch Sinter Klaas (though how he ended up coming on a boat from Spain is anybody's guess!). Students listen and answer the same questions as on the photocopies. Tell them that not all the questions are answered. Lower levels can simply mark the questions that are answered.

1 Yes.

2 Spain.

3 He has a white horse and black helpers.

4 He is dressed in red.

5 You write poems and sing songs. You have to leave a carrot and straw for the horse and cookies for Sinter Klaas.

6 Not mentioned.

7 Yes.

8 He spanks you, takes you back to Spain in a bag and you have to pick oranges for him. And you don't get a present.

9 Not mentioned.



It's called Sinter Klaas and it's celebrated on December the fifth. And it's a nice tall man all in a red dress. And he comes on a big boat with his black helpers and they do all acrobatic stunts and stuff. And they walk around with these big *juten* bags. And the thing is the children are all really scared of Sinter Klaas because if you're bad he will take you back to Spain. [To Spain?] Yes, that's where he comes from. And then for the rest of the year you have to pick oranges for him. If you're good you get sweets and if you're bad he'll take you back in a bag or he gives you – he'll spank your bum with the end of a broom, we call it the *roe*.

So and it's ... you have to write poems and sing songs in front of the fireplace and you have to put a wooden shoe with a carrot and straw because he comes also on his white horse and he rides over the top of the roofs. So in the evening you have to sing really loud and ask him to come by your house and tell him that you've been a good girl or a good boy. And so you leave that for him and you also leave cookies for him and his helpers. And then in the morning the carrot is gone and the cookies are gone and you find a gift if you've been a good girl or a good boy.

Follow-up

- Students tell each other what they are going to buy for their family and friends for Christmas.
- Alternatively, from glossy magazines cut out some advertisements for gifts, and put each gift on an individual card. Divide the class into groups and give each group an assortment of cards. Students decide which gifts they would like to give and receive and why. In multinational classes students can discuss gifts which are typically given in their country.

5 Christmas games

- On pages 88–89 there are a few games to get students in a Christmas mood. Linguistic content was not my prime motivation in compiling these games.

1 Spot the difference

- The two pictures on pages 85 and 88 have ten differences. Put students in pairs and make sure they have different pictures. Instruct them to find the ten differences by asking each other questions.

The key to the Christmas games is in the Appendix.

Christmas carols

- On pages 109 and 110 are the words of a few English carols and songs. Students can sing along with these old favourites. If you want to set them a task, you could blank out the odd word here and there for them to write in as they listen.

4 Santa Claus

Father Christmas

On Christmas Eve, the night before Christmas, Father Christmas goes round every child's house and brings them toys. You have to write him a letter to say what toys you want. You put the letter on your fire place so it will flow up your chimney. He might bring you those things you want if you are good. Father Christmas has some messengers. They are fairies. Before Christmas you have to be good because you can not see the tiny fairies, and on Christmas Eve the fairies tell Father Christmas if you are good. Father Christmas has different names like Santa Claus and Saint Nicholas.



Dear Father Christmas
I hope you think I've been good because I have.
When you come I will put out a mince pie for you and carrots for the reindeers. Please bring me a train set, soldiers, pens and a ball.
from

Kynan 

Dear Santa

I hope you are well. I have had a fun year and tried hard to be good. please will you bring me

