

12 Extracts of Christmas



Christmas literature extracts
with comprehension questions





Introduction

Celebrate the festive season with this teaching resource which features 12 extracts from well-known Christmas-themed literature and a range of comprehension questions.

As we approach Christmas, these extracts will be the perfect way to include some fun, festive magic into your lessons, while developing your students' literacy skills!





Books

A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens

Marley was dead, to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that. The register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker, and the chief mourner. Scrooge signed it. And Scrooge's name was good upon 'Change for anything he chose to put his hand to. Old Marley was as dead as a doornail.

- **What does the sentence 'Marley was dead, to begin with' suggest may happen in this story?**

How the Grinch Stole Christmas by Dr. Seuss

Every Who down in Whoville liked Christmas a lot...
But the Grinch, who lived just north of Whoville, did NOT!
The Grinch hated Christmas! The whole Christmas season!
Now, please don't ask why. No one quite knows the reason.
It could be his head wasn't screwed on just right.
It could be, perhaps, that his shoes were too tight.
But I think that the most likely reason of all,
May have been that his heart was two sizes too small.

- **How do the first two lines emphasise the contrast between the Grinch and the rest of Whoville?**





Hercule Poirot's Christmas by Agatha Christie

Stephen pulled up the collar of his coat as he walked briskly along the platform. Overhead a dim fog clouded the station. Large engines hissed superbly, throwing off clouds of steam into the cold raw air. Everything was dirty and smoke-grimed. Stephen thought with revulsion: 'What a foul country—what a foul city!' His first excited reaction to London, its shops, its restaurants, its well-dressed, attractive women, had faded. He saw it now as a glittering rhinestone set in a dingy setting.

- **Why was Stephen walking 'briskly'?**
- **What does the phrase 'Large engines hissed superbly' suggest about what Stephen thinks of the trains?**
- **How has Stephen's opinion of London changed?**

A Christmas Memory by Truman Capote

Imagine a morning in late November. A coming of winter morning more than twenty years ago. Consider the kitchen of a spreading old house in a country town. A great black stove is its main feature; but there is also a big round table and a fireplace with two rocking chairs placed in front of it. Just today the fireplace commenced its seasonal roar.

- **Give two pieces of evidence from the text that show that this is set in old times.**
- **Why is the fireplace compared to a roaring animal here?**





The Nutcracker by E.T.A. Hoffman

Snow was falling gently on the streets, and people were hurrying home, their arms filled with gaily wrapped boxes and paper parcels from toy stores, candy shops, and bakeries. For it was Christmas Eve, and as twilight fell, the children throughout Germany waited in hushed expectation for night to arrive, and with it their gifts from the Christ Child.

- **Why were the people hurrying home?**
- **What does the word 'gaily' mean in this context?**
 - a) Cheerfully
 - b) Brightly
 - c) Thoughtlessly
- **What does this suggest about how the children were feeling on Christmas Eve?**

Little Women by Louisa May Alcott

"Christmas won't be Christmas without any presents," grumbled Jo, lying on the rug. "It's so dreadful to be poor!" sighed Meg, looking down at her old dress. "I don't think it's fair for some girls to have plenty of pretty things, and other girls nothing at all," added little Amy, with an injured sniff. "We've got Father and Mother, and each other," said Beth contentedly from her corner. The four young faces on which the firelight shone brightened at the cheerful words, but darkened again as Jo said sadly, "We haven't got Father, and shall not have him for a long time." She didn't say "perhaps never," but each silently added it, thinking of Father far away, where the fighting was.

- **How does the author use the imagery of the light to reflect the mood of the four girls?**
- **What could you say about each of the girls' personality from this extract? Give evidence for each.**





The Polar Express by Chris Van Allsburg

On Christmas Eve, many years ago, I lay quietly in my bed. I did not rustle the sheets. I breathed slowly and silently. I was listening for a sound — a sound a friend had told me I'd never hear — the ringing bells of Santa's sleigh. "There is no Santa," my friend had insisted, but I knew he was wrong. Late that night I did hear sounds, though not of ringing bells. From outside came the sounds of hissing steam and squeaking metal. I looked through my window and saw a train standing perfectly still in front of my house.

- **Why was he breathing slowly and silently?**
- **How did he know his friend was wrong?**
- **What language device has the author used to create imagery here?**





The Wind in the Willows – Kenneth Grahame

Villagers all, this frosty tide,
Let your doors swing open wide,
Though wind may follow, and snow beside,
Yet draw us in by your fire to bide;
Joy shall be yours in the morning!

Here we stand in the cold and the sleet,
Blowing fingers and stamping feet,
Come from far away you to greet—
You by the fire and we in the street—
Bidding you joy in the morning!

For ere one half of the night was gone,
Sudden a star has led us on,
Raining bliss and benison—
Bliss to-morrow and more anon,
Joy for every morning!

Goodman Joseph toiled through the snow—
Saw the star o'er a stable low;
Mary she might not further go—
Welcome thatch, and litter below!
Joy was hers in the morning!

