

Language for ...

Christmas

Age: Adult

Level: Intermediate

Time: 45–60 minutes

Language Focus: Christmas vocabulary

Skills: listening, speaking

Materials: worksheet exercises, video (on onestopenglish or downloaded in advance of the lesson), internet access preferable

Aims: to provide students with language for talking about Christmas celebrations and traditions



Likely keywords/concepts: Christmas compounds (e.g. *Christmas pudding/card/tree ...*), the Christmas calendar (e.g. *Boxing Day, Christmas Eve*), food (e.g. *turkey, mince pie*), decorations and present giving (e.g. *stocking, fairy lights*).

What are red words?

Ninety per cent of the time, speakers of English use just 7,500 words in speech and writing. These words appear in the Macmillan Dictionary in red, and are graded with stars. One-star words are frequent, two-star words are more frequent and three-star words are the most frequent. 'Language for' lessons are based on red words and encourage students to improve their English through communicative tasks using collocation and commonly used phrases.

- 1 As preparation for the lesson, ask students to find out how Christmas is spent in the UK, e.g. What do people usually do to celebrate, and on which days? What do people usually eat? Ask them to think about how Christmas traditions in the UK compare with Christmas or other celebrations in their own countries.



Teaching tip: Students could be invited to share their findings on a class blog/website. Encourage them to submit photos as well as text and, if possible, to include a photo of their own celebrations, which can be later used in the lesson.




Teaching tip: As a lead-in to the video, explain to your students how you celebrate Christmas, or another special day. Personalising the topic like this helps to stimulate student interest. Encourage students to ask questions.

- 2 Before giving out worksheets, begin the lesson by eliciting when presents are traditionally given (either in the UK or in students' own cultures). Brainstorm the names of these special occasions on the board. Follow on by inviting students to discuss the saying in exercise 1a, 'giving is better than receiving' – they could do this in small groups or as a whole class activity. Encourage them to give a personal response, e.g. by describing a situation where giving something to someone made them feel particularly happy, or a time when they received a gift that they were really pleased with.
- 3 The second part of the warmer (1b) features some simple noun compounds with the word Christmas. Brainstorm 'Christmas' compound nouns as a class and elicit meanings. Give out worksheets. Ask students to complete the exercise in pairs. Their preparation for the lesson should help them with this, so ask them to try to complete it without using a dictionary if possible. Check answers as a class, referring to definitions in the Macmillan Dictionary as necessary.

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- 4 Tell students that they're now going to watch a video in which different people in the UK talk about their Christmas celebrations. Ask them to read the questions in exercise 2a in preparation. Play the video ('Live from London: Christmas video special'): www.onestopenglish.com/skills/listening/live-from-authentic-interviews/live-from-authentic-video-lessons/live-from-london-christmas-video-special/554863.article Give students time to complete exercise 2a, and then replay the video so that they can check their answers. Check the answers as a class.
- 5 Before completing exercise 2b, explain that you're going to play the video again and that students will need to listen out for the correct words (one word in Qs 2, 3, 4, 5 and 8, two in Qs 1, 6 and 7) to complete what the people say. Ask them to read the sentences and briefly think about what the words might be. Play the video, pausing if necessary. Once students have completed the exercise, check the answers as a class. You may wish to point out the phrases *a big thing* (= an informal way of saying that an event is important) and *all the trimmings* (= extra parts added to a meal to make it traditional or more interesting). Do students know what *all the trimmings* means in relation to a UK Christmas dinner? (= e.g. stuffing, cranberry sauce, small sausages wrapped in bacon affectionately known as 'pigs in blankets'). This exercise could also be completed by playing the video with the audio only, to really sharpen student listening skills.
- 6 Divide students into small groups to chat about their answers to question 2c. Remind them to think about what the people interviewed said about the food they usually eat and what they tend to do on Christmas day. Which person's celebrations do they most like the sound of, and why? (You may wish to play the video again as a final reminder.)
- 7 Ask students to complete the reordering exercise 2d as quickly as possible, thinking back to the video. To add an element of competition, students could work in teams against each other. Ask the fastest finisher for their answers, ensuring that all students have the correct answers since these will form a resource for them in a later speaking exercise.
- 8 Ask students to work individually to match the verbs with the phrases in exercise 3a, reminding them to first complete any matches they immediately know. Have them compare their answers with a partner, and check the answers as a class.
- 9 Exercise 3b continues the theme of looking at vocabulary associated with a traditional Christmas in the UK. Tell students to work in pairs to complete the exercise, and to then check their answers using the Macmillan Dictionary.