a new bicycle
a pair of rollerblades
a puppy
a CD player
and some sweets

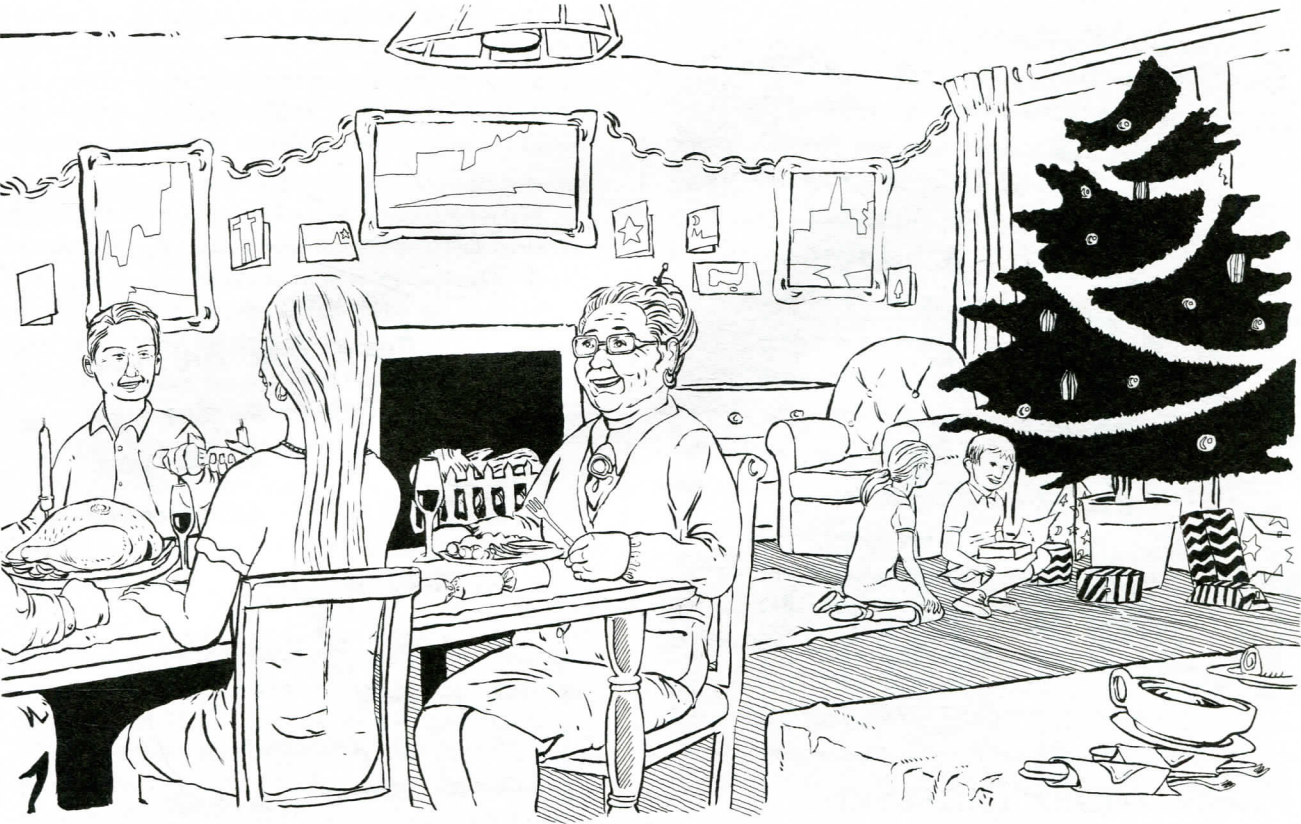
Happy Christmas

Love, Sophie

- 1 Is there a fictitious person in your country who gives presents?
- 2 Where does he/she come from?
- 3 Does he/she have any animals or helpers?
- 4 How is he/she dressed?
- 5 What preparations have to be made for this event – food, stockings, etc?
- 6 What role do the parents take?
- 7 Are the children scared of him/her?
- 8 What happens if you are a bad child?
- 9 Do you remember when and how you discovered that this person didn't really exist?

5 Christmas games

1 Spot the difference



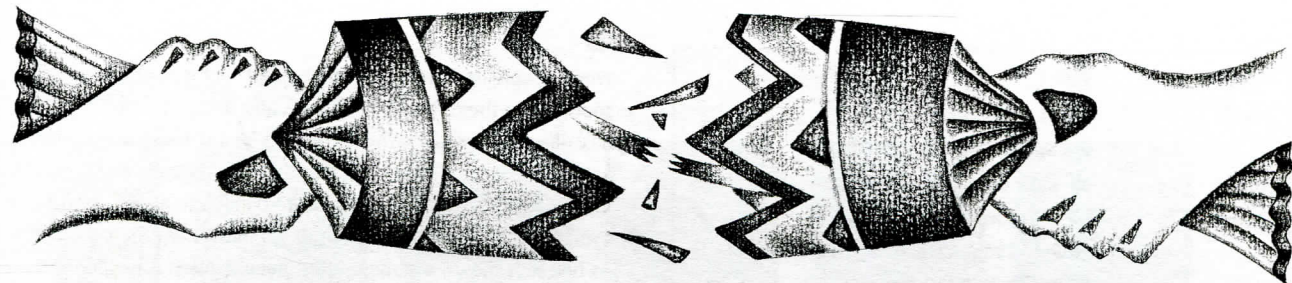
2 Christmas wordsearch

Can you find the 16 Christmas words hidden in the wordsearch? You can go across, down or diagonally left to right. The same letter cannot belong to more than two words.

