

Topic: Festivals in different cultures
Aim: To help learners talk about customs for different festivals in their own and other cultures, using Christmas in the UK as an example.
Language aims: To develop speaking skills on the topic of customs for festivals in different cultures To develop vocabulary learning skills.
Level: C1
Time: 60–90 minutes (note that some activities are optional)
Materials: Cambridge English Christmas vocabulary cards Cambridge English YouTube video on vocabulary recording Cambridge English Christmas vocabulary crossword: Learner A , Learner B , definitions Cambridge English Christmas vocabulary learning activities Reading text about Christmas in the UK blank cards or slips of paper for writing vocabulary items Planning sheet for homework task.
Teacher preparation: Cut up Christmas vocabulary cards Find photographs or images of different festivals (or Christmas in different cultures, as appropriate) Find photographs of different vocabulary items for Christmas.
Context: As this lesson is about festivals in general, it can be used in any context in any country, to talk about different kinds of festivals. Christmas in the UK is used as an example of the kind of customs which belong to one festival. These customs can be compared with Christmas in other countries, or any other kind of festival.
Age: Young learners or adults
Vocabulary: Custom (n): A tradition which people in one culture or country usually follow, or something which people usually do at the time of a festival. Festival (n): A special time of year when people in a culture or country celebrate a special event and follow particular customs. Usually this is a happy time of year. See also definitions of the vocabulary used in the reading text and activities on Christmas vocabulary.

Procedure:

1. Lead-in and establishing topic

Establish the meanings of *custom* and *festival* by talking about festivals which your learners may be familiar with. This may be Christmas or any other festival. You can use pictures from the internet to help you establish which festival and which customs you are referring to.

Tell your learners that you are going to teach them about Christmas in the UK, then you are going to allow them to write and talk about any festival they would like.

2. Brainstorm activity

Divide learners into pairs or small groups, and ask them to think about what they know about Christmas customs in the UK. Ask them to make a list of key vocabulary items, for example, *Christmas tree, Christmas card*.

3. Vocabulary activity

Give each pair or group a set of [Cambridge English Christmas Vocabulary Cards](#) and ask them to check if any of the vocabulary items they thought of are on the cards.

Ask learners to put all the remaining cards into three groups: vocabulary items they know, ones they don't know, and ones they are not sure about. Encourage learners to help one another with vocabulary that they find difficult.

Use pictures (which you can find on the internet) to establish and check the meaning of the new vocabulary.

4. Video activity (optional)

You can show the learners the [Cambridge English video about recording new vocabulary](#), and ask learners to talk about how they could record this new Christmas vocabulary.

5. Vocabulary activity 2

Divide learners into pairs, Learner A and Learner B. Give each student either [Cambridge English Christmas Crossword Learner A](#) or [Learner B](#).

Ask learners to take turns to describe the Christmas vocabulary items. Learners have to guess the items and then complete the gaps in their own crossword. At the end, learners can use the [definitions](#) to help them identify any words which they found difficult.

6. Extra activities (optional)

There are other [activities for practising this Christmas vocabulary](#) on the Cambridge English website.

(You can find other general vocabulary activities in Cambridge English Vocabulary Activities on the Cambridge English website.)

7. Reading

Give learners the reading text about Christmas in the UK and ask them to read it quickly to see which of the items on the vocabulary list are mentioned.

(Answer key: they are all mentioned, except: *mistletoe* and *holly*)

Now ask the learners to read the text again and answer the [questions](#) below the reading text.

Answer key:

- a) No, the shortest day is the solstice, which is three days before Christmas.
- b) They decorate their houses with a Christmas tree and coloured lights and objects.
- c) a real tree or an artificial (plastic) one
- d) presents
- e) Children believe that Santa fills the stockings.

- f) Many foods are very rich.
- g) Many people regret eating too much, and go on a diet or promise to do more exercise.
- h) Carols are traditional songs sung at Christmas, and there are also many famous Christmas pop songs.
- i) All the shops are closed on Christmas Day, and many on New Year's Day. But on the other days many shops are open and there are sales.