And then they heard the angels tell
'Who were the first to cry NOWELL?
Animals all, as it befell,
In the stable where they did dwell!
Joy shall be theirs in the morning!'

- **Why do you think the author used repetition at the end of each stanza?**





Poems

A Visit from St. Nicholas by Clement Clarke Moore

'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse;
The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,
In hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there;
The children were nestled all snug in their beds;
While visions of sugar-plums danced in their heads;
And mamma in her 'kerchief, and I in my cap,
Had just settled our brains for a long winter's nap,
When out on the lawn there arose such a clatter,
I sprang from my bed to see what was the matter.
Away to the window I flew like a flash,
Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash.
The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow,
Gave a lustre of midday to objects below,
When what to my wondering eyes did appear,
But a miniature sleigh and eight tiny rein-deer,
With a little old driver so lively and quick,
I knew in a moment he must be St. Nick.

- **How is the snow portrayed in an unusual way in the phrase 'The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow'?**
- **Why do you think the poet uses animal-related imagery throughout?**
- **How does the author use enjambment to show excitement?**





In the Bleak Midwinter

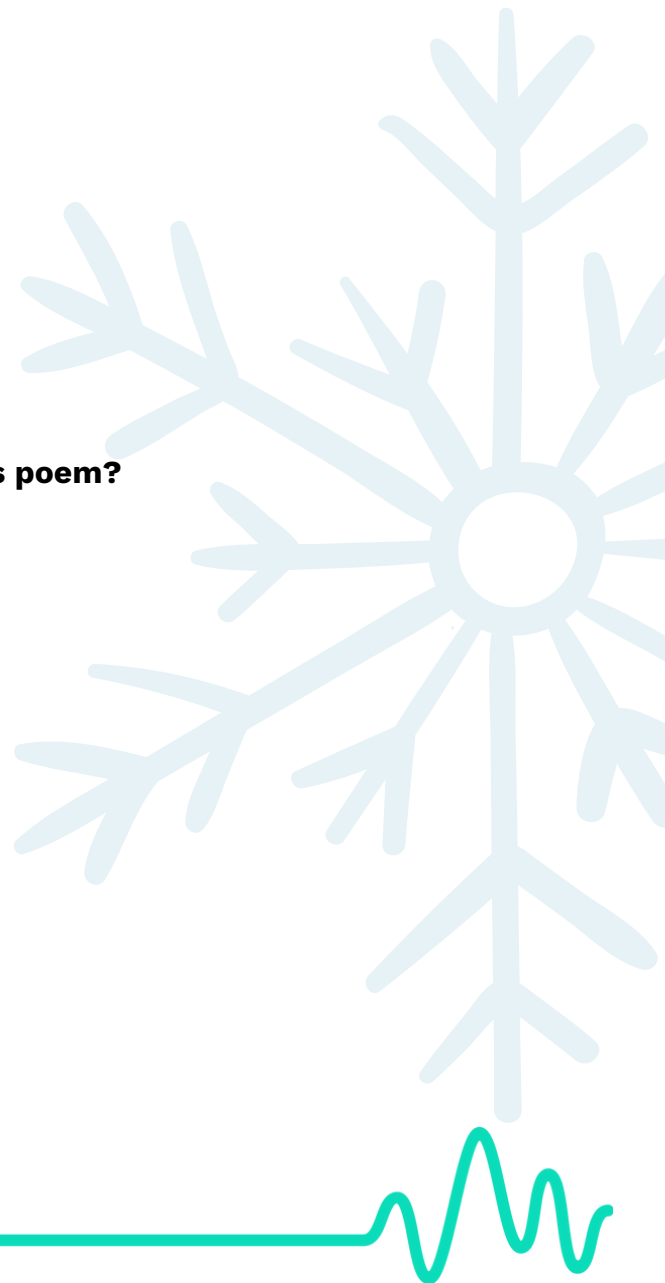
In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan,
Earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow,
In the bleak midwinter, long ago.

- **Why does the author use the repetition ‘Snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow’?**

The Nativity by C.S. Lewis

Among the oxen (like an ox I'm slow)
I see a glory in the stable grow
Which, with the ox's dullness might at length
Give me an ox's strength.
Among the asses (stubborn I as they)
I see my Savior where I looked for hay;
So may my beast like folly learn at least
The patience of a beast.
Among the sheep (I like a sheep have strayed)
I watch the manger where my Lord is laid;
Oh that my baaing nature would win thence
Some woolly innocence!

- **Why do you think the author used brackets in this poem?**





Songs

The Twelve Days of Christmas by Anonymous

On the twelfth day of Christmas
My true love sent to me
Twelve fiddlers fiddling,
Eleven ladies dancing,
Ten pipers piping,
Nine drummers drumming,
Eight maids a-milking,
Seven swans a-swimming,
Six geese a-laying,
Five gold rings,
Four colly birds,
Three French hens,
Two turtle doves, and
A partridge in a pear tree.

- **Why do you think alliteration is used in this text?**