C	C	H	W	H	I	T	E	F	R
S	A	M	C	R	M	E	S	E	E
A	R	I	P	R	A	S	T	S	I
N	D	S	G	U	A	P	O	T	N
T	C	T	S	I	D	C	C	I	D
A	A	L	U	L	F	D	K	V	E
Y	R	E	A	R	E	T	I	E	E
I	O	T	R	U	K	I	N	N	R
R	L	O	S	T	S	E	G	M	G
E	V	E	P	A	R	T	Y	H	A

- CARD
- CAROL
- CRACKER
- EVE
- FESTIVE
- GIFT
- MISTLETOE
- PARTY
- PUDDING
- REINDEER
- SANTA CLAUS
- SLEIGH
- STOCKING
- TURKEY
- WHITE
- WRAP

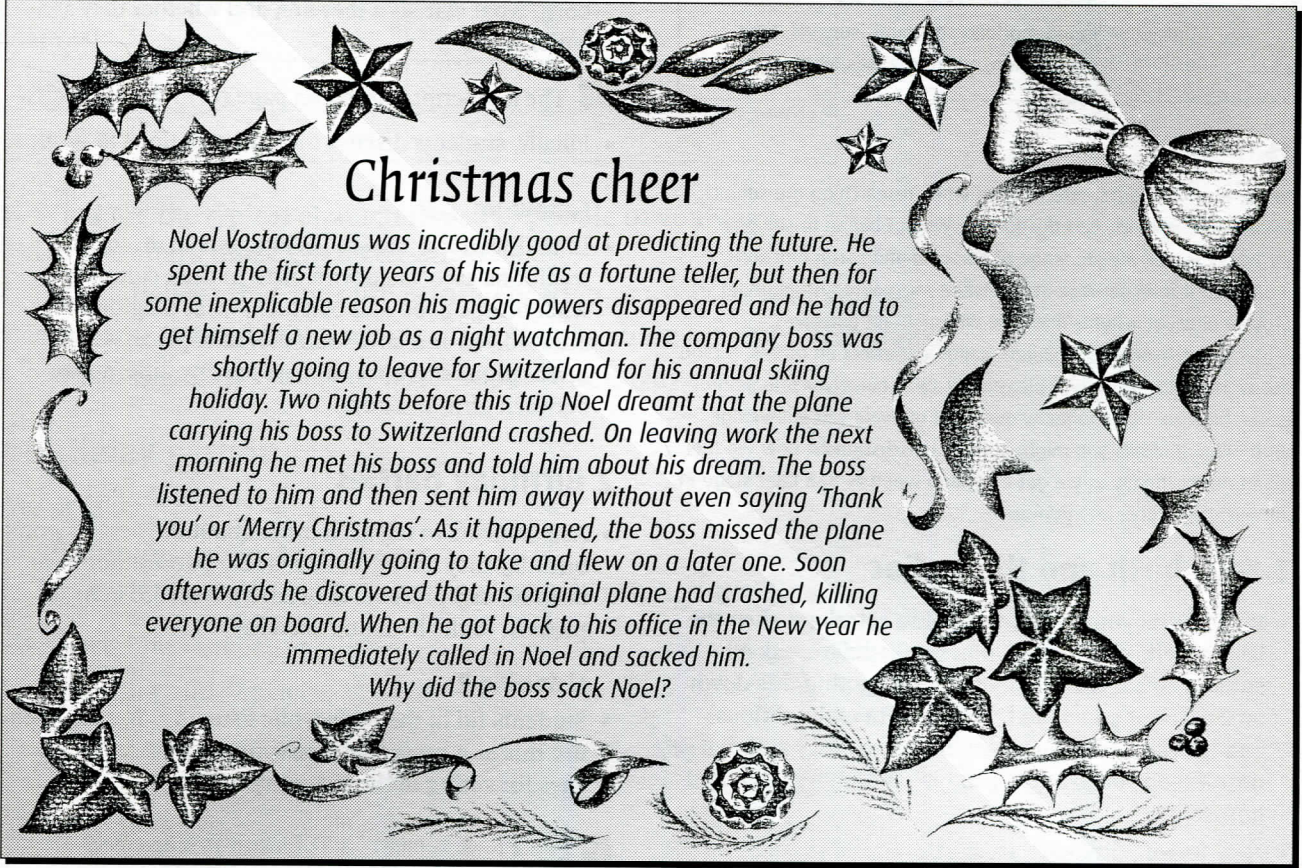
3 Christmas crackers



British people have fun pulling crackers over Christmas lunch or dinner. The crackers explode when you pull them and inside you find a silly party hat, a useless gadget (such as keyrings, plastic earrings) and a joke or a riddle. Here are four riddles for you to solve:

