

Comprehension Workbook 8

Christmas

(Origins of Christmas traditions)



Find out about the meaning of stories and articles

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Christian faith

Matches the requirements of the Literacy Strategy and designed to integrate with the study of world religions. (This material is independent of any specific text book and can be used alongside any publisher's books including our Christian Faith, Church, Christian art and writing and Christian holy days books.)

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Origins of Christmas traditions

Many of the Christmas traditions that we celebrate today began in Victorian times. Queen Victoria's husband, Prince Albert, was from Germany, and he brought many traditional German Christmas traditions to England. Other traditions and symbols were created in England in Victorian times, or had been used before the Victorians.

Christmas tree

The idea of having a fir tree at Christmas may have started in the 8th century, in Germany. St Boniface, a monk from Devon, went to preach in an area of Germany where there were many non-Christians. One winter, St Boniface came across a group of people worshipping an oak tree. St Boniface grabbed an axe and hacked down the tree. According to the legend, a fir tree grew up immediately in its place, its green needles were a reminder that God's love lasts forever. From that time, the German people converted to Christianity and began decorating evergreen trees at Christmas time. In 1841, a picture of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert and their children sitting around a Christmas tree was printed in the Illustrated London News. After that, Britons began decorating Christmas trees of their own.

Christmas cards

The first person who had the idea for a printed Christmas card was Sir Henry Cole, Chairman of the Society of the Arts. In 1843, Cole found himself very busy as Christmas came around and he had the idea of having a card printed up with Christmas greetings that you could simply sign and post to family and friends. Cole asked the painter John Callcott Horsley to design the card, which showed a picture of a family enjoying a Christmas meal. Horsley had 1,000 of the cards printed up and they were sold for one shilling each, which was a lot of money. But the idea caught on and soon everyone began sending Christmas cards.

Father Christmas

In the third century, a boy named Nicholas lived on what is now the southern coast of Turkey. Nicholas' wealthy parents died in an epidemic and Nicholas inherited all of their money. Nicholas was a Christian and he decided to become a priest. He also decided to follow Jesus' words to "sell what you own and give the money to the poor," and during his life he gave away his entire fortune to help others. Eventually, Nicholas became the Bishop of Myra and word of his generosity spread far and wide. After he died, Nicholas was made a saint. In order to remember Nicholas' generosity, people began exchanging gifts on the anniversary of his death—December 19. The story of St Nicholas and the tradition of remembering his generosity inspired the story of Father Christmas and the tradition of giving gifts on Christmas day.

Christmas stockings

According to legend, there was once an honest and hard-working poor man who was worried that his three daughters would not be able to get married as he did not have a dowry for them. Nicholas, the Bishop of Myra, heard about the family and wanted to help them. One Christmas Eve, the girls hung their stockings out to dry on the fireplace and went to sleep. That night, the Bishop threw some gold coins down the chimney. The coins landed in the stockings. News of this gift spread and soon other people began to hang stockings too in the hope that they would receive gifts.





Understanding words

Before we can understand a story we have to know what all of the words mean. Let's try one...

a Write a sentence in which you found the word 'tradition'.

b From that sentence, write what you think 'tradition' means.

c Write a new sentence using the word 'tradition'.

d Use a dictionary to find words with a similar meaning (synonyms) to 'tradition'.

e Draw a picture illustrating a 'tradition'.



Finding key words

Next, we need to find the key words that tell us what the story is about...

Read the story and underline the key words. Write the most important of these key words in a list like the one below. Write next to it a word that means a similar thing (a synonym). You don't have to use all the spaces, but you should not use more.

Key word	Synonym (similar word)
Example: eventually	after some time

3

Summarising

(the gist of the story)

To summarise means to rewrite the story in a shorter version using as many of our key words from Task 2 as needed.

1 Write a heading for your summary.

2 Now write the main idea in one sentence.
e.g. "This story tells us..."

3 Now add some detail to the main idea by writing more sentences after it.

**Finally,
can you rewrite your
summary to make it better?**

1. Look out for errors such as using the same word too often – use alternatives.
2. Make sure you have summarised the author's purpose in your OWN words.
3. Make sure your summary is in a logical order.
4. Is your summary informative AND interesting to others?

There is nothing wrong with rewriting; even the best authors rewrite their work.

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Sequencing

Sequencing means getting the events in the right order. Write these sentences in the correct order, so they make sense.



The idea of having a fir tree at Christmas may have started in the 8th century, in Germany.

In the third century, a boy named Nicholas lived on what is now the southern coast of Turkey.

In 1841, a picture of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert and their children sitting around a Christmas tree was printed in the Illustrated London News.

But the idea caught on and soon everyone began sending Christmas cards.

After he died, Nicholas was made a saint.

