

Chapter – 1

The Best Christmas Present In The World

Comprehension Check

Q1. What did the author find in a junk shop?

Answer. The author found a nineteenth century roll-top desk in the junk shop. It was made of oak. It was in a very bad condition. The roll-top was broken into several pieces. One of the legs was clumsily mended and there were scorch marks down one side. The author bought it in order to restore it.

Q2. What did he find in a secret drawer? Who do you think had put it in there?

Answer. The author found a small black tin box in the secret drawer. There was a paper sellotaped to its top. It said, 'Jim's last letter, received January 25, 1915. To be buried with me when the time comes.' Most likely, it was put there by Mrs. Jim Macpherson, who was Jim's wife. Her name and address were on the envelope inside the box.

Q3. Who had written the letter, to whom, and when?

Answer. Jim Macpherson had written the letter to his wife Mrs. Macpherson on during December 1914. It was written during the First World War.

Q4. Why was the letter written — what was the wonderful thing that had happened?

Answer. Jim wrote the letter to tell his wife about a wonderful thing that had happened on Christmas day. The British and the Germans were engaged in a war, yet on this day, both the troops met in no man's land. It was a thing of wonder because right in the middle of a war, the warring soldiers were making peace.

Q5. What jobs did Hans Wolf and Jim Macpherson have when they were not soldiers?

Answer. Hans Wolf was from Dusseldorf. He played the cello in the orchestra. Jim Macpherson was a school teacher from Dorset.

Q6. Had Hans Wolf ever been to Dorset? Why did he say he knew it?

Answer. No, Hans Wolf had never been to Dorset. He had learned all about England from school and from reading books in English.

Q7. Do you think Jim Macpherson came back from the war? How do you know this?

Answer. No, it is most likely that Jim Macpherson did not come back from the war. The notepaper sellotaped to the tin box mentioned the letter contained in the box to be the "last letter" from Jim. This was perhaps the last that Connie heard from Jim. While celebrating Christmas in no man's land, the British and German soldiers played a game of football. Hans told Jim that he hoped the war would also be resolved by a football match. To this Jim replied that he wasn't very good at football, but would be sure of winning if they played cricket. The match was won by the Germans. This perhaps indicates that the Germans might have also won the actual battle between the two troops.

Q8. Why did the author go to Bridport?

Answer. The author went to Bridport because that was the address where Mrs. Macpherson lived. He wanted to give that letter back to her.

Q9. How old was Mrs. Macpherson now? Where was she?

Answer. Mrs. Macpherson was a hundred and one years old. She was in a nursing home in Burlington House.

Q10. Who did Connie Macpherson think her visitor was?

Answer. Connie Macpherson thought that her visitor was her husband, Jim.

Q11. Which sentence in the text shows that the visitor did not try to hide his identity?

Answer. The sentence which shows that the visitor did not try to hide his identity is, 'I explained about the desk, about how I had found it, but I don't think she was listening.'

Working With Language

Q1. For how long do you think Connie had kept Jim's letter? Give reasons for your answer.

Answer. Connie must have kept Jim's letter for a long time. This is because she told the narrator how she read it quite often every day so that she could feel that Jim was near her.

Q2. Why do you think the desk had been sold, and when?

Answer. The desk must have been sold when the house in which Connie Macpherson lived had caught fire. She was taken to a nursing home. All the burnt up things must have been sold by the neighbours after that.

Q3. Why do Jim and Hans think that games or sports are good ways of resolving conflicts? Do you agree?

Answer. Jim and Hans thought that games or sports are good ways of resolving conflicts because nobody dies in matches. No children are orphaned and no wives become widows. Due to these reasons, games are good ways for resolving conflicts. Wars only lead to death and devastation.

Q4. Do you think the soldiers of the two armies are like each other, or different from each other? Find evidence from the story to support your answer.

Answer. The soldiers of the two armies were like each other. Both the troops celebrated Christmas with each other. They shared each other's food. All of them were smoking, laughing, talking, drinking and eating. They even talked about the books they liked. They agreed about everything. They also played a game of football for which both Hans and Jim cheered, clapped hands and stamped feet. They also exchanged carols at night. Moreover, they had the same view that wars only brought death and destruction, and they hoped that each would be alive to see his family. All these instances show that the soldiers of the two armies were similar to each other.

Q5. Mention the various ways in which the British and the German soldiers become friends and find things in common at Christmas.