- 1 Which is the one and only word spelt incorrectly in this sentence?
- 2 The more you take away from it, the larger it becomes; the more you add to it, the smaller it becomes. What is it?
- 3 What is it that was given to you, belongs to you exclusively, and yet is used more by your friends than by yourself?
- 4 What is it that no one wishes to have, yet no one wishes to lose?

4



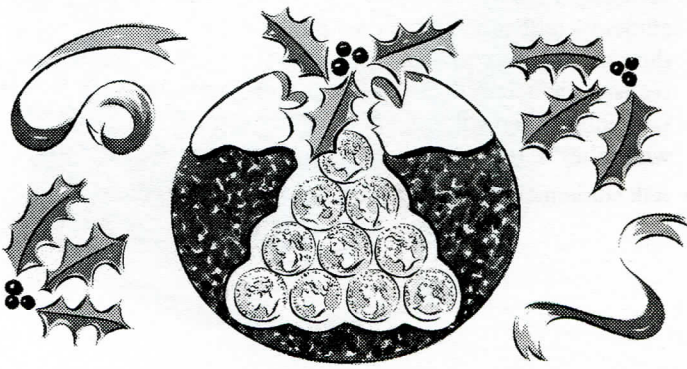
Christmas cheer

Noel Vostrodamus was incredibly good at predicting the future. He spent the first forty years of his life as a fortune teller, but then for some inexplicable reason his magic powers disappeared and he had to get himself a new job as a night watchman. The company boss was shortly going to leave for Switzerland for his annual skiing holiday. Two nights before this trip Noel dreamt that the plane carrying his boss to Switzerland crashed. On leaving work the next morning he met his boss and told him about his dream. The boss listened to him and then sent him away without even saying 'Thank you' or 'Merry Christmas'. As it happened, the boss missed the plane he was originally going to take and flew on a later one. Soon afterwards he discovered that his original plane had crashed, killing everyone on board. When he got back to his office in the New Year he immediately called in Noel and sacked him.

Why did the boss sack Noel?

5 Christmas pudding

Before the metric system was introduced, parents used to put silver sixpences into the Christmas pudding, which lucky members of the family would find (if they didn't swallow them!). Place ten coins as shown. Then turn the pyramid upside down by moving three coins, one at a time.



Day 26

The pagan 'Yule' is the origin of the word for Christmas in many nordic countries: *Jul* in Danish, Swedish and Norwegian plus Finnish *joulua* and Estonian *joulu*. In Gaelic languages the words for Christmas (*Nadolig*, *Nollaig*, *Nodlog*) all derive from the Latin *natalica* (nativity). A similar root is for *Natale*, *Noël* etc., which come from the Latin *dies natalis* (birthday, originally *dies natalis invicti solis*, birthday of the unconquered sun, with reference to Mithras and the ancient sun-God Attis).

Day 27

Christmas quiz

🕒 The languages are:

- a Boas Festas – Portuguese
- b Buon Natale – Italian
- c Feliz Navidad – Spanish
- d Fröhliche Weihnachten – German
- e Gajan Kristnaskon – Esperanto
- f Glaedelig Jul – Danish
- g Hristos se rodi – Serbian
- h Joyeux Noël – French
- i Nadolig Llawen – Welsh
- j Selamat Hari Krisna, Dan Tahun Bahru – Malay

Christmas games

🕒 1 Spot the difference

In the picture on page 88...:

- 1 There is no fairy on the Christmas tree.
- 2 There are only six presents under the tree.
- 3 Two children are opening presents.
- 4 One of the people at the table is different.
- 5 The turkey has not been eaten.
- 6 The candles are not lit.
- 7 The Christmas cards are on the wall.
- 8 The fire is not lit.
- 9 There is no mistletoe.
- 10 There is no Christmas pudding.

