

Activity 1: The history of Christmas

a. Read this introduction to Christmas:

Christmas is a festival that takes place once a year. For Christians, Christmas Day – the 25th of December – is a religious holiday. It celebrates the anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ. Christmas is also celebrated as a cultural holiday for many people around the world. Popular customs include sending Christmas cards, decorating Christmas trees, singing carols and eating a Christmas dinner including turkey and Christmas pudding. Father Christmas – also known as Santa Claus and Saint Nicholas – is central to the holiday, bringing gifts to children on Christmas Eve.

Before you find out more about the history of Christmas, what do you already know? Discuss your ideas with a partner.

b. Now, work with a partner to discover more about the origins of Christmas.

Both of you should visit the following website: www.english-heritage.org.uk/christmas/the-history-of-christmas

Student A: Read the first two sections, 'Neolithic' and 'Roman'. Look for the answers to the following questions.

1. What day was very important to the people who built Stonehenge?
2. What did Neolithic people do at Stonehenge at this time of year?
3. What midwinter presents could Neolithic people hope to get?
4. Apart from feasting and giving presents, what else did Neolithic people probably do at midwinter?
5. What was the name of the Roman midwinter celebration and how long did it last for?
6. What six things happened at this time of year that were normally forbidden?
7. What food did soldiers normally eat?
8. What special drink did soldiers have at this festival?

Once you have completed all the answers, tell your partner what you learnt.

Student B: Read the next two sections, 'Medieval' and 'Tudor'. Look for the answers to the following questions.

1. How long did medieval people celebrate Christmas for and on which dates?
2. On what date were presents given?
3. What three festivals did the medieval festival combine?
4. Who was in charge at medieval festivals?
5. Which were larger, medieval or tudor celebrations?
6. What did people do to the 'King of the Bean'?
7. What did Tudor people love to eat?
8. When were presents usually given in Tudor times?

Once you have completed all the answers, tell your partner what you learnt.

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Now, you and your partner should both read the final section, 'Victorian'. Look at the statements below and decide, with your partner, whether they are true (T) or false (F). If the sentence is false, correct it.

1. The modern Christmas festival originated in the Victorian period. []
2. Christmas celebrations in Victorian times were busy and noisy. []
3. Christmas trees first became popular in the UK in the Victorian period. []
4. Before the Victorian period, people used to eat goose for their main Christmas meal. []
5. Rich people gave presents and food to their friends. []
6. Parties for adults became yearly events in big houses. []

Discussion

- In what ways is the modern way of celebrating Christmas different from how it was done in the past?
- What do you like most (and least) about Christmas nowadays?

Activity 2: Santa Claus

a. What do you already know about Santa? Discuss your ideas with a partner.

b. Work in a group of four (students A, B, C and D). Go to the website indicated in your section and complete the activities.

Student A: Go to nationalgeographic.com/news/2018/12/131219-santa-claus-origin-history-christmas-facts-st-nicholas and read the section, 'From St. Nicholas to Santa'. Answer the following questions, then share the answers with your group.

1. When was St Nicholas born?
2. What three characteristics describe Nicholas?
3. On what date did Nicholas die?
4. Which two European gods did St Nicholas become combined with?
5. After the Protestant Reformation, who brought presents for children and what problems did they have?
6. Why is there often a scary figure associated with Christmas?

Student B: Go to nationalgeographic.com/news/2018/12/131219-santa-claus-origin-history-christmas-facts-st-nicholas and read the section, 'St. Nicholas in America'. Answer the following questions, then share the answers with your group.

1. Which country brought Santa Claus to America?
2. In which part of America was Christmas not celebrated?
3. What was the name of the book that first showed the modern Santa/St Nicholas?
4. What was the name of the 1822 poem that helped to make Santa become popular?
5. Before the late-19th century, what clothes did Santa wear?
6. After becoming popular in America, where did Santa become popular next?

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Student C: Go to nationalgeographic.com/news/2018/12/131219-santa-claus-origin-history-christmas-facts-st-nicholas and read the final section, 'Not everyone believes in Santa'. Answer the following questions, then share the answers with your group.