Answer. The British and the German troops celebrated Christmas with each other. They enjoyed each other's food. All of them were smoking, laughing, talking, drinking and eating. Hans Wolf and Jim Macpherson shared the cake Connie had baked. They talked about Bathsheba, Gabriel Oak, Sergeant Troy and Dorset. They even talked about the books they liked. They agreed about everything. Both the troops played a game of football for which both Hans and Jim cheered, clapped hands and stamped feet. They also exchanged carols at night. In this way, they celebrated Christmas together, finding a lot in common between them.

Q6. What is Connie's Christmas present? Why is it "the best Christmas present in the world"?

Answer. When the narrator came to see Connie and gave her the box, she mistook him for her husband Jim. She thought that Jim had come home for Christmas. This was Connie's Christmas present. It was the best Christmas present in the world for her because Jim had written in the letter that he would come home on Christmas. She had read that letter several times everyday to feel that he was near her. Now that he was finally there with her, she was extremely happy.

Q7. Look at these sentences from the story. I spotted it in a junk shop in Bridport... The man said it was made in the early nineteenth century... This one was in a bad condition... The italicised verbs are in the past tense. They tell us what happened in the past, before now.

(i) Read the passage below and underline the verbs in the past tense. A man got on the train and sat down. The compartment was empty except for one lady. She took her gloves off. A few hours later the police arrested the man. They held him for 24 hours and then freed him. Now look at these sentences. The veneer had lifted almost everywhere. Both fire and water had taken their toll on this desk. Notice the verb forms had lifted, had taken (their toll). The author found and bought the desk in the past. The desk was damaged before the author found it and bought it.

Fire and water had damaged the desk before the author found it and bought it. We use verb forms like had damaged for an event in the 'earlier past'. If there are two events in the past, we use the 'had...' form for the event that occurred first in the past. We also use the past perfect tense to show that something was wished for, or expected before a particular time in the past. For example, I had always wanted one... Discuss with your partner the difference in meaning in the sentences below. When I reached the station, the train left. When I reached the station, the train had left.

(ii) Fill in the blanks using the correct form of the verbs in brackets. My little sister is very naughty. When she _____ (come) back from school yesterday, she had _____ (tear) her dress. We _____ (ask) her how it had _____ (happen). She _____ (say) she _____ (have, quarrel) with a boy. She _____ (have, beat) him in a race and he _____ (have, try) to push her. She _____ (have, tell) the teacher and so he _____ (have, chase) her, and she _____ (have, fall) down and _____ (have, tear) her dress. (iii) Underline the verbs and arrange them in two columns, Past and Earlier past. (a) My friends set out to see the caves in the next town, but I stayed at home, because I had seen them already. (b) When they arrived at the station, their train had left. They came back home, but by that time I had gone out to see a movie! (c) So they sat outside and ate the lunch I had packed for them. (d) By the time I returned, they had fallen asleep!

Past	Earlier past

Answer. (i) A man got on the train and sat down. The compartment was empty except

for one lady. She took her gloves off. A few hours later the police arrested the man. They held him for 24 hours and then freed him.

(ii) My little sister is very naughty. When she came (come) back from school yesterday, she had torn (tear) her dress. We asked (ask) her how it had happened (happen). She said (say) she had quarrelled (have, quarrel) with a boy. She had beaten (have, beat) him in a race and he had tried (have, try) to push her. She had told (have, tell) the teacher and so he had chased (have, chase) her, and she had fallen (have, fall) down and had torn (have, tear) her dress.

(iii) (a) My friends set out to see the caves in the next town, but I stayed at home, because I had seen them already. (b) When they arrived at the station, their train had left. They came back home, but by that time I had gone out to see a movie! (c) So they sat outside and ate the lunch I had packed for them. (d) By the time I returned, they had fallen asleep!

Past	Earlier past
set out	had seen
stayed	had left
arrived	had gone
came	had picked
sat	had fallen
ate	
returned	

Q8. Dictionary work by the end of the journey, we had run out of drinking water. Look at the verb run out of in this sentence. It is a phrasal verb: it has two parts, a verb and a preposition or an adverb. Phrasal verbs often have meanings that are different from the meanings of their parts. Find these phrasal verbs in the story. burn out light up look on run out keep out Write down the sentences in which they occur. Consult a dictionary and write down the meaning that you think matches the meaning of the phrasal verb in the sentence.