Answers

- 3 1 incorrectly 2 A hole. 3 Your name. 4 A bald head.
 4 He was a night watchman, so he shouldn't have been asleep dreaming.
 5 First move the top coin and put it under the row of four coins, between the second and third coins. Now take the first and fourth coins in the row of four coins, and put them on either side of the coins on what was originally the second row. And hey presto!

Day 27

Carols

The word 'carol' either comes from the Latin *choraula* (a flute player) via the old French *carole* or is of Celtic origin (in Breton a *koroll* was a dance, in old Cornish a *carol* was a choir or a concert, and in Welsh it meant a song). In any case they've been around for at least 1000 years, though the first printed collection was published in 1521.

Away in a Manger

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
 The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head;
 The stars in the bright sky looked down where he lay,
 The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,
 But little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes;
 I love thee, Lord Jesus: look down from the sky
 And stay by my side until morning is nigh.

Be near me, Lord Jesus: I ask thee to stay
 Close by me for ever, and love me I pray;
 Bless all the dear children in thy tender care
 And fit us for heaven, to live with thee there.

Traditional

We Wish You a Merry Christmas

We wish you a merry Christmas
 We wish you a merry Christmas
 We wish you a merry Christmas
 And a happy New Year.

We want some figgy pudding
 We want some figgy pudding
 We want some figgy pudding
 And a cup of good cheer.

We won't go until we get some
 We won't go until we get some
 We won't go until we get some
 So bring it out here!

We wish you a merry Christmas
 We wish you a merry Christmas
 We wish you a merry Christmas
 And a happy New Year.

Traditional

Jingle Bells

Dashing through the snow
 In a one-horse open sleigh
 Through the fields we go
 Laughing all the way.
 Bells on bob-tail ring
 Making spirits bright
 What fun it is to ride and sing
 A sleighing song tonight.

Jingle bells, jingle bells
 Jingle all the way,
 Oh what fun it is to ride
 In a one-horse open sleigh, O
 Jingle bells, jingle bells
 Jingle all the way,
 Oh what fun it is to ride
 In a one-horse open sleigh.

John Parpont (1859)

Good King Wenceslas

Good King Wenceslas looked out on the feast of Stephen.
When the snow lay round about, deep and crisp and even.
Brightly shone the moon that night, though the frost was cruel,
When a poor man came in sight, gathering winter fuel.

Hither page and stand by me, if thou knowst it telling
Yonder peasant, who is he, where and what his dwelling?
Sire, he lives a good league hence, underneath the mountain,
Right against the forest fence, by Saint Agnes' fountain.

Bring me flesh and bring me wine, bring me pinelogs hither
Thou and I will see him dine when we bear them thither.
Page and monarch forth they went, forth they went together
Through the rude wind's wild lament, and the bitter weather.

Sire the night is darker now, and the wind blows stronger
Fails my heart I know not how, I can go no longer.
Mark my footsteps my good page, tread thou in them boldly
Thou shalt find the winter's rage freeze thy blood less coldly.

In his master's steps he trod where the snow lay dinted
Heat was in the very sod which the saint had printed
Therefore Christian men be sure, wealth or rank possessing,
Ye who now will bless the poor, shall yourselves find blessing.

Traditional

Twelve Days of Christmas

On the (first) day of Christmas my true love sent to me
Twelve lords leaping
Eleven ladies dancing
Ten pipers piping
Nine drummers drumming
Eight maids milking
Seven swans swimming
Six geese laying
Five gold rings
Four colly birds
Three french hens
Two turtle doves and
A partridge in a pear tree

Traditional

Silent Night

Silent night! Holy night!
All is calm, all is bright,
Round yon virgin mother and child;
Holy infant, so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night! Holy night!
Shepherds quail at the sight;
Glories stream from heaven afar,
Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia!
Christ the Saviour is born.
Christ the Saviour is born.

Silent night! Holy night!
Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from thy holy face,
With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.

Joseph Mohr

Translated by John Freeman Young

The Holly and The Ivy

The holly and the ivy,
When they are both full-grown,
Of all the trees that are in the wood,
The holly bears the crown.
The rising of the sun
And the running of the deer
The playing of the merry organ,
Sweet singing in the choir.

The holly bears a blossom
As white as lily flower,
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ
To be our sweet Saviour.

The holly bears a berry
As red as any blood,
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ
To do poor sinners good.

The holly bears a prickly
As sharp as any thorn,
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ
On Christmas Day in the morn.

The holly bears a bark
As bitter as any gall,
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ
For to redeem us all.

Traditional