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The 4 page 60 minute ESL British English lesson – 05/12/13

## 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' idealised snowy Christmas.

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### SPEAKING – WARM UP

Think of three reasons we dream of a white Christmas? Go round the room swapping details with others.

### LISTENING – WRITING - DICTATION

The teacher will read some lines of the article slowly to the class.

### READING

Students should now read the article aloud, swapping readers every paragraph.

### SPEAKING - UNDERSTANDING

**1) The article** – Students check any unknown vocabulary or phrases with the teacher.

**2) The article** - Students should look through the article with the teacher.

- 1) What is the article about?
- 2) What do you think about the article?
- 3) Was this an easy or difficult article to understand?
- 4) Was this a boring or interesting article?
- 5) Discuss the article.

**3) Article quiz** - Students quiz each other in pairs. Score a point for each correct answer. Score half a point each time you have to look at the article for help. See who can get the highest score!

#### Student A questions

- 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 Phillip Allingham?
- 5) What really caused the cold winters?

#### Student B questions

- 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.

**Category: Christmas / Charles Dickens / Snow**  
**Level: Intermediate / Upper Intermediate**

## Why do we dream of a white Christmas? – 5<sup>th</sup> December 2013

### WRITING / SPEAKING

*In pairs.* On the board write as many words as you can to do with '**Charles Dickens**'. *One-two minutes.* Compare with other teams. Using your words compile a short dialogue together.

### WRITING / SPEAKING

*In pairs* – Think of three things about a white Christmas. Write them below. Talk about them!

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_

**Add** three things about Charles Dickens. Discuss together.

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_

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

### WRITING / SPEAKING

*In pairs/As a class* - Think of six books by Charles Dickens. Write the titles on the board. Briefly talk about them. 5 mins.

### WRITING / SPEAKING

*In pairs/As a class* – Compare a sunny Australian Christmas and a snowy one in Europe. Which is best? 5 mins.

### DISCUSSION

#### Student A questions

- 1) Did the headline make you want to 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' 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) Have you learnt anything today?

### DRAWING / SPEAKING

*In groups.* On the board draw a Christmas tree. Decorate it and label your tree.

### SPEAKING - PRESENTATION

*In groups.* Prepare a short presentation on either: **A white Christmas / Charles Dickens.** Look online first!

### SPEAKING - ROLEPLAY

*In pairs.* You are in a café in London. Start a conversation about Charles Dickens and white Christmases. 5 mins.

### SPEAKING - DISCUSSION

Allow 10 minutes – As a class.

*Discuss the following...*

A white Christmas / Decorating the Christmas tree  
/ A Christmas dinner / Opening the Christmas presents / Celebrating Christmas

**The teacher** can moderate the session.

### WRITING

Finish these sentence starters. Correct your mistakes. Compare what others have written.

- 1) Christmas \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) Charles Dickens \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) Victorian England \_\_\_\_\_

### DISCUSSION

#### 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 a white Christmas 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 you doing for Christmas this year?
- 10) Did you like this discussion?

**GAP FILL: READING**

**Why do we dream of a white Christmas?**

Why do we (1)\_\_\_ of a white (2)\_\_\_? Why do we get Christmas cards with snow on them?

The culprit is the writer Charles Dickens. His childhood coincided with a (3)\_\_\_ of (4)\_\_\_ cold winters. Thus in his writings he describes (5)\_\_\_ a Britain smothered in snow on Christmas Day, his inspiration coming from his (6)\_\_\_.

Six of Dickens's first nine Christmases were white. One of these fell in the (7)\_\_\_ of 1813-14, when Britain's last (8)\_\_\_ Fair was held on a frozen River Thames in London and Dickens was nearly two years old.

**winter / persistently / freakishly / frost / Christmas / dream / childhood / decade /**

The ice around Blackfriars Bridge was thick enough to bear the weight of an (1)\_\_\_ . 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 (2)\_\_\_ of the (3)\_\_\_ of Christmas in early Victorian England.

Phillip Allingham, a (4)\_\_\_ in Dickens's Christmas books said, *A Christmas Carol* made Christmas respectable for the English (5)\_\_\_, 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 (6)\_\_\_ on them. Other (7)\_\_\_ would later complement Dickens' idealised (8)\_\_\_ Christmas.

**snowy / specialist / revival / essay / elephant / celebration / bourgeoisie / tales**

**GAP FILL: GRAMMAR**

**Why do we dream of a white Christmas?**

(1)\_\_\_ do we dream of (2)\_\_\_ white Christmas? Why do (3)\_\_\_ get Christmas cards with snow on them?

The culprit is (4)\_\_\_ writer Charles Dickens. (5)\_\_\_ childhood coincided with a decade of freakishly cold winters. Thus in his writings he describes persistently a Britain smothered in snow (6)\_\_\_ Christmas Day, his inspiration coming from his childhood.

Six of Dickens's first nine Christmases were white. One of these fell (7)\_\_\_ the winter of 1813-14, when Britain's last Frost Fair was held on a frozen River Thames in London (8)\_\_\_ Dickens was nearly two years old.

**his / and / the / why / on / we / in / a**

The ice around Blackfriars Bridge was thick enough to bear the weight of (1)\_\_\_ elephant. (2)\_\_\_ when in 1843, he came to write about *the Ghost of Christmas Past*, he did so with the spirit of (3)\_\_\_ 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 (4)\_\_\_ establishing the Victorian genre of the Christmas story and spurring a revival of the celebration (5)\_\_\_ 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 (6)\_\_\_ Prince Albert in 1840 were adopted too, after Dickens wrote a popular essay on (7)\_\_\_ . Other tales (8)\_\_\_ later complement Dickens' idealised snowy Christmas.

**with / them / those / would / so / by / of / an**

## Why do we dream of a white Christmas? – 5<sup>th</sup> December 2013



### GAP FILL: LISTENING

#### Why do we dream of a white Christmas?

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### WRITING/SPELLING

#### From page 1...

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 19<sup>th</sup> 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.

**Homework** - Write and send a 200 word email to your teacher about: **Why do we dream of a white Christmas?** Your email can be read out in class.

Why do we dream of a white Christmas? – *5<sup>th</sup> December 2013*