

Santa: reading

I have a friend called Sam who hates December. Can you guess why? He's tall, quite fat and has a large beard. Yes! His boss always asks him to dress up as Santa Claus for the children's party, and he hates being Santa Claus! Also some people call him *Samta* Claus and he really hates that too!



Sam explains more, "First of all, I hate the costume. The red and white trousers and jacket look terrible on me. I also have to wear a hat, a belt, gloves and boots - I'm always far too hot. I have to say 'Ho ho ho' all the time, too.

"Secondly, the children never say 'thank you' when I give them a present. I think children nowadays have too many toys and presents already; they don't need any more. The presents are very expensive too - why do children only want expensive presents?

"Thirdly, Santa Claus, or Father Christmas, is not the most important thing about Christmas but that's all people think about - getting presents." Sam looks unhappy. He really doesn't want to be Santa Claus again this year.

He then tells me the difference between Santa Claus and Father Christmas. "They are not the same people," he says. This is news for me. "Father Christmas has a much older history. In the past, long before Christianity came to Britain, an old man from every village or town went to all the houses and asked for food and drink. The man was called 'Old Winter' and later 'Father Christmas'. People were kind and gave him food and drink."

So who was Santa Claus, then? "He was Saint Nicholas, a Bishop from Turkey hundreds of years ago. He helped people and gave presents to children. The Dutch called him *Sinterklaas* and when they immigrated to the US they took *Sinterklaas* with them and he got a new name: Santa Claus. That's why the Americans say Santa Claus but the British say Father Christmas."

I then have an idea. "Sam," I say, "I know your boss will ask you to be Santa Claus again. However, why not be Zenta Claus instead?"

Sam looks at me, surprised. "Who is Zenta Claus?" he asks. "Well, other people are also unhappy about Santa Claus and the buying of so many presents. In Japan there is now another person. This person looks like Santa Claus, the same red and white costume and beard etc, but there is a big difference. He doesn't give presents to children and he doesn't make people buy lots of things."

"So what does Zenta do, then?" asks Sam. I explain, "Well, he sits quietly on the floor and thinks about how bad it is that everyone buys so many things they don't need."

For the first time Sam is smiling. "This year, I'm Zenta Claus, not Santa Claus!" and then he laughs "Ho ho ho!!"

Santa: Teachers' notes and tips – elementary

1 Pre-reading tasks

- a Ask the students to tell each other if they like dressing up or not (wearing special clothes – a costume - in order to be somebody or something different). Can they give an example, e.g. a party, a play or festival etc., when as an adult or child they dressed up? Who did they dress up as?
- b Monitor while students chat and listen for any interesting comments.
- c Invite a couple of students who have differing views to speak to the class.

Tip: give a simple example

“When I was little I went to a party dressed up as a duck. After that all my friends called me *quacky* so I really hate dressing up now!” This helps elementary students to understand the task.

- d Tell students you're going to read out the first three sentences of the reading and ask them just to listen: *I have a friend called Sam who hates December. Can you guess why? He's tall, quite fat and has a large beard.* Read again if necessary.
- e Can any student guess why Sam hates December? If they can't guess just show the picture from the reading quickly, but *don't* give the reading out yet.
- f Then, read out the next part: *Yes! His boss always asks him to dress up as Santa Claus for the children's party, and he hates being Santa Claus.* Did anyone guess correctly? Do the students understand Sam's feelings?
- g Then tell students that there are three reasons why Sam hates being Santa Claus. Can any student guess what they might be? Encourage students to think about this in pairs and then ask for suggestions.

Tip: encourage predicting

Students will be able to understand the text better if they've anticipated the content.

Tip: share ideas

All students, including those who couldn't think of any suggestions, will then benefit.

2 First reading tasks

- a Students each receive a copy of the reading. They have to find out:
 - What are the three things that Sam hates? and
 - Why does Sam feel happier at the end of the reading?

Tip: board instructions

This helps students understand better, and you don't have to keep repeating the instructions!

Tip: tell students you only want short answers

This is a first reading task so students should just be getting the main idea of the text, they don't need to give long answers.

- b Make sure that students compare their ideas after the reading.
- c Elicit the answers from the students: he hates i) the costume ii) the children (who are rude / don't say 'thank you') iii) the fact that the real meaning of Christmas is lost / it's too commercial; he feels happier because he's going to be 'Zenta' instead this year.

