

Why do we dream of a white Christmas?

Why do we dream of a white Christmas? Why do we get Christmas cards with snow on them? The culprit is the writer Charles Dickens. His childhood coincided with a decade of freakishly cold winters. Thus in his writings he describes persistently a Britain smothered in snow on Christmas Day, his inspiration coming from his childhood. Six of Dickens's first nine Christmases were white. One of these fell in the winter of 1813-14, when Britain's last Frost Fair was held on a frozen River Thames in London and Dickens was nearly two years old. The ice around Blackfriars Bridge was thick enough to bear the weight of an elephant. So when in 1843, he came to write about *the Ghost of Christmas Past*, he did so with the spirit of those colder Christmases, with "quick wheels dashing the hoar frost and snow from the darker leaves of the evergreen like spray". The story is now credited with establishing the Victorian genre of the Christmas story and spurring a revival of the celebration of Christmas in early Victorian England.

Phillip Allingham, a specialist in Dickens's Christmas books said, *A Christmas Carol* made Christmas respectable for the English bourgeoisie, who had come to regard it as somewhat antiquated. Christmas trees brought over to Britain by Prince Albert in 1840 were adopted too, after Dickens wrote a popular essay on them. Other tales would later complement Dickens's idealised snowy Christmas. From the mid-19th century a poem first published in America 20 years earlier gained currency. *The night before Christmas* put Santa Claus on a sleigh pulled by reindeer. It was around this time that artists consistently drew Santa in red robes. But Dickens had done most of the groundwork, driven by an enduring obsession for the season. In *The Pickwick Papers*, published six years before *A Christmas Carol*, he had written: "Happy happy Christmas, that can win us back to the delusions of our childish days." Those dearly remembered childhood Christmases that Dickens remembered coincided with the second decade of the 19th century, the coldest decade in Britain since the 1690s. Some regard those winters as the last hurrah of "a little ice age" that had gripped Northern Europe for several centuries, though the immediate cause of the cold was a series of colossal volcanic eruptions that enveloped the globe in dust and shrouded the sun.

Category: Christmas / Charles Dickens / Snow

Level: Intermediate / Upper Intermediate

EXERCISES

1. **Why do we dream of a white Christmas?** Think of three answers to this question. Go round the room swapping details.

2. **Geography: London:** Where is London? What country is it in? What part of the country is it in? What river runs through London? Draw a map on the board then **look on Google maps** to help you.

3. **Dictation:** The teacher will read four to six lines of the article slowly and clearly. Students will write down what they hear. The teacher will repeat the passage slowly again. Self-correct your work from page one - filling in spaces and correcting mistakes. Be honest with yourself on the number of errors. Advise the teacher of your total number of errors. Less than five is very good. Ten is acceptable. Any more is room for improvement! More than twenty - you need to do some work!

4. **Reading:** The students should now read the article aloud, swapping readers every paragraph.

5. **Vocabulary:** Students should now look through the article and underline any vocabulary they do not know. Look in dictionaries. Discuss and help each other out. The teacher will go through and explain any unknown words or phrases.

6. **The article:** Students should look through the article with the teacher.

- a) What is the article about?
- b) What do you think about the article?

7. **Let's think!** Think of five things about a white Christmas. Then add five things about Charles Dickens. Write them below. Explain to your partner why you chose these.

| Five things about a white Christmas | Five things about Charles Dickens |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1 | 1 |
| 2 | 2 |
| 3 | 3 |
| 4 | 4 |
| 5 | 5 |

The teacher will choose some pairs to discuss their findings in front of the class.

8. **Let's discuss: A white Christmas:** Think of two different places in the world where there might be a white Christmas? Compare and discuss together with your partner.

The teacher will choose some pairs to discuss their findings in front of the class.

9. **Let's think!** In pairs. On the board write as many words as you can to do with **a white Christmas**. *One-two minutes*. Compare with other teams. Using your words compile a short dialogue together.

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10. Let's talk! Radio London: *In pairs/groups.* You are in the Radio London studio. One of you is the presenter; the other student(s) select one or more of the topics listed below as today's talking point(s). Try to get a balanced interview. *5 minutes.*

| | | | |
|---|-----------------|---|-----------------------|
| 1 | Charles Dickens | 3 | A white Christmas |
| 2 | Christmas | 4 | A Victorian Christmas |

The teacher will choose some pairs to tell their stories in front of the class.