Answer. (i) burn out House number 12 turned out to be nothing but a burned-out shell, the roof gaping, the windows boarded-up.

(ii) light up That was the moment her eyes lit up with recognition and her face became suffused with a sudden glow of happiness.

(iii) look on Hans Wolf and I looked on and cheered, clapping our hands and stamping our feet, to keep out the cold as much as anything.

(iv) run out The time came, and all too soon, when the game was finished, the schnapps and the rum and the sausage had long since run out, and we knew it was all over.

(v) keep out Hans Wolf and I looked on and cheered, clapping our hands and stamping our feet, to keep out the cold as much as anything.

Q3. Noun phrase Read the following sentence. *I took out a small black tin box.* The phrase in italics is a noun phrase. It has the noun — box — as the head word, and three adjectives preceding it. Notice the order in which the adjectives occur — size (small), colour (black) and material (tin) of which it is made. We rarely use more than four adjectives before a noun and there is no rigid order in which they are used, though there is a preferred order of modifiers/adjectives in a noun phrase, as given below.

determiner	modifier 1 (opinion, feeling)	modifier 2 (size, shape, age)	modifier 3 (colour)	modifier 4 (material)	head word
a / an / the	nice / lazy / beautiful	tall / round / old / young	red / white / light / dark	silk / cotton / woollen	woman man / table / chair

Answer.

Noun	Adjective
Elephant	enormous, cheerful, wild, large, medium-sized
Face	round, cheerful, chubby
Building	multi-coloured, blue, red, large, medium-sized
Water	blue, cold

Working With The Text

Q1. Do you think the title of this story is suitable for it? Can you think of any other title(s)?

Answer. Yes, the title of the story is suitable for it. The spirit of Christmas is the theme that prevails throughout the story. It was on a Christmas day, in the middle of a raging war, that two warring troops made peace. The moment of peace that the soldiers shared with each other was the best Christmas present for them. Again, it was on a Christmas day that the narrator went to see Mrs. Macpherson. He went to return her husband's letter to her. The letter was precious to her, but even more precious was her

delusion that the narrator was her husband Jim, who she believed had returned as promised on a Christmas day. This was the best Christmas present in the world for her.

Q2. Noun phrase Read the following sentence. *I took out a small black tin box.* The phrase in italics is a noun phrase. It has the noun — box — as the head word, and three adjectives preceding it. Notice the order in which the adjectives occur — size (small), colour (black) and material (tin) of which it is made. We rarely use more than four adjectives before a noun and there is no rigid order in which they are used, though there is a preferred order of modifiers/adjectives in a noun phrase, as given below.

Nouns	Adjectives
elephant	circular, striped, enormous, multicoloured, round, cheerful, wild, blue, red, chubby, large, medium-sized, cold
face	
building	
water	

Answer. Noun phrase Read the following sentences. *I took out a small black tin box.* The phrase in italics is a noun phrase. It has the noun box as the head word, and three adjectives preceding it. Notice the order in which the adjectives occur—size (small) colour (black) and material of which it is made (tin). We rarely use more than four adjectives before a noun and there is no rigid order in which they are used, though there is a preferred order of modifiers/adjectives in a noun phrase, as given below :

determiner	modifier 1 (opinion feeling)	modifier 2 (size, shape, age)	modifier 3 (colour)	modifier 4 (material)	head word
a/an/the	nice/lazy/ beautiful	old/young/ tall/round	red/white/ light/dark	silk/cotton/ woollen	woman/man/ table/chair

Speaking

Q1. In groups discuss whether wars are a good way to end conflicts between countries. Then present your arguments to the whole class.

Answer. Wars are definitely not at all a good medium to end conflicts between countries as they do not lead to any solutions except 'n' number of killed soldiers, orphan children and widow wives. Man is a social animal and likes to live in a society. If any kind of conflict occurs among each other, he solves it either by discussion or

legally. But if conflicts arouse between two countries they are solved only by wars. Why? Why can't some other solutions be found? We have brain and so do the politicians. They are civilised and educated people. The conflicts can be solved by talking to each other or by apologies. Wars lead to enmity and leave a forever, never-to-be filled gap between the two nations. So wars should be avoided.

Q2. What kind of presents do you like and why? What are the things you keep in mind when you buy presents for others? Discuss with your partner. (For example, you might buy a book because it can be read and reread over a period of time.)