8 Speaking

Now, arrange learners into small groups or pairs and ask them to talk about the customs from one festival in their own country.

If you have a group of learners all from the same country, ask each pair or group to think of a different festival.

Ask learners to make a list of vocabulary items about the customs in the festival(s), and to write simple definitions in English. If the names of the customs cannot easily be translated into English, just ask them to put the definitions into English.

Ask them to write each vocabulary item on a card or slip of paper.

Move the learners into larger groups and spread the cards or slips of paper over a desk, or put them on the wall. Ask learners to guess what they mean, which festival they came from, and which learner wrote them.

8. Preparation for writing

To prepare for homework, look at the reading text about Christmas again, and match the [paragraph headings](#) to the sections in the text.

Answer key:

- a) **What music do people listen to? paragraph 6**
- b) **How long does the festival last? paragraph 7**
- c) **How do people decorate their houses? paragraph 3**
- d) **What gifts do people give each other? paragraph 4**
- e) **Is this festival the same everywhere? paragraph 1**
- f) **What season is this festival? paragraph 2**
- g) **What do people eat? paragraph 5**

Using the [planning sheet](#) for the text about Christmas as an example, ask learners to make notes about a festival in their own country.

Divide learners into pairs and ask them to show one another their notes and ask their partner more questions about the festival.

9. Homework

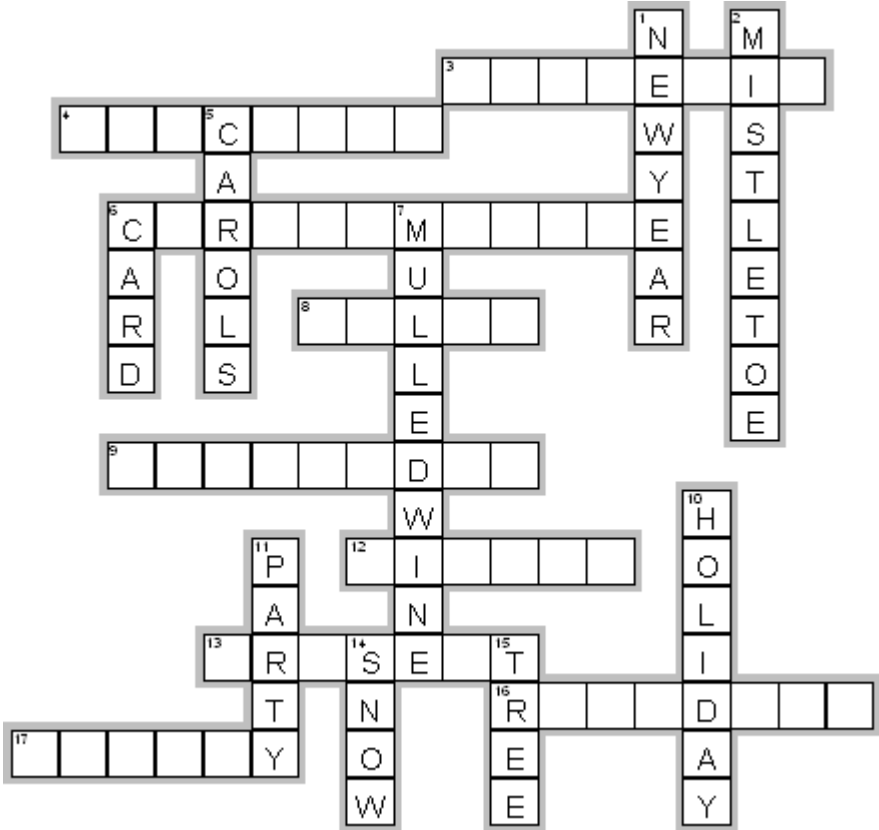
For homework, learners can complete this writing activity and prepare to talk about the festival in the following lessons.