3 Second reading tasks

- a Sam talks about three people: Santa Claus, Father Christmas and Zenta Claus. Students read again and explain:
- Where do each of the three people come / came from? and
 - What do they do / did?
- b As always students check with each other once they've finished.
- c Feedback: Father Christmas – Britain, asked for food and drink; Santa Claus – Turkey (St Nicholas), helped people and gave children presents; Zenta Claus – Japan, thinks about the people buying things they don't need.

Tip: think about quick feedback

If you have access to an OHT / IWB you could have the answers ready to show the students once they've given their suggestions.

Tip: think about other reading tasks

This reading is mainly to promote a reaction and encourage speaking. If you feel you'd like to do more with it why not ask students to read it and write their own comprehension questions for another student? Limit the questions to 5 perhaps. The questions are then swapped and answered – no preparation for the teacher and lots of work for the students!

4 Post-reading tasks - speaking

- a Elicit from students other events that have become more and more commercialized over the years (e.g. Mother's Day, St Valentine's Day, Thanksgiving Day...)
- b Write the following on the board:
- *Yes I agree, people buy too many things they don't need*
 - *Sort of, but I like shopping*
 - *No, I disagree; it's good to buy lots of things*
- Then ask students to decide if they agree with Sam or not - they can choose one of replies above. They then speak to their partner and compare their views, adding more of their own opinions if possible.
- c Have a brief openclass feedback to see what most students think.

Tip: think about different speaking tasks

Students could also tell each other about something they've bought but never used: an ice-cream maker? an exercise machine? an article of clothing? gym membership?

5 Post-reading tasks – making a poster

- a Students are going to design a poster to stop people buying so many things! Tell them to work in pairs or small groups and come up with some good reasons for people to keep their money in their wallets.
- b Once they have enough ideas they have to think of the best way to present this information on a poster that's going to be put up outside shopping centres. They'll need a snappy heading as well to attract the attention of shoppers.
- c This can be done for homework and posters compared in the following class – which one is the most effective and why?

Santa: reading

Adults often look back on significant events from their childhood. These memories can be quite strong, or rather vague. People remember riding their first bike, a special birthday party or discovering their pet rabbit had died in the night. For me though, my strongest memory is the day I discovered that Father Christmas doesn't exist! Really! What a shock! For as long as I could remember my family had left milk and biscuits on the kitchen table for the old man to eat. After all, he was travelling the long, cold night on his sled delivering presents to children all round the world so he needed something to keep him going. There were also some carrots for his trusty reindeers.



One Christmas my brothers and I were very concerned that we didn't have a chimney for Santa to climb down. "If we have no chimney," we wailed together, "how can we have our presents?" Our parents took ages explaining that Santa was quite happy to come in through the kitchen door, which they would leave unlocked for that one night, and into the living room. Pacified, we went to bed, our ears straining for the sound of bells and chuckles (Ho ho ho!!) only to fall asleep secure in the knowledge that our presents would be waiting for us under the tree (which we'd spent hours decorating) in the morning.

There were also other awkward questions that my parents were made to answer. "If there's only one Santa, how come he's in two toy shops at the same time, and coming to our school too?" So our parents did start to explain that sometimes someone was dressed up as Santa because we were right, it was impossible for him to be everywhere at the same time. They did convince us, however, that on Christmas Eve it was the bona fide man in red who came into our home and left the toys. So when my older brother came home from school, boasting that he didn't believe in Father Christmas any more and accusing our parents of buying and leaving the presents under the tree themselves (and eating the biscuits!) I was astounded. But even more so when my parents felt "we were old enough to know the truth" and admitted he was right! What! No elves making toys in a workshop in the North Pole? I burst into tears and hid in my room for hours, totally inconsolable.

However, I felt much better about the disastrous news (and I would argue that discovering Santa isn't real is one of the first rites of passage into adulthood) when I found out that Santa, admittedly in the distant past, was based on a real person, or rather two real people. Nowadays Father Christmas and Santa Claus are often interchangeable but in reality they have two different backgrounds. The former is based on a custom, long before Christianity, of an old man in each town or village who knocked on people's doors asking for food and drink. The man was said to represent "Old Winter" and it was thought that if people were kind to him they would not have a bad winter. He later became known as "Father Christmas" and this name is used in the UK, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand and other Commonwealth countries.

Santa Claus, on the other hand, comes from the Dutch translation of Saint Nicholas, *Sinterklaas*. He was believed to have been a Bishop who lived in Myra (now Turkey) in

the 4th Century who gave presents to the poor. His saint day is 6 December and this day, or the day before, is the gift-receiving day for children in many countries including the Netherlands, Belgium and the Czech Republic. Dutch immigrants to the US took the custom of *Sinterklaas* with them where Santa Claus has become synonymous with Christmas although he has nothing to do with the origins of Christmas Day itself.