Answer. If I have to select gifts for myself. I would go for books and sports kit. Books are one's best friends. They can be read and reread and spread knowledge and information. Books are fun to read. Books can be of various kinds. They can be comic books, story books, literature books, poetry books, etc. There are many varieties of books one can select a lot of them depending upon the taste. They never get old or outdated. Moreover, the knowledge gained by them is never lost, or forgotten. Besides books, sports kit is also one of my best presents as sports keeps me physically fit and healthy. And as there is a saying "a healthy body has a healthy mind" If you are physically strong you can find any problem. if I have to select a gift for my friend I would purchase a football. He is fond of football and is a very good football player too.

Writing

Q1. Imagine that you are Jim. You have returned to your town after the war. In your diary record how you feel about the changes you see and the events that occur in your town. You could begin like this 25 December, 1919 It's Christmas today, but the town looks..... Or Suppose you are the visitor. You are in a dilemma. You don't know whether to disclose your identity and disappoint the old lady or let her believe that her dear Jim has come back. Write a letter to a friend highlighting your anxiety, fears and feelings.

Answer. I am Jim. This incident happened when I returned to my town for the Christmas in the year 1919. The First World war ended but I could see the consequences in my town. Many of the citizens of the town are dead. It seems that I'm in a burial ground. There is no happiness at all. It went away with the people who are dead. I went to the church where I could see different people. Some people were crying for their dearest ones who are dead. Some people were questioning God, why the war happened and why he had taken their loved ones away from them. Some people were praising God for giving life. Some people were asking God for better future of our country. Some people were asking God for the best Government. I prayed for his protection of the country and the citizens. After the church service, I went to some people's house who are looking for some console. I talked and consoled them. I traveled my entire town to estimate the damage which was caused by the war. After estimation, I submitted the report to the mayor of the town. Finally, I returned home and spent time with my parents.

Q2. Given below is the outline of a story. Construct the story using the outline. A young, newly married doctor _____ freedom fighter _____ exiled to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands by the British _____ infamous Cellular Jail _____ prisoners tortured _____ revolt by inmates _____ doctor hanged _____ wife waits for his return _____ becomes old _____ continues to wait with hope and faith.

determiner	modifier 1 (opinion, feeling)	modifier 2 (size, shape, age)	modifier 3 (colour)	modifier 4 (material)	head word
a/an/ the	nice/lazy/ beautiful	tall/ round/ old/young	red/white/ light/dark	silk/cotton/ woollen	woman man/ table/chair

Answer. There was a young, newly married doctor who lived in a small town. He practised medicine in the town and was very happy. But one day few British soldiers came to his house and caught him calling him a freedom fighter. They exiled him to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands to the infamous Cellular Jail. The wife kept asking the authorities about the status of her husband but all in vain. She could not make them believe that her husband was a simple doctor and not a freedom fighter. There in the jail, the prisoners were tortured and beaten up brutally by the Britishers. One day the inmates revolted. The authorities caught hold of them and hanged them. The doctor was also among them. The wife kept waiting for justice and for her husband to return. She grew old and still even after independence waits with hope and faith. She is 103 years old.

The Ant and the Cricket - (Working with the Poem)

Question 1: The cricket says, “Oh! What will become of me?” When does he say it, and why?

Answer: The cricket speaks these words when in his home he finds no food to eat in winter.

Question 2: (i) Find in the poem the lines that mean the same as “Neither a borrower nor a lender be” (Shakespeare).

Answer: The line is: But we ants never borrow; we ants never lend.

(ii) What is your opinion of the ant’s principles?

Answer: The ant’s principle is not bad. It teaches a lesson to everybody to plan for the rainy day.

Question 3: The ant tells the cricket to “dance the winter away.” Do you think the word ‘dance’ is appropriate here? If so, why?

Answer: The word ‘dance’ here means ‘merry making and wasting time.’ It is appropriate here. The irresponsible cricket does not deserve any sympathy.

Question 4: (i) Which lines in the poem express the poet’s comment? Read them aloud.

Answer: The poet’s comment is expressed in the last two lines.
“Folks call this a fable, 111 warrant it true.”

(ii) Write the comment in your own words.

Answer: People say that this story of the cricket and the ant is imaginary or a fable with a moral. But I think that the story is true and educative. Some people live only in the present. They spend what they earn, and make merry. But they regret this habit later on.

Question 5: If you know a fable in your own language narrate it to your classmates.

Answer: Attempt yourself.