Christmas vocabulary cards

turkey	snow
present	mistletoe
carols	holly
tree	card
party	New Year
stocking	Boxing Day
mince pie	holiday
reindeer	Christmas Eve
mulled wine	winter

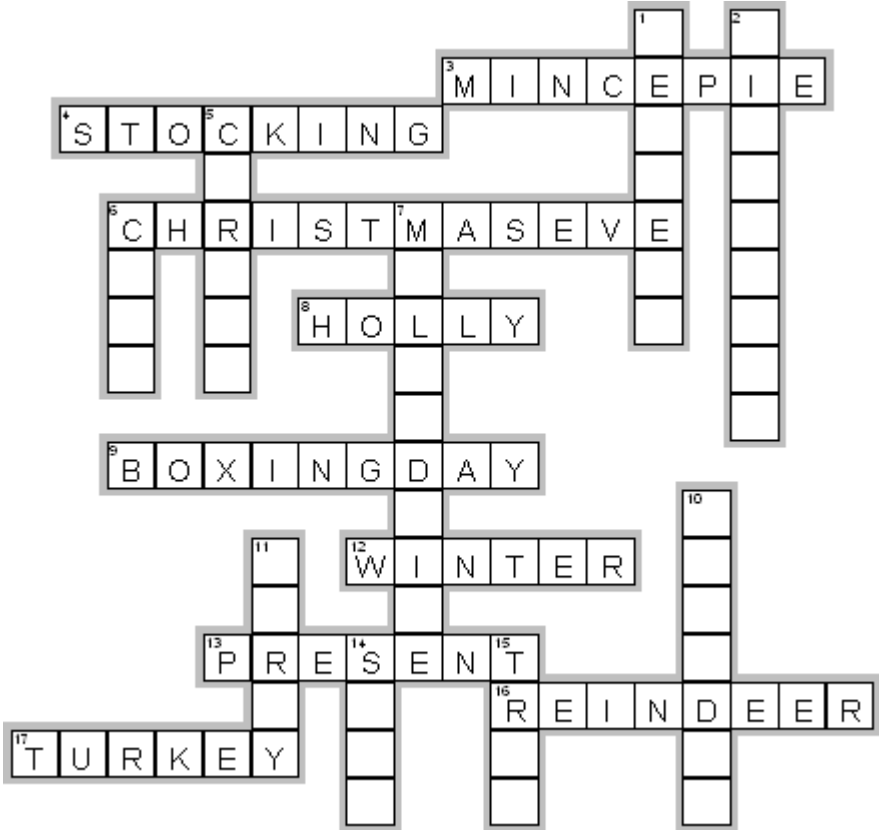
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Christmas crossword: Learner A



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Christmas crossword: Learner B



Christmas vocabulary definitions

Boxing Day	The day after Christmas Day
Card	This has a message written in it and is given from one person to another at Christmas
Carols	Traditional songs sung at Christmas
Christmas Eve	The day before Christmas
Holiday	A special time of the year when you do not have to go to work
Holly	A green, thorny plant with red berries used to decorate people's homes
Mince pie	A traditional sweet pastry filled with fruit
Mistletoe	Couples traditionally kiss underneath this plant at Christmas
Mulled wine	Hot, spiced wine which is drunk at Christmas
New Year	The celebration between December and January when January 1st begins
Party	A meeting of people for a celebration, usually with music, food and dancing
Present	A gift given from one person to another
Reindeer	The animals that pull Santa's sleigh
Snow	Soft pieces of frozen water that fall from the sky when the weather is cold
Stocking	A large sock into which gifts are placed on Christmas Day
Tree	A tall, green thing which is decorated and placed in the house over the Christmas period
Turkey	Large bird traditionally eaten at Christmas

Reading text about Christmas customs in the UK

Christmas is traditionally a time of celebration and gift giving, both in the UK and also in many places all over the world. But Christmas is not the same everywhere, and there are some traditions which are common in the UK but not in other cultures. However, many things about the way Christmas is celebrated in the UK may be very familiar to those from other parts of the world.

