



What's it all about?

Secondary Assembly

Additional Resources:
PowerPoint presentation

Aim:

To understand some of the ways Christmas is celebrated in different parts of the world

To reflect on what the birth of Jesus means to Christians and how it affects the way they live their lives

Introduction

Welcome the pupils to their Christmas assembly and introduce yourself.

Explain to pupils that we all probably have different ways that we celebrate Christmas. We might have little traditions we do with our friends or our family (you may wish to share one of yours!). If our Christmas celebrations differ just between us then I'm sure you can imagine that outside of the UK or even outside of Europe celebrating Christmas might look quite different.

Activity

I want to find out how much you know about how Christmas is celebrated in other countries. To do this we are going to do an international Christmas quiz. I'm going to read out a statement about how Christmas is celebrated in a different country and I want you to decide whether you think it is true or false by raising your hand.

Read through the statements asking for a show of hands for true or false.

1 In Germany St Nicholas comes in the night between the 5th and the 6th of December and puts presents into the shoes of the children, who usually place them by their doors on the previous evening. (True)

2 In Ethiopia Christmas is celebrated on the 7th of January (True - Ethiopia still use the old Julian calendar, so they celebrate Christmas on the 7th of January, not on the 25th of December!)

3 In India, Father Christmas or Santa Claus delivers presents to children from a car. (False he delivers them from a horse and cart!)

4 In Finland, Santa might also be known as Joulupukki! This really means 'Christmas Goat' (True - it was traditