

## Topic-based reading: Santa – Intermediate by Jackie McAvoy

**LEVEL:** Intermediate and above

**AGE:** Teenagers / Adults

**TIME NEEDED:** 60 minutes

**OBJECTIVES:** To talk about memories, to summarize a text, to write a letter either in favour of or against the idea of Santa Claus / Father Christmas

**KEY SKILLS:** Reading, speaking, writing

**MATERIALS:** One copy of the worksheet per student, a board and board pens, paper and pens for writing a letter

### LEAD-IN: PRE-READING TASKS

- 1 Ask students to think about when they were a child. Explain (if necessary) that the term for this period in someone's life is *childhood* and explain or elicit that the subsequent period of being an adult is known as *adulthood*.
- 2 In pairs, get students to recollect a time when they learnt something, or found out about something, that surprised them. If the students can't think of any such memories they can just tell each other about any memory they have from early childhood. Monitor and then feedback as a whole class, asking any students with particularly interesting or amusing stories to tell them to the class.

**Tip: Start with an anecdote**

If you have your own story, start the lesson by telling it to the class. It can be very simple: for example, about the time you were learning to ride a bike and you found out that your dad was no longer holding on to it.

- 3 If you have students who are familiar with Santa Claus / Father Christmas, ask them to write down everything they know about him. This can be done by putting students into groups of three and setting a time limit. When the time is up, the groups read out their information and the group with the most information is the winner. The other groups add in any information they didn't have.

**Tip: Activate schemata**

There are lots of references to things related to Santa Claus / Father Christmas in the text. Asking students to think of these first will help them understand the text more easily.



### READING 1

- 4 Give out the worksheets. Tell the students they are going to read a text about Santa Claus / Father Christmas. Ask the students to read the text quickly and answer the two questions.
- 5 Once completed, get students to compare their answers in pairs before discussing the correct answers as a whole class.

**Key:** \_\_\_\_\_

1. *The day the writer found out that Santa Claus / Father Christmas wasn't real. At the time, this was very upsetting news.*
2. *Zenta Claus*

Explain that *Zenta* is a combination of the Japanese word *Zen* and the word *Santa*. *Zen* means 'calm'.

- 6 If students have a similar memory, let them talk about it and how they felt.

**Tip: Get students to respond to the text**

Give students the phrase *This reminds me of a time when ...* as a prompt. Reacting to the text this way is a real-life response so allow time for it.

### READING 2

- 7 Students read the text again and complete the third exercise, matching the vocabulary items to their definitions. Encourage students to match the words they know first, before attempting to work out the others. Finally, use a dictionary to look up any words they can't guess. Once completed, feedback as a whole class, eliciting / giving the correct answers.

**Tip: Make the task kinaesthetic**

To make this task more interesting, photocopy the table and cut up the individual boxes. In pairs or groups, get the students to match the words with their definitions. To add a competitive element, set a time limit before going through the answers as a whole class.

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Key: \_\_\_\_\_

1. significant	g. <i>very large, noticeable or important</i>
2. vague	l. <i>not clearly or fully explained</i>
3. exist	d. <i>to be real or to appear in the real world</i>
4. pacified	t. <i>made someone who is angry, worried or upset feel calmer or happier</i>
5. chuckles	n. <i>laughs, in a private or secret way</i>
6. awkward	p. <i>difficult to deal with</i>
7. bona fide	i. <i>something or someone who really is what they seem or claim to be</i>
8. astounded	j. <i>extremely surprised or shocked</i>
9. elves	a. <i>a small imaginary person with magic powers</i>
10. inconsolable	b. <i>so unhappy or disappointed that no one can make you feel better</i>
11. disastrous	q. <i>causing a lot of damage or harm</i>
12. rites of passage	c. <i>events that mark important stages in someone's life</i>
13. interchangeable	o. <i>something that can be used instead of something else with the same effect</i>
14. the Commonwealth	e. <i>an organization of countries that used to be under the political control of the UK</i>
15. synonymous	f. <i>to have the same, or almost the same, meaning</i>
16. bulging	h. <i>completely full and sticking out</i>
17. commercial	s. <i>relating to business with goods or services to sell</i>
18. meditating	k. <i>making your mind empty of thoughts or concentrating on only one thing, in order to relax</i>
19. aspects	m. <i>particular parts, features or qualities of something</i>
20. consumer	r. <i>someone who buys and uses goods and services</i>

- Tell the students they now have to write a summary of the text in no more than 30 words. They can work together to help each other if they want. Set a time limit of 10 minutes. By the end of this time they should have one or two sentences.
- In pairs, students look at each other's sentences and decide whose is better and make any changes. Feedback as a whole class and see if the class can agree on the best summary of the text. Elicit why this summary is good.

Key: (model answer) \_\_\_\_\_

*This text is about Father Christmas – the day the writer found out he did not exist, the origins of the man and a modern alternative.*

### Tip: Use summaries as an alternative comprehension exercise

Asking students to summarize a text helps them to identify the most important parts and leave out those which are irrelevant.

### READING 3

- Students read the text again and complete exercise 5, underlining all the information about Father Christmas / Santa Claus. They then check this against the information they had before the reading. For students who were not familiar with Father Christmas / Santa Claus, elicit all the things they now know.
- Students complete exercise 6, identifying the different ways Father Christmas is referred to in the text.

Key: \_\_\_\_\_

*Food and drink is left overnight for him, he travels by sled, he delivers presents to children all over the world and leaves these under Christmas trees, he has reindeers, he climbs down chimneys, he has bells, he chuckles ('Ho, ho, ho!'), he visits toy shops and schools, his toys are made by elves, he lives in the North Pole, he wears a red and white suit, he has a long white beard, his character is used to sell products.*

*He is referred to as Santa Claus / Father Christmas, old man, the bona fide man in red.*

### Tip: Think about quick and efficient feedback

Going through all the answers sometimes bores the students and makes the lesson too teacher-centred. Consider having a projector or IWB page with the answers on prepared in advance, for example.

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### POST-READING TASKS: SPEAKING AND WRITING

- 12 Explain to students that their town council has decided to ban Santa Claus because they believe he is no longer appropriate. Students have to decide whether or not they agree with this decision and then write to their local newspaper with their opinion. If all the students have the same opinion, divide the class into two and give one half of the class the opposite opinion to consider. For example, if students are non-Christian and they feel that Santa Claus is starting to appear in their culture, this could be a reason for getting rid of him.
- 13 In groups, students come up with a list of reasons for either keeping or getting rid of Santa Claus.
- 14 Either in class or as homework, students write a letter to the editor. The editor (the teacher) then chooses one letter *for* and one letter *against* to appear in the next 'newspaper'.

#### Tip: Use the vocabulary in a follow-up lesson

Give a list of verbs and ask students if they can remember how they were used in the text: *look back on, keep somebody going, strain, boast, accuse, meditate, etc.*

Or alternatively, adjectives can be used: *vague, pacified, awkward, astounded, inconsolable, synonymous, etc.*

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### READING 1

Read the text quickly. Answer the following two questions.

1. What was the writer's childhood memory? Was it good, bad or something else?

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2. Who is the person in the photograph?

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#### SANTA

Adults often look back on significant events from their childhood. These memories can be quite strong, or rather vague. People remember riding their first bike, a special birthday party or discovering their pet rabbit had died in the night, for example. For me though, my strongest memory is the day I discovered that Father Christmas doesn't exist. Really? What a shock! For as long as I could remember, my family had left milk and biscuits on the kitchen table for the old man to eat. After all, he was travelling the long, cold night on his sled delivering presents to children all around the world, so he needed something to keep him going. There were also some carrots for his trusty reindeers.



One Christmas, my brothers and I were very concerned that we didn't have a chimney for Santa to climb down. 'If we have no chimney,' we wailed together, 'how can we have our presents?' Our parents took ages explaining that Santa was quite happy to come in through the kitchen door, which they would leave unlocked for that one night, and into the living room. Pacified, we went to bed, our ears straining for the sound of bells and chuckles (Ho ho ho!!), only to fall asleep secure in the knowledge that our presents would be waiting for us under the tree (which we'd spent hours decorating) in the morning.

There were also other awkward questions that my parents were made to answer. 'If there's only one Santa, how come he's in two toy shops at the same time, and coming to our school too?' So our parents did start to explain that sometimes

someone was dressed up as Santa because we were right, it was impossible for him to be everywhere at the same time. They did convince us, however, that on Christmas Eve it was the bona fide man in red who came into our home and left the toys. So when my older brother came home from school, boasting that he didn't believe in Father Christmas any more and accusing our parents of buying and leaving the presents under the tree themselves (and eating the biscuits)! I was astounded. But I was even more shocked when my parents felt 'we were old enough to know the truth' and admitted that he was right! What! No elves making toys in a workshop in the North Pole? I burst into tears and hid in my room for hours, totally inconsolable.

However, I felt much better about the disastrous news (and I would argue that discovering Santa isn't real is one of the first rites of passage into adulthood) when I found out that Santa, admittedly in the distant past, was based on a real person, or rather two real people. Nowadays, Father Christmas and Santa Claus are often interchangeable but in reality they have two different backgrounds. The former is based on a custom, from long before Christianity, of an old man in each town or village who knocked on people's doors asking for food and drink. The man was said to represent 'Old Winter' and it was thought that if people were kind to him they would not have a bad winter. He later became known as 'Father Christmas' and this name is used in the UK, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand and other Commonwealth countries.

Santa Claus, on the other hand, comes from the Dutch translation of Saint Nicholas, *Sinterklaas*. He was believed to have been a Bishop who lived in Myra (now Turkey) in the 4th century who gave presents to the poor. His saint day is 6 December and this day, or the day before, is the gift-receiving day for children in many countries including the Netherlands, Belgium and the Czech Republic. Dutch immigrants to the US took the custom of Sinterklaas with them where Santa Claus has become synonymous with Christmas although he has nothing to do with the origins of Christmas Day itself.

There is comfort, however, for those of you who think that Santa Claus and his big, bulging bag of presents has made Christmas far too commercial: *Zenta Claus*. Not one but many Zenta Clauses can be found wearing the traditional red and white suit with a long, white beard outside shopping malls and department stores during the busiest shopping season of the year. However, Zentas don't persuade

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people to shop. Instead they sit quietly, simply meditating on the negative aspects of the consumer culture. Originally from Japan but becoming popular in other countries, Zenta Claus encourages people to consider *not* spending money on things people neither need nor really want. Have a look: Zenta's bag is empty; now that's another shock! Ho ho ho!

**READING 2**

3. Read the text again and match the words from the text on the left with their meanings on the right.

1. significant	a. a small imaginary person with magic powers
2. vague	b. so unhappy or disappointed that no one can make you feel better
3. exist	c. events that mark important stages in someone's life
4. pacified	d. to be real or to appear in the real world
5. chuckles	e. an organization of countries that used to be under the political control of the UK
6. awkward	f. to have the same, or almost the same, meaning
7. bona fide	g. very large, noticeable or important
8. astounded	h. completely full and sticking out
9. elves	i. something or someone who really is what they seem or claim to be
10. inconsolable	j. extremely surprised or shocked
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14. the Commonwealth	n. laughs, in a private or secret way
15. synonymous	o. something that can be used instead of something else with the same effect
16. bulging	p. difficult to deal with
17. commercial	q. causing a lot of damage or harm

18. meditating	r. someone who buys and uses goods and services
19. aspects	s. relating to business with goods or services to sell
20. consumer	t. made someone who is angry, worried or upset feel calmer or happier

4. Write a summary of the text. Use no more than 30 words.

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**READING 3**



5. Read the text again. Underline all the information about Santa Claus / Father Christmas.

6. What are the different ways Father Christmas is referred to in the text?

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