1. Who caused Santa Claus to become unpopular in Russia?
2. At what time of year did people receive gifts in Russia, under the Soviet Union?
3. What colour coat did Grandfather frost wear under the Soviet Union?
4. Why do people in some countries dislike Santa?
5. Did the Soviet Union succeed in replacing Christmas?
6. What happened to Soviet Christmas traditions after the Soviet Union collapsed in 1989?

Student D: Go to www.thisinsider.com/santa-claus-around-the-world-2017-12. What are the names of similar figures in other countries and what is special about each one? Complete the table with information about four countries of your choice, then share the answers with your group.

country	name of their 'Santa figure'	special features of their 'Santa figure'

Discussion

- What do you call Santa in your country?
- If Santa is part of your culture, did you believe in Santa when you were young? Can you remember when you found out he wasn't real?
- Find images of Santa on the internet. In what ways are they similar to – or different from – the familiar image of Santa Claus?

Activity 3: Christmas around the world!

Christmas is a global celebration. You have already seen how the legend of Santa Claus varies greatly from country to country. For the following task, you will read about different traditions around the world celebrated at Christmas time.

a. Take a look at the following traditions. As you read them, try to guess which countries these traditions come from. (Some countries are used more than once!)

El Salvador	Great Britain	Japan	Canada	Denmark	Estonia	Philippines	Armenia	Colombia
United States	Spain	Venezuela	Brazil	Guatemala	Poland	Italy	Germany	Sweden

Twenty Christmas traditions from around the world

1. During the Christmas meal, Christmas crackers containing toys, jokes and a paper hat are pulled.

2. A white sponge cake covered with cream and decorated with strawberries is often consumed.

3. Children put their shoes in the window in the hope that the three wise men will deliver them presents. _____
4. Christmas carols are heard as early as 1 September. _____
5. On 6 January, female puppets are burned on a pyre to symbolize the death of the old year and beginning of the new year. _____
6. They celebrate the Cavalcade of Lights Festival. _____
7. The Christmas tree usually stands centrally in the home, decorated with ornaments, tinsel and lights, with an angel or star at the top. _____
8. People dress up in an ornamental hat named a Puritina and dance in a line. _____
9. Potato salad with frankfurters and wiener sausages is a popular meal in some families.

10. Children take presents of fruits, nuts and other sweets to older relatives. _____
11. In many cities, and even in small rural towns, neighbourhoods get together and decorate their whole neighbourhood or street, turning streets into 'tunnels of light'. _____
12. Neighbourhoods get together for night festivals where children play with skateboards, rollerblades and bicycles. _____

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13. On 6 December, Saint Nicholas puts goodies in children's shoes. _____
14. Rice pudding is traditionally served with whipped cream and lots of black cherry sauce.

15. Electric candles and glowing stars are placed in almost every window during the month of December. _____
16. A traditional meal includes herring and beetroot soup with ravioli. _____
17. It is a tradition for children to leave a glass of milk and plate of cookies for Santa.

18. In some cities, judges decide on the most beautifully decorated house. _____
19. Children are visited by Santa Claus on Christmas Eve and must sing songs or recite Christmas poems before they receive their presents. _____
20. Children celebrate Christmas by playing with firecrackers and sparklers. _____

b. Now, visit the following weblink en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christmas_traditions and check your answers. Don't try to read the whole article from top to bottom; instead, try to find the countries as quickly as you can.

Discussion

- What traditions above are similar to those in your country?
- What is your favourite tradition from the list?
- What is your favourite tradition from your country?
- If you celebrate Christmas, do you think your country is losing any of its Christmas traditions? If so, why?
- If you could start a Christmas tradition of your own, what would it be?

Activity 4: Interesting facts about Christmas

The following article www.factretriever.com/christmas-facts lists some interesting facts about Christmas.

Your teacher will give you a **set of facts to read** in this fun and surprising article. Make notes on your chosen facts to relate back to your group. You may need some help with vocabulary so ask your teacher!

Discussion

- Which fact did you find the most interesting/the funniest/the strangest?
- Do you know any other facts about Christmas to share with your classmates?

We hope you've enjoyed learning all about Christmas. Perhaps it will change the way you think about it this year. All that's left to say is – have a very merry Christmas!