

Lesson Plan: Christmas



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Christmas

[1] In December, many Americans greet friends by saying “**Merry** Christmas!” The word “merry” means cheerful, lively and happy. “Merry” is an old word from long ago, now used only at Christmas. Using special words like “merry” is a **tradition** — something people do in the same way every year.

[2] Christmas, which falls on December 25, is an old tradition. The holiday began almost two thousand years ago as a Christian holiday, **celebrating** the birth of Jesus. Today, Americans celebrate Christmas with traditions from many times and places. The indoor Christmas tree comes from Germany. **Poinsettias** — the red, leafy plants people set out in December — are a Mexican tradition.

[3] In much of the United States, the weather is cold during December. Many people play outside, throwing **snowballs**, ice skating, sledding, or building snowmen. Inside, families eat holiday meals, often turkey, ham, pies, and cookies shaped like stars or Christmas trees.

[4] One of the most loved parts of Christmas is the story of Santa Claus. Santa is a **mythical figure**. He is said to live at the North Pole. People say he flies all over the world to bring gifts to children on Christmas Eve.

[5] Many adults **make believe** that Santa is real because children enjoy the Santa tradition. Adults often help children set out plates of cookies for Santa to eat. They might take their children to see a person dressed as Santa.

[6] Many children write letters to Santa, asking for gifts. They send these letters through mail, like real letters. The U.S. **Postal** Service shares some children’s letters online. Anyone who reads the letters can buy gifts for the children. Everyone pretends the gifts came from Santa.

[7] The Santa Tracker, a U.S.-Canadian volunteer project, is another fun tradition. Each December, volunteers watch the sky, pretending to spot Santa as he flies around the world. When children call the Santa Tracker, adults answer the phone. They tell stories about Santa.

[8] Fun traditions like the Santa Tracker help people feel **festive** during the cold months of winter. During the holiday season, which includes Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year’s, people take time to celebrate. Many Americans spend time with loved ones, eat special foods, and enjoy family and community traditions at this time of year.



Overview

This 90-minute lesson introduces students to the U.S. holiday of Christmas through activities that encourage the development of both language skills and collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking skills.

Goals

Students will:

- Practice reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills.
- Strengthen collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking skills.
- Learn about Christmas traditions in the context of U.S. culture.
- Make connections between Christmas traditions and their own culture or community.

Lesson Materials

1. Printed or projected copy of the photo page at the beginning of this lesson.
2. Printed or projected copy of the Christmas article included with this lesson.
3. Printed or projected copy of the [Vocabulary Discussion Questions](#) included in this lesson. (You may wish to cut the paper up and give one question to each group).
4. Printed copy of the [Reading Response Worksheet](#) included in this lesson.

Preparation

1. Read through this lesson in its entirety.
2. Review the Christmas reading and the Vocabulary from the Reading section (below).
3. Consider whether this lesson is suitable for your classroom, given local customs and beliefs related to Christmas and Santa. Teachers should be aware that the lesson includes some U.S. military-related Christmas traditions (the Santa tracker).
4. Determine whether you will need to activate students' prior knowledge, pre-teach, or otherwise provide scaffolding, or support, for your students beyond the suggestions in the Procedures section.
5. Consider if, or how, you will adapt or change this lesson to better meet your students' needs.



Vocabulary from the Reading

- **merry** (adjective) – cheerful, lively, happy. In the U.S., it’s mainly used when talking about Christmas.
- **celebrating** (verb) – to do something special to show the importance of a day or event.
- **festive** (adjective) – happy and full of fun, especially used to describe a party or holiday.
- **tradition** (noun) – a way of doing something that people share or repeat over time.
- **snowball** (noun) – a ball that people shape out of snow.
- **make believe** (verb) – to pretend that something is real when it is not.
- **mythical figure** (noun) – a person or creature from old stories that people imagine is real.
- **poinsettia** (noun) – a red, leafy plant sometimes known as the “Christmas flower.”
- **postal** (adjective) – describing a country’s mail delivery system.

Procedures

Introduction: “What Happens Next” (5 minutes)

1. Show students the photo at the beginning of the lesson.
2. Ask students to describe what they see. Encourage them to connect the photo to anything they already know about Christmas.
3. Have students talk with a partner about what they think might happen next in the scene.
4. Invite pairs to share their ideas with the class (for example, someone eats a cookie, Santa leaves gifts, or children catch Santa).