There is comfort, however, for those of you who think that Santa Claus and his big, bulging bag of presents has made Christmas far too commercial: Zenta Claus. Not one but many, Zenta Clauses can be found wearing the traditional red and white suit with a long, white beard outside shopping malls and department stores during the busiest shopping season of the year. However, Zentas don't persuade people to shop. Instead they sit quietly, simply meditating on the negative aspects of the consumer culture. Originally from Japan but becoming popular in other countries, Zenta Claus encourages people to consider *not* spending money on things people neither need nor really want. Have a look - their bag is empty, now that's another shock! Ho ho ho!!

Santa: Teachers' notes and tips – upper intermediate

1 Pre-reading tasks

- a Ask students to think about their childhood. Get them to recollect a time when they learnt something, or found out about something, that surprised them. If the students don't have anything specific like this then they can just tell each other about a memory from early childhood.
- b Monitor well and if a student or two have an amusing story then let them tell the whole class.

Tip: start with an anecdote

If you have your own story, start the lesson by telling the students. It can be very simple – finding out that your dad was no longer holding the bike and you were actually riding it yourself, for example.

- c If you have students who are all familiar with Father Christmas (or Santa Claus – whichever name the students use) ask them to write down everything they know about him. Perhaps put the students in groups of three and after a few minutes the team with the most information reads this out and the others add anything that's missing.

Tip: activate schemata

There are loads of references – the costume, the elves, the North Pole etc. Asking students to think of all these first will help them to understand the text more easily.

2 First reading tasks

- a Give each student a copy of the reading and tell them they're going to read about Father Christmas. They have to read the text quickly and
 - identify the writer's childhood memory (was it good, bad or something else?)
 - and name the person in the photograph.
- b Get students to compare their answers before eliciting the answers.
- c Feedback: the day the writer found out that Father Christmas wasn't real (at the time it was very upsetting news), and Zenta Claus.
- d If other students remember this too, or something similar, let them talk about it and how they felt.

Tip: get students to respond to the text

Perhaps give students *This reminds me of when...* as a prompt to help them. Reacting to the text like this is a real-life response so allow time for it.

3 Second reading tasks

- a Students now read the text more slowly and then summarize it in no more than **30** words. They can work together to help each other if they want.
- b Perhaps give a time limit on this - 10 mins? By the end of that time they should have one, maybe two sentences.
- c Students look at each other's sentences and decide whose is better and make any changes. When everyone is ready they can read these out and decide whose is best and why.

- d If students want a model answer you can give them this, although students may well have done better: This reading is about Father Christmas – the day the writer found out he did not exist, the origins of the man and a modern alternative.

Tip: use summaries as an alternative comprehension exercise

Asking students to summarize a reading helps them to identify the most important parts and leave out those which are irrelevant.

4 Third reading tasks

- a Students read the text again and underline all the Father Christmas references - did they have all of these before reading? For students who are not familiar with Father Christmas, what are all the things they now know about him?
- b At the same time ask students to notice the different ways Father Christmas is referred to in the text.
- c Feedback: food and drink left overnight for him, he travels by sled, delivers presents to children all over the world and leaves these under the Christmas tree, has reindeers, climbs down chimney, has bells, chuckles (ho ho ho!), visits toy shops and schools, toys made by elves, he lives the North Pole, wears red and white suit, has long white beard, is used to sell products. Is there anything missing?! He's referred to as Father Christmas, old man, Santa, the bona fide man in red, Santa Claus.

Tip: think about quick and efficient feedback

Students will be bored if you go through all the answers and it'll be too teacher centred. Consider having an OHT or IWB page prepared in advance, for example.

5 Post-reading tasks – speaking and writing

- a The powers that be have decided to get rid of Father Christmas - it's been decided that he's no longer appropriate! Students have to decide whether or not they agree with this decision and then write to their local newspaper with their opinion. (If students are non-Christian and they feel that Father Christmas is starting to appear in their culture this can well be a reason for getting rid of him!)
- b Put students with the same ideas together. They need to come up with a list of reasons for him to stay or go.
- c Then, either in class or for homework, they write a letter to the editor. The editor (you) chooses one for and one against to appear in the next edition of the paper.

Tip: Use the vocabulary in a follow up lesson

Perhaps give a list of verbs and ask students if they can remember how they were used in the text: look back on, keep somebody going, strain, boast, accuse, meditate... Or the adjectives: vague, pacified, awkward, astounded, inconsolable, synonymous...