

# Webquest: Christmas

by Luke Vyner

**Level:** Intermediate / Upper intermediate  
**Target age:** Teenagers / Young adults  
**Time needed:** Up to 90 minutes  
**Key skills:** Reading, speaking  
**Materials:** One copy of the worksheet per student

In this Christmas webquest, your students will learn about the history of Christmas, discover popular traditions practised today and explore how Christmas is celebrated differently around the world, before finally learning some surprising Yuletide facts!

## Activity 1: The history of Christmas

Hand out the worksheet. Tell your students to discuss what they already know about the history of Christmas.

Put students in pairs and explain that each student in the pair will read a different section of the weblink text.

[www.english-heritage.org.uk/christmas/the-history-of-christmas](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/christmas/the-history-of-christmas)

**Student A** will read and answer the questions on the two sections, 'Neolithic' and 'Roman'.

**Student B** will read and answer the questions on the next two sections, 'Medieval' and 'Tudor'.

Get students to note down their answers to the questions so that they are ready to discuss them with their partners.

If you are working with stronger students, an alternative approach is to turn this into a task that also tests note-taking skills:

1. Students A and B read the texts that they have been assigned.
2. Get Student A to ask Student B the series of questions about Student B's text and then note down the answers that Student B gives.
3. They can then reverse roles so that Student A answers Student B's questions about Student A's text.

4. They can then swap texts, read their partner's text and check each other's respective answers.

For the final section, 'Victorian', ask students to work in pairs to do the true or false task.

With stronger students, get them to try to answer the questions before reading the text and then use the text to check their answers.

Wrap up this activity by discussing the final questions as a class.

## Key:

### Student A

1. 21st December
2. They held great feasts.
3. daggers (made of bronze)
4. They sang songs, played bone flutes and jumped over bonfires.
5. Saturnalia; at least five days
6. Slaves were served at meals by their masters; everyone wore a pileus; gambling with dice was allowed; everyone wore bright party clothes; slaves could criticize their masters; slaves got time off.
7. bread and beef
8. imported wine

### Student B

1. 12 days from 25th December to 6th January
2. 6th January
3. Christmas, Saturnalia and Yule
4. a Lord of Misrule
5. Tudor
6. They imitated (copied) him.
7. sugar
8. New Year's Day (1st January)

### Victorian

1. True
2. False – They were quieter and family-focused.
3. True
4. True
5. False – They gave presents and food to their poorer neighbours.
6. False – The parties were for children.

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## Activity 2: Santa Claus

Ask students to discuss the question in part a in pairs.

Put your students into groups of four and explain that each student will read a different text.

**Student A** will read the section, 'From St. Nicholas to Santa' at [news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2013/12/131219-santa-claus-origin-history-christmas-facts-st-nicholas](https://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2013/12/131219-santa-claus-origin-history-christmas-facts-st-nicholas).

**Student B** will read the section, 'St. Nicholas in America' at [news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2013/12/131219-santa-claus-origin-history-christmas-facts-st-nicholas](https://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2013/12/131219-santa-claus-origin-history-christmas-facts-st-nicholas).

**Student C** will read the final section, 'Not everyone believes in Santa' at [news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2013/12/131219-santa-claus-origin-history-christmas-facts-st-nicholas](https://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2013/12/131219-santa-claus-origin-history-christmas-facts-st-nicholas).

**Student D** will go to [www.thisinsider.com/santa-claus-around-the-world-2017-12](http://www.thisinsider.com/santa-claus-around-the-world-2017-12) to fill in their table according to the instructions. Tell them to choose their four favourite 'Santas' or countries only.

When they have shared their answers in their groups, ask them to move on to the discussion questions.

### Key:

#### Student A

1. 280 years after Christ (AD)
2. fiery, wiry and defiant
3. 6th December
4. Saturn and Odin
5. Baby Jesus; he couldn't carry many presents and he isn't very scary.
6. to encourage children to behave well

#### Student B

1. the Netherlands
2. New England
3. Knickerbocker's History of New York
4. 'A Visit from St Nicholas' or 'The Night Before Christmas'
5. He wore different coloured clothes, in sizes from miniature to massive.
6. in Europe

#### Student C

1. Josef Stalin
2. New Year
3. blue
4. He represents the commercialization of Christmas at the expense of Christ; he's not local.
5. no
6. Countries went back to their old traditions.

