

15.2

The best and worst ... present

LEVEL

Intermediate

TOPIC

Giving and receiving presents

ACTIVITY TYPE

Note-taking

READING FOCUS

Recognising main ideas, reading 'between the lines'

TIME

30–40 minutes

KEY LANGUAGE

Past tenses

PREPARATION

One photocopy for each student

Warm up

- 1 Explain to students that they are going to read about and discuss presents. Ask when they receive presents. Encourage them to talk about the best and worst presents they have ever received, and given.
- 2 Ask students what makes a good and a bad present. Use the reasons in Answer key below to guide them. Do not worry, however, if they do not mention all of the reasons.
- 3 Explain that they are going to read about the experiences of four people. Ask students not to predict exactly what the people will say, but to predict the kind of thing they will say. Use the first four headings in the chart in Answer key below to guide them. Build up the headings and names into a chart on the board as you discuss what the people will say.

Main activity

- 1 Give each student a photocopy. Tell students to copy the first four columns of the chart on the board and complete them with *yes* when appropriate. Encourage students to work together in pairs so that they can help each other.
- 2 Explain to the class that the four names are both men's and women's names. (Lee = name for both male and female. Alex = name for both, or short for Alexander [male] and Alexandra [female], Charlie = familiar name for Charles [male] and sometimes for Charlotte [female], Chris = short for Christopher [male] and Christine [female]). Ask students to read the text again and work out if the people are male or female.
- 3 Elicit that Charlie (clue: a *long dress*) and Chris (clue: *my husband*) are female, and Lee (clue: *her son*) and Alex (clue: *my girlfriend*) are male. Then check the answers and complete the first four columns of the chart on the board.
- 4 Ask students to read the text again and find occasions when four of the presents were given/received.
- 5 Ask students to work out the reasons why the presents are good or bad. Get them to refer to the list of reasons they discussed earlier, and to include any reasons they did not discuss.

Answer key

	best you've received	worst you've received	best you've given	worst you've given	occasion	reason
Lee	yes			yes	birthday	The giver shows they understand the receiver. The giver gives something that they like.
Alex			yes	yes	taking exams	The giver doesn't know the receiver's likes and dislikes. The giver has made a financial sacrifice.
Charlie		yes	yes		foreign business trip	The giver wants to change the receiver in some way. The giver has put a lot of thought into the present.
Chris	yes	yes			wedding anniversary	The giver has made an emotional sacrifice. The receiver has already got the present.

Follow up

- Ask students if they have had any similar experiences to those they have read about.
- Ask students what would be the best and worst birthday present they could receive.

What's the best present you've ever received – and the best you've ever given? And what's the worst? Write and tell us about your experiences. There'll be a present for the best letter!

Lee: My mum never goes to the theatre, but she knows I like going a lot. For my birthday, she gave me theatre vouchers – I could use them to buy tickets to a show of my choice. Anyway, I decided to invite her to come along with me, perhaps she would get to like it. So, I got two tickets for Benefactors. Neil Pearson, who she's seen a lot on TV and likes, was in it. She said she would go, but only if she paid for a meal before the show. And she chose a Japanese restaurant. She had never had Japanese food before, but she knew that her son loved it! We had a great evening! From the best ... to the worst. I once gave my dad a book that I had read and loved. It was called *In cold blood* and was a true story about the murder of a family in America in the 1950s. I realise now that it was just not his kind of thing – ever since then he's always asked me to buy him the latest fantasy book by Terry Pratchett or Philip Pullman. I've lost my copy of *In cold blood*, and sometimes I think I should ask him if I can have his. I'm sure I've given other presents that have not been right, but that's one I know about.

Alex: I once bought my girlfriend Kerry a Bonsai tree. It cost a lot of money, and I thought it would be an unusual and lasting present. But it gave her a look of horror crossed her face when she saw it. She is absolutely hopeless with plants, and I should have known that. Apparently, she either gave it too much water or not enough. Sure enough, the poor thing died. Kerry felt really bad about it, but I knew all along that it wasn't the right present for her. I tried to do better with presents after that. Kerry had always talked about wanting to go to Prague. So, before her exams last year, I saved and saved, and bought a holiday for two for four nights in Prague. I bought a guidebook too, and put the tickets inside the guidebook. I gave her the present when her last exam was over. When she opened the present, she thought it was only the guidebook. 'Oh, yes,' she said, 'we must book up for Prague. I'd love to go there.' And then the tickets fell onto the floor. Her eyes filled with tears. She was so surprised and pleased. I know it's the best present I've ever given anyone.

Charlie: I usually wear jeans, tracksuit bottoms, trainers, T-shirts, that sort of thing. And, as far as I knew, my partner Marcus was happy with that. So I got a bit of a shock, to be honest, when he bought me a long dress back from a foreign business trip. I don't wear long dresses, so this must mean that that's what he wants me to wear. I was a bit annoyed too, I'd shown him the new pair of trainers I wanted lots of times. I'm sure he could have got them abroad. The best present I think I ever gave was to someone I worked with. We didn't have much money in those days, but I really took a lot of care with her present. I wrapped a box in beautiful paper, and then filled it with lots of small things. There was a packet of paper hankies – she had a cold at the time; batteries for her alarm clock – she was sometimes late for work; a bar of her favourite chocolate; a comb; even a pair of tights. They say 'It's the thought that counts'. And it's true, I'd put more thought than money into the present.

Chris: The best present I ever had was something I didn't expect at all. My husband and I are both Arsenal supporters, but we've never been to a match. The tickets are impossible to get, and they're too expensive for us. Anyway, one of my colleagues is a season-ticket holder. And last year, for our tenth wedding anniversary, he gave us his tickets for the Arsenal – Manchester United game. That was an amazing thing for him to do. The worst birthday present I ever received was also connected with football. It was a book called *Football's strangest matches*. I love football, that wasn't the problem. The problem was that I already had the book, and the same person had given it to me the year before! I should have said something at the time, but I was too polite.