Pre-Reading Vocabulary Introduction (15 to 20 minutes)

1. Introduce each vocabulary word.
2. Divide the class into small groups. Assign each group one of the questions from the [Vocabulary Discussion Questions](#) handout. Explain that one member from each group will need to share a response with the whole class.
3. Allow students time to discuss their question.
4. Ask each group to share their response, noting their ideas on the board.



Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking Activity: “Snowball Fight” (20 to 25 minutes)

1. Ask students to read the article and complete the [Reading Response Worksheet](#). Students may read together but should complete the worksheet as individuals.
2. Gather students in a circle. Tell students to crumple up their worksheet into a ball. Students should have a “snowball fight” by throwing their paper balls.
3. Next, students should each pick up a “snowball” from the ground, unfolding it to reveal another student’s completed worksheet.
4. Students should seek to find the owner of this graphic organizer by talking with one another, checking each other’s responses against what is written on their papers.
5. Once papers have been identified, the game is complete.

Speaking, Listening and Creativity Activity: Santa Tracker Role Play (30 to 40 minutes)

1. If appropriate in your classroom, show students [a video](#) about what it’s like to volunteer for the NORAD “Santa Tracking” project described in the article.
2. Explain you’d like students to imagine what it might be like to answer children’s phone calls or e-mails about Santa Claus.
3. Divide students into small groups. Ask them to make a list of questions think children might ask about Santa Claus, such as “how old is Santa Claus?”, “is Santa real?” or “what does Santa Claus like to eat?” Each group should write their questions on one piece of paper.
4. Ask students to pass their paper to the next group. This group should write answers to these questions. Encourage students to be creative and use their imaginations.
5. Ask each group to share one or two questions and answers with the whole group.
6. As a group, practice some holiday phrases (such as “Ho, Ho, Ho” and “Merry Christmas.”) Explain that the volunteers at the Santa Tracker often hear unusual questions. They can use these holiday phrases when they are not sure what to say.
7. Split students into pairs. Ask them to take turns being the “caller” (a child asking about Santa) and the adult “operator,” who gives a make-believe answer to their questions. Remind students that if they don’t know what to say, they can use a holiday phrase.
8. After the activity, invite the class to reflect by asking “what did you learn about U.S. holiday traditions?”



Closing Activity: Conducting a Holiday Phrase (5 minutes)

1. In this activity, the teacher acts as a musical conductor, using hand gestures to increase or decrease the volume of the student chorus.
2. As a group, practice saying a holiday phrase (such as “Ho, Ho, Ho,” or “Merry Christmas.”) Students’ voices should grow louder and softer as the instructor indicates.
3. Once the student chorus has practiced working with the conductor, students may take turns conducting. They could add new gestures to increase or decrease the tempo, or direct the student chorus to add sound effects (like stomps or claps).

Variations and Extensions

Speaking and Listening Extension

If timing and communications technology allow, you may wish to have students phone or e-mail the NORAD Santa Tracker and communicate directly with U.S.-based volunteers.

The call center is staffed by volunteers who are happy to talk with young people about Santa Claus and Christmas, but it is open just one day a year, December 24, from [04:00 to 24:00 U.S. Mountain Standard Time](#). Contact information for the Santa Tracker is [here](#).

Students could return to class after contacting the Santa Tracker and share their communication experiences in class.

Creativity Extension

Students may enjoy enhancing their role play activity by decorating the classroom with colored paper. They could make red and green paper hats to wear, make paper chains with vocabulary words, or cut out paper snowflakes. Students could then discuss how props, decoration, and costumes can create a festive experience.

Writing Variation

Instead of the Santa Tracker Role Play, students may enjoy writing a letter to Santa. As a teacher, you can find letter writing tips and downloadable letter templates at the U.S. Postal Service’s [Operation Santa website](#). The site also features a rotating selection of real letters to Santa from U.S. children, which might interest your students. However, you will need to review these real letters carefully to determine if they are appropriate in your teaching context.



Vocabulary Discussion Questions

In the U.S., merry is a word only used in to talk about Christmas, as in “Merry Christmas!” What other words are used mostly on special days? These can be words from any language.

In the U.S., people may decorate their homes and serve special food to make an event feel fun and festive. In your life, what does a festive event look, sound, smell, and taste like?

During Christmas, many Americans enjoy traditions such as putting up a Christmas tree or singing songs. What holiday traditions or activities do you look forward to?

Many stories tell of mythical figures, such as monsters, magical animals, or people with magical powers like Santa Claus. What are some mythical figures you know about?

At Christmas, many Americans make believe that Santa Claus is real. Have you acted in a play, or done a class role play, where you had to pretend to be someone else? What kinds of things did you do?