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## Student D

country	name of their 'Santa figure'	special features of their celebration
United Kingdom	Father Christmas	He wears green, has a wreath of holly or ivy and carries a staff. He resembles the Ghost of Christmas Present in Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol.
France	Père Noël / Papa Noël	He wears a long red cloak instead of a red suit, and children leave their shoes by the fireplace hoping that they will be filled with goodies after mass on Christmas Eve.  Père Noël also traditionally travels with a not-so-friendly companion called Père Fouettard, or 'the whipping father', who spansks any children who have not behaved well throughout the year.
Russia & Ukraine	Ded Moroz and Snegurochka (Father Frost and the Snow Maiden)	They travel on New Year's Eve carrying gifts for children.
Sweden	Tomte or Jultomten	An adult dresses up with a face mask and asks, 'Are there any good children who live here?' before distributing presents.
Norway	Julenissen	Christmas pixies or Christmas elves come from the North Pole and give gifts to children at Christmas. They wear grey clothes and have a grey beard.
the Netherlands	Sinterklaas	He comes riding into town on a white horse, wearing a tall, red bishop's hat and a jewelled staff. He knocks on doors and brings gifts to good children, while his companion, Grampus, rattles chains at naughty children and threatens to kidnap them.
Austria, Switzerland & Germany	Christkind/ Christkindl	The 'Christ child' is the benevolent (usually female) gift-bringer who leaves presents for good children on Christmas Eve. She wears a crown and has long, curly blonde hair.
Spain	Los Reyes Magos	Before 6th January (El Día de Reyes), children write letters to their favourite mago (wise man) asking for gifts. On 5th January, children leave out sweets for the magi and hay for their camels and put out their shoes. The next day, these are replaced with presents.
Finland	Joulupukki or Yule goat	The goat goes to each house and asks, 'Are there any well-behaved children here?' and hands out presents. He drives a sleigh pulled by reindeer but can't fly. Representations of the Yule Goat are made out of straw and often set on fire.
Catalonia	Tió de Nadal	A log with a painted-on smiley face who defecates presents. Children place it under the Christmas tree and 'feed him' nuts and dried fruit in the days before Christmas. They also keep him warm under a blanket. On Christmas Eve, the children beat it with sticks and sing a song. The next morning, children find he has left them a pile of gifts and sweets.
Iceland	Yule Lads	13 mischievous elves who play tricks on children. In the 13 nights before Christmas, children leave their shoes by the windowsill in the hope that one of the Lads will leave them small gifts or sweets. Badly behaved children instead receive rotten potatoes in their shoes.
Italy	La Befana	A good-natured witch who flies on a broomstick. On the night of 5th January, she flies over Italy and gives toys and sweets to good children and leaves coal for naughty children.

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## Activity 3: Christmas around the world!

Get students to read the rubric and 'Twenty traditions' text before they read the weblink text [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christmas\\_traditions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christmas_traditions). Check whether they know or can guess where each tradition comes from.

Encourage your students to skim read the weblink article. It's very long and the idea is to find the answers as quickly as they can. As this is quite a challenging task, you could give it a competitive edge by making the task a race. If you decide to do this, put students into pairs, **Student A** searching odd numbers and **Student B** searching even numbers.

To wrap up this activity, ask students to discuss the questions as a whole class.

### Key:

1. Great Britain
2. Japan
3. Spain
4. Philippines
5. Italy
6. Canada
7. United States
8. Guatemala
9. Germany
10. Armenia
11. Colombia
12. Venezuela
13. Germany
14. Denmark
15. Sweden
16. Poland
17. United States
18. Brazil
19. Estonia
20. El Salvador

## Activity 4: Interesting facts about Christmas

Give one of the following groups of numbers to each student or pair: **1** (1–5) **2** (6–10) **3** (11–15) **4** (16–20) **5** (21–25) **6** (26–30) **7** (31–35) **8** (36–40) **9** (41–45) **10** (46–50).

Explain to students that they should make notes on their facts from [www.factretriever.com/christmas-facts](http://www.factretriever.com/christmas-facts). If you are working with stronger students, get them to memorize their facts. Students then share their facts with their group. Once this stage has been completed, create a class mingle activity and ask students to share their findings with each other.

### Additional activities

- Get students to sing along to famous Christmas carols and songs here: [tistheseason.to](http://tistheseason.to).
- If you can find one, decorate a class Christmas tree. [www.bhg.com/christmas/trees/how-to-decorate-a-christmas-tree](http://www.bhg.com/christmas/trees/how-to-decorate-a-christmas-tree)
- Make, write and send Christmas cards to friends and relatives. [www.kidspot.com.au/things-to-do/activity-articles/christmas-handmade-cards/news-story/a3e0ac4e2d447a3111e25d87bfb46aa1](http://www.kidspot.com.au/things-to-do/activity-articles/christmas-handmade-cards/news-story/a3e0ac4e2d447a3111e25d87bfb46aa1)

We hope you and your class have a very merry Christmas!