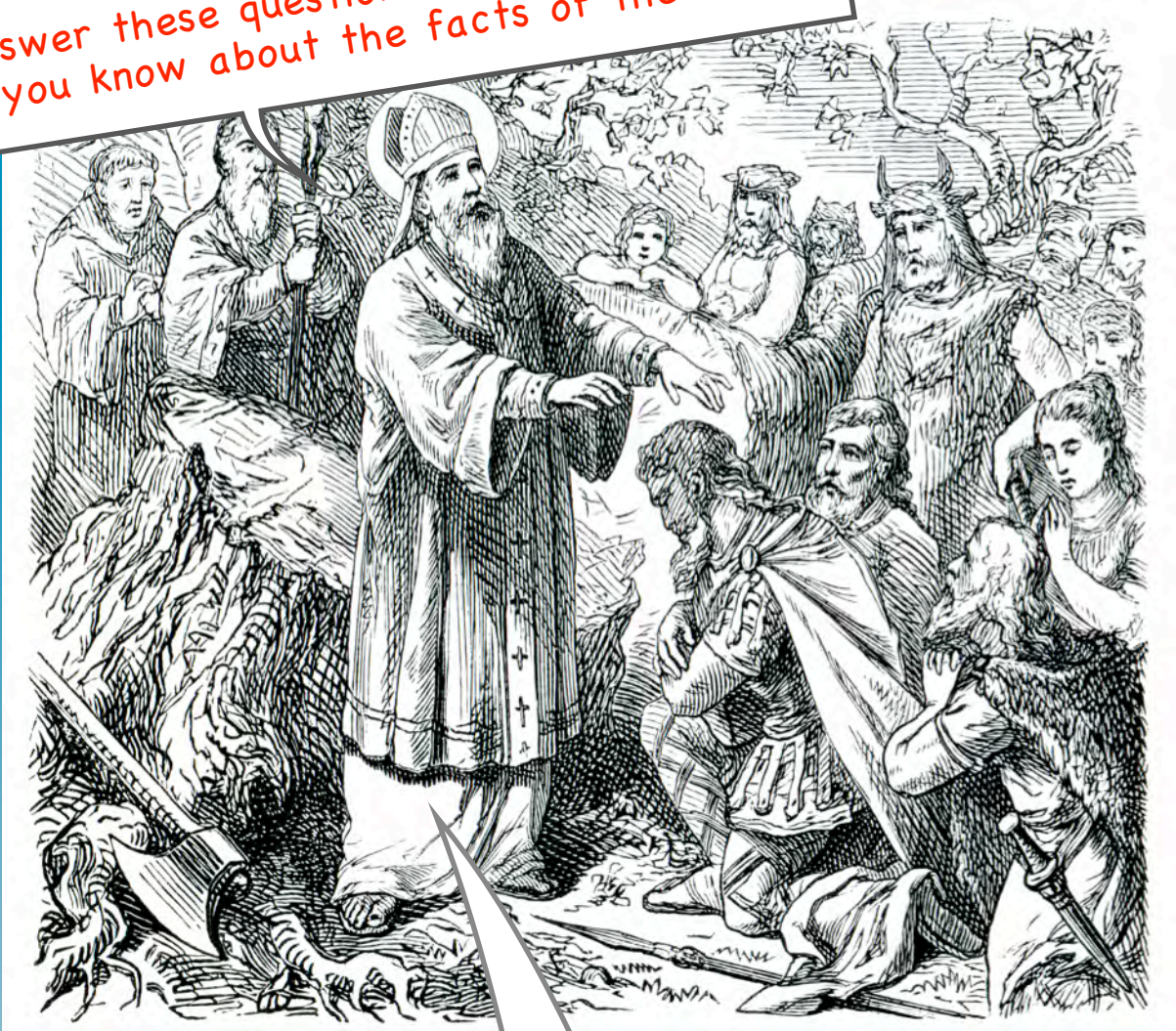
In 1843, Cole found himself very busy as Christmas came around and he had the idea of having a card printed up with Christmas greetings that you could simply sign and post to family and friends.



Get to the facts

Answer these questions to see how much you know about the facts of the story.

St Boniface



Write a sentence to answer each of these questions:

- (a) Who had the idea for a printed Christmas card?
- (b) Where did St Boniface go to preach about Christianity?
- (c) Where did St Nicholas live?
- (d) Who gave coins to the poor man and his daughters?
- (e) Who brought many traditional German Christmas traditions to Britain?



Whys and wherefores

Answer these questions to see how much you know about the meanings in the story and how it was written.

1 Why did people in Britain start to decorate Christmas trees in Victorian times?

2 Why was the man in the Christmas stockings story worried?

3 Why did Henry Cole decide not to write his own Christmas cards in 1843?

4 In the tradition of the Christmas tree, what is the green tree a reminder of?



Opinions matter

Answer these questions to give your views and to develop the story.

- 1 Which parts of the story of the Christmas stockings are probably facts and which parts may be made up?
- 2 Which parts of the story of St Boniface and the Christmas tree do you think are probably facts and which parts may be made up?
- 3 Christmas cards are a big time saver, are they also less personal than a handwritten message?
- 4 Why do Britons follow many German Christmas traditions?
- 5 What are some other Christmas traditions?





Talking it through

It often helps if a group of people get together and discuss a problem.



Discussion topic: Traditions

Discuss the religious meaning of some Christmas traditions. How have some of the Christmas traditions mentioned here, or other Christmas traditions that you can think of, changed over time.

Make a story...

When you read a description it often gives you ideas about how the event might be described differently.



Christmas Traditions

You are living in Victorian times. It is getting close to Christmas and you keep reading in the papers about new Christmas traditions. You decide to try some of these traditions for the first time...

(Now you describe what happens next. What new Christmas traditions do you decide to try and why....)

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