Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the article and do the exercises.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

Vocabulary	Definition
1. ..... in bad taste	a. a group of people who belong to a house (for example, a family, flatmates, etc.)
2. ..... a get-together	b. low quality and in bad taste
3. ..... a decoration	c. a brother or sister
4. ..... cheesy	d. happy or religious songs sung at Christmas
5. ..... a household	e. an informal meeting, usually between friends or family
6. ..... Christmas carols	f. a person or company which sells products to the public
7. ..... a retailer	g. not very sophisticated or elegant
8. ..... a sibling	h. a pretty thing put on a house or street to celebrate a special moment

Christmas

It's that time of the year for family, friends ... and cheesy Christmas music. For many people, Christmas is quite simply (as an old pop song says) 'the most wonderful time of the year'. For others, it is an exhausting exercise in bad taste. So what does a British Christmas involve?

Special days

Christmas is a celebration that lasts for several days. In the UK and many other countries, the main celebration takes place on Christmas Day (25 December). From the Christian origins of the holiday, this day marks the birth of Jesus Christ. Christmas Eve (24 December) is the time for last-minute shopping and preparations, present-wrapping and maybe a drink in the pub. Others will be at home preparing food for the big day or at a midnight church service to welcome Christmas Day. Boxing Day (26 December) is also a national holiday in the UK – a necessary one for many, to recover after eating too much the day before! Shops are usually open on Boxing Day and the big after-Christmas sales begin.

Decorations

From huge cities to tiny villages, the month of December sees buildings and streets covered in coloured lights, red ribbons and smiling Santa Claus faces. People also decorate their houses (and sometimes their gardens) for the Christmas period. The most famous decoration is, of course, the Christmas tree – a pine tree covered in little shiny decorations and fairy lights. Some people put a nativity scene in their house. This is a collection of little figures who represent the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.

Family and friends

Christmas is a time to be with the people you love. Often, this involves travelling to your hometown to be with parents, siblings, cousins, old friends, etc. For some households, it's the only time of the year when all the family is together. In the UK, this is usually a time for chats, cups of tea and watching Christmas films together. However, it can also lead to occasional family tension. But don't worry: there are plenty of impossibly cheerful pop songs to help everyone relax!

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Food

Christmas meals vary across households, but the most common Christmas dinner in the UK is a roasted turkey with vegetables and potatoes. This may be accompanied by stuffing (made with bread, onions and herbs) and pigs in blankets (sausages wrapped in bacon or pastry). And, of course, delicious mince pies – little sweet cakes with fruit inside. This is, of course, fantastic if someone is cooking for you. If you're the cook, you may feel under a little pressure as the extended family start arriving for dinner!

Presents

Christmas is certainly the most wonderful time of the year for retailers! The days and weeks before Christmas are characterised by frantic shopping for presents. Many groups of friends or workmates take part in a 'Secret Santa' group. This is where each person buys a small present for one other person in the group, but the identity of the giver is never revealed. In many countries, Christmas Eve is a night for kids to go to bed early before their house is visited by Santa Claus, a magic man in a red suit who leaves presents for all the kids in the house.

Parties

Apart from dinner at home with family or friends, Christmas is also a time for parties. At school, children often do a Christmas theatre performance or sing Christmas carols in a concert, then have a party with sweets and cakes. For adults, most workplaces usually have their Christmas 'do'. This can be a dinner in a restaurant or just a few drinks in a bar. At workplace parties, many romances have started under the mistletoe, a special plant which people hang from the ceiling. If you meet somebody under the mistletoe, the tradition is to kiss that person.

However you celebrate Christmas, for many it's a time for having fun and spending time with the people you love. Plastic decorations and neon Santa Claus faces might be considered to be in bad taste by some people, but without them, it simply wouldn't be Christmas.

Tasks

Task 1

Are the sentences true or false?

	Answer	
1. The text suggests that everybody loves Christmas.	True	False
2. In the UK, 25 December is the most important day during the Christmas period.	True	False
3. A nativity scene is a reminder of the religious origins of Christmas.	True	False
4. The text suggests that Christmas can be a time for family arguments.	True	False
5. In the UK, roast beef is the most common food at Christmas.	True	False
6. The activity called 'Secret Santa' is usually only for children.	True	False
7. If you meet someone under the mistletoe plant, you have to give them a present.	True	False
8. Some people in the UK go shopping in the sales on Boxing Day.	True	False

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Task 2

Put the words and phrases in order to make sentences.

1. wonderful time is certainly Christmas for retailers. the most of the year

2. for the period. decorate People Christmas their houses

3. are usually Day. Shops on Boxing open

4. bed early. Eve is Christmas a night to go to for kids

5. Christmas carols do a Christmas theatre At school, performance or sing in a concert. children often

6. time with the people having fun Christmas is and spending you love. a time for

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