 **Teaching tip:** A range of vocabulary related to Christmas can be found in the Macmillan Dictionary thesaurus feature at: www.macmillandictionary.com/thesaurus-category/british/relating-to-or-connected-with-the-christmas-period

Draw students' attention to the regional labels. Many of these words (e.g. *bauble*, *fairy light*, *Christmas cracker/pudding*) are only used in the United Kingdom.


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After confirming the answers as a class, ask them to think back to the video and try to remember – which of the things in questions 1–7 did they see? (*fairy lights*, *bauble* and *tinsel* all appear in the introduction). If you are able to source them cheaply and easily, you might even like to bring in some mince pies – either for all students as a *festive* treat (point out *festive* = enjoyable and connected with Christmas celebrations), or as a prize for the first student who correctly remembers the items in the video.

- 10 Divide students into pairs for exercise 3c. Tell them to spend a few minutes noting down ideas and then take it in turns to do the asking or describing. Remind them to think back to the video and look back at the language in earlier exercise material to help them. They can look at the images provided as a stimulus, or supply their own to aid and illustrate their descriptions.
- 11 Exercise 4 is to encourage conversation and simulate real life interaction. Students need to work with a different partner than the one they have previously worked with. Firstly, ask the students to write five questions to ask their new partner about their special occasion. Check they are correct. Next, students move to interview their new partner and note down their answers. As this is a fluency exercise, remind students that they don't need to write down everything their partner says, just the key words to help them remember for when they report back later. Once completed, students can either return to their original partner and tell them what they have found out, or report back to the class as a whole.
- 12 As a wind-up discussion, ask students to read and think about what Natasha says at the end of the video. Do students agree with her? Is their own country different from the UK in this respect? You

may wish to explain *in your face* (= annoying in a way that is difficult to ignore).

 **Teaching Tip:** The phenomenon Natasha describes is sometimes dubbed 'Christmas creep'.

Further reading at:

www.macmillandictionary.com/buzzword/entries/Christmas-creep.html

- 13 The final extra activity could be used for homework, or as an extension activity for fast finishers. It is an open gap-fill, setting some of the vocabulary from earlier exercises in context. Ask students to complete it individually, thinking back to the video and the vocabulary featured so far. Note that more than one answer is possible for questions 1, 4, 7 and 12; the key provides suggestions here based on words from the lesson. You might wish to point out the use of adjective *real* (= existing naturally and not artificial), i.e. *a real Christmas tree*, and contrast it with *artificial* (= man-made) Christmas trees as a common alternative in the UK. As a further extension, students could write a similar paragraph about their own Christmas/special day.

KEY:

- 1a students' own answers
- 1b Christmas card: a card that you send to your friends and family at Christmas
 Christmas pudding: a sweet food made with dried fruits and spices, eaten at Christmas
 Christmas Eve: the day or evening before Christmas Day
 Christmas cracker: a tube of coloured paper given at Christmas which makes a sudden sharp noise when two people pull it apart. It contains a small present, paper hat and a joke.
 Christmas carol: a traditional song sung at Christmas

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Christmas stocking: a large sock that children hang on their bed the night before Christmas that is filled with presents while they sleep
 Christmas tree: a tree that you cover with lights and other decorations at Christmas

7 j
 8 b
 9 c
 10 e

- 2a**
- 1 walk the dog
 - 2 duck
 - 3 3pm
 - 4 the food
 - 5 the washing up
 - 6 doesn't like
 - 7 as early as possible
 - 8 stressed

- 3b**
- 1 b
 - 2 c
 - 3 c
 - 4 b
 - 5 a
 - 6 a
 - 7 c

- 2b**
- 1 big thing
 - 2 dinner
 - 3 tradition
 - 4 starts
 - 5 consists
 - 6 the trimmings
 - 7 worst thing
 - 8 early

- 4** students' own answers
- 5**
- 1 party (other answers possible)
 - 2 off
 - 3 Christmas Eve
 - 4 celebrate (other answers possible)
 - 5 spending
 - 6 Christmas tree
 - 7 baubles (other answers possible)
 - 8 fairy lights
 - 9 mince pies
 - 10 least
 - 11 stockings
 - 12 presents (other answers possible)
 - 13 tradition
 - 14 dinner/lunch
 - 15 trimmings
 - 16 crackers

- 2c** students' own answers

- 2d**
- 1 How would you describe a traditional Christmas in your household?
 - 2 How do you celebrate Christmas?
 - 3 Is there a typical, traditional meal that you have?
 - 4 What kind of food?
 - 5 What's your favourite thing about Christmas?

- 3a**
- 1 f
 - 2 h
 - 3 a
 - 4 i
 - 5 d
 - 6 g