First, of course, in the northern hemisphere, Christmas is more or less in the middle of winter, and Christmas Day is just three days after the winter solstice, the shortest day, so there is not much daylight in the UK at this time of year and the weather can be quite cold, with snow and ice, and Christmas is connected in people's minds with winter traditions. Much of the imagery and many of the customs which are followed over Christmas are related to the fact that it is the winter.

Lights and colours are very important during this season; people like to fill their houses with brightly coloured decorations and lights, which help to make the dark winter seem brighter and warmer. It's common to bring a small tree, either a real or artificial one, into the house, and cover it with small presents for children, and coloured balls or figures, and this tree often becomes the centrepiece in people's living rooms over the Christmas holiday.

Gift giving is very important, and under the Christmas tree is often the place where people put presents, wrapped in brightly coloured paper and ribbons, in anticipation of Christmas Day, when they are all opened. Children look forward to opening them, and Christmas is often a chance for parents and relatives to spend a lot of money on buying things for the young ones in their families. Another famous tradition connected to gift giving is the stocking, a large sock, usually a red colour, which children hang up in front of the fireplace in the living room. On Christmas Day the children find that this stocking is full of gifts, and they believe that Santa Claus, riding on a sleigh pulled by reindeer, has visited the house, entered the room through the chimney, and filled the stocking.

People tend to eat very rich foods over the Christmas period, and eating and drinking are very important parts of the customs at this time of year. On Christmas Day itself, families usually get together for a large meal, the main course of which is usually turkey served with potatoes and a variety of vegetables. This is often followed by a large, sweet pudding made of fruit and a lot of sugar, called Christmas pudding, and in the afternoon or evening, people may eat mince pies, and drink hot mulled wine. Of course, many people eat too much on Christmas Day, and all over the holiday period, and quite often they begin the new year by promising to go on a diet or planning to get much more exercise!

The Christmas holiday period is often a whole week in total, usually starting on Christmas Eve (December 24th), when people may finish work early and go to parties, where they will meet friends or family. Music is important at these parties; sometimes people sing traditional carols, which tend to be older traditional songs about Christmas, or they may prefer to listen and sing along to more modern Christmas pop songs, which are now becoming a very important part of Christmas customs.

Christmas Day itself (December 25th) is mostly spent with the family, and people do not tend to go out as there is not usually any public transport and the shops are all closed. The following day is called Boxing Day, which was traditionally a day for visiting neighbours and relatives, but it is becoming increasingly common for this to be a shopping day in the UK, as many of the shops open and have sales starting on Boxing Day. Many people have the whole week between Christmas Day and New Year as a holiday, and New Year's Day itself is also a public holiday when most shops and services in the UK are closed.

Questions

- a) Is Christmas Day the shortest day of the year?
- b) What do people do to change the appearance of the insides of their houses at Christmas?
- c) What different sorts of Christmas tree do people bring into their houses?
- d) What do people put under the Christmas tree?
- e) Who fills the stockings with presents?
- f) Are Christmas foods healthy?
- g) What is a common regret about the food at Christmas, and what do people do about it?
- h) What is the difference between the two types of music people listen to at Christmas?
- i) When are the shops open and closed in the UK over the Christmas period?

Paragraph headings

- a) What music do people listen to?
- b) How long does the festival last?
- c) How do people decorate their houses?
- d) What gifts do people give each other?
- e) Is this festival the same everywhere?
- f) What season is this festival?
- g) What do people eat?



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Writing activity plan

Choose a festival whose customs you would like to write about.

Look at the following topics. Which ones can you include in your writing? Which ones are not relevant? Cross out the ones which are not relevant, and then write in some other topics you can include. Make notes about the topic, then decide which order the topics are going to appear in and write the paragraph number in the box.

Show your plan to your partner and discuss it. Your partner may be able to make some suggestions about how to improve it.

Name of the festival:

What music do people listen to?

Paragraph number:

What do people eat?

Paragraph number:

How long does the festival last?

Paragraph number:

What season is this festival?

Paragraph number:

How do people decorate their houses?

Paragraph number:

What gifts do people give each other?

Paragraph number:

Is this festival the same everywhere?

Paragraph number:

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