11. Let's do 'The Article Quiz': Have the students quiz each other in pairs. They score a point for each correct answer and half a point each time they have to look at the article for help. See who can get the highest score!

Student A

- 1) Name the famous writer.
- 2) Name the river.
- 3) What year did the writer write about the ghost of Christmas Past?
- 4) Who is Philip Allingham?
- 5) What really caused the cold winters?

Student B

- 1) Who was Prince Albert?
- 2) What did Prince Albert bring to Britain in 1840?
- 3) Name the bridge.
- 4) The sleigh was pulled by what?
- 5) Name the books.

12. Let debate: Students A prefer a white Christmas. Students B prefer Christmas without snow. *2 minutes.*

13. Presentation: In pairs, groups or individually: Prepare in class or at home a 2-minute presentation on either: **A white Christmas / Charles Dickens.** Stand at the front of the class to give your presentation to the class. The class can vote on the best presentation. Class – After the presentations go through the good and weak points on each presentation. Learn from the results.

14. Let's draw a Christmas tree: On the board draw a Christmas tree. Decorate it and label your tree.

15. Let's write an e-mail: Write and send a 200 word e-mail to your teacher about: **A white Christmas.** Your e-mail can be read out in class.

16. Sentence starters: Finish these sentence starters. Correct your mistakes. Compare what other people have written.

- a) Christmas _____
- b) Charles Dickens _____
- c) Victorian England _____

DISCUSSION

Student A questions

- 1) Did the headline want to make you read the article?
- 2) Why do we dream of a white Christmas?
- 3) Why do we get Christmas cards with snow on them?
- 4) Have you read any of Charles Dickens's books? Which ones?
- 5) When did it last snow in your country?
- 6) What three things do you like about Christmas?
- 7) Think of three things you put on a Christmas tree.
- 8) Think of three things you put on a snowman.
- 9) Think of three things about Victorian Christmases.
- 10) Who was Prince Albert?

Student B questions

- 1) What do you think about what you've read?
- 2) Think of three things you like about Christmas.
- 3) Think of three things you dislike about Christmas.
- 4) Think of three things you liked about Christmas as a child.
- 5) Do you get White Christmases in your country? Why? Why not?
- 6) Do you have a Christmas tree at Christmas? Why? Why not?
- 7) Do you go ice skating at Christmas? If yes, where?
- 8) Is Christmas more for children?
- 9) What are doing for Christmas this year?
- 10) Did you like this discussion?

SPEAKING

Let's discuss! Christmas

Allow 10-15 minutes – As a class / small groups / pairs / 1 to 1

| |
|---|
| A white Christmas – Decorating the Christmas tree – A Christmas dinner – Opening the Christmas presents – Celebrating Christmas |
|---|

The teacher can moderate the session.

GAP FILL: READING:

Put the words into the gaps in the text.

Why do we dream of a white Christmas?

Why do we (1)_____ of a white Christmas? Why do we get Christmas cards with snow on them? The (2)_____ is the writer Charles Dickens, his childhood coincided with a decade of (3)_____ cold winters. Thus in his writings he describes persistently a Britain smothered in snow on (4)_____ Day. His inspiration coming from his childhood. Six of Dickens's first nine Christmases were white. One of these fell in the winter of 1813-14, when Britain's last Frost Fair was held on a frozen River Thames in London and Dickens was nearly two years old. The (5)_____ around Blackfriars Bridge was thick enough to bear the weight of an elephant. So when in 1843, he came to write about *the* (6)_____ of *Christmas Past*, he did so with the spirit of those colder Christmases, with "quick wheels dashing the (7)_____ frost and snow from the darker leaves of the evergreen like spray". The story is now credited with establishing the Victorian genre of the Christmas story and spurring a revival of the celebration of Christmas in early (8)_____ England.

Phillip Allingham, a specialist in Dickens's Christmas books said, *A Christmas Carol* made Christmas respectable for the English (1)_____, who had come to regard it as somewhat (2)_____. Christmas trees brought over to Britain by Prince Albert in 1840 were adopted too, after Dickens wrote a popular (3)_____ on them. Other tales would later complement Dickens's idealised (4)_____ Christmas. From the mid-19th century a (5)_____ first published in America 20 years earlier gained currency. *The night before Christmas* put Santa Claus on a (6)_____ pulled by (7)_____. It was around this time that artists consistently drew Santa in red robes. But Dickens had done most of the (8)_____, driven by an enduring obsession for the season. In *The Pickwick Papers*, published six years before *A Christmas Carol*, he had written: "Happy happy Christmas, that can win us back to the delusions of our childish days."

freakishly

Christmas

hoar

ice

dream

ghost

Victorian

culprit

reindeer

sleigh

snowy

bourgeoisie

groundwork

antiquated

essay

poem

GAP FILL: LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

Why do we dream of a white Christmas?

Why do _____ Christmas? Why do we get Christmas cards with snow on them? The culprit is the _____. His childhood coincided with a decade of freakishly cold winters. Thus in his writings he describes persistently a Britain _____ Christmas Day, his inspiration coming from his childhood. Six of Dickens's first nine Christmases were white. One of these _____ of 1813-14, when Britain's last Frost Fair was held on a frozen River Thames in London and Dickens was nearly two years old. The ice around Blackfriars Bridge was thick enough to bear the weight of an elephant. So when in 1843, he came to write about *the Ghost of Christmas Past*, he did so with the spirit of those colder Christmases, with "quick wheels _____ and snow from the darker leaves of the evergreen like spray". The story is now credited with establishing the Victorian genre of the Christmas story and spurring a revival of the celebration of Christmas in early _____.

Phillip Allingham, a specialist in Dickens's Christmas books said, _____ made Christmas respectable for the English bourgeoisie, who _____ it as somewhat antiquated. Christmas trees brought over to Britain by Prince Albert in 1840 were adopted too, after Dickens wrote a _____. Other tales would later complement Dickens's idealised snowy Christmas. From the mid-19th century a poem first published in America 20 years earlier gained currency. *The night before Christmas* put _____ sleigh pulled by reindeer. It was around this time that artists consistently drew _____. But Dickens had done most of the groundwork, driven by an enduring obsession for the season. In *The Pickwick Papers*, published six years before *A Christmas Carol*, he had written: "Happy happy Christmas, that can win us back to the delusions _____."

GRAMMAR

Put the words into the gaps in the text.

Why do we dream of a white Christmas?

Why do we dream of a white Christmas? (1)___ do we get Christmas cards with snow on them? The culprit is the writer Charles Dickens. His childhood coincided with a decade of freakishly cold winters. (2)___ in his writings he describes persistently a Britain smothered in snow on Christmas Day, his inspiration coming from his childhood. Six of Dickens's first nine Christmases were white. One of (3)___ fell in the winter of 1813-14, when Britain's last Frost Fair was held on a frozen River Thames in London and Dickens was nearly two years old. The ice around Blackfriars Bridge was thick enough to bear the weight of an elephant. So (4)___ in 1843, he came to write (5)___ *the Ghost of Christmas Past*, he did so with the spirit of (6)___ colder Christmases, with "quick wheels dashing the hoar frost and snow (7)___ the darker leaves of the evergreen like spray". The story is now credited (8)___ establishing the Victorian genre of the Christmas story and spurring a revival of the celebration of Christmas in early Victorian England.

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when

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a

by

in

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our

for

the

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SPELLING TEST

The teacher will ask the class individually to spell the following words that are in the article. Afterwards, check your answers with your teacher, using the following ratings:
Pass = 12, Good = 15, Very good = 18, Excellent = 20

| | | | |
|----|--------------|----|------------|
| 1 | hoar | 11 | groundwork |
| 2 | inspiration | 12 | antiquated |
| 3 | persistently | 13 | freakishly |
| 4 | respectable | 14 | decade |
| 5 | bourgeoisie | 15 | hurrah |
| 6 | coincided | 16 | gripped |
| 7 | Victorian | 17 | immediate |
| 8 | immediate | 18 | enveloped |
| 9 | celebration | 19 | shrouded |
| 10 | reindeer | 20 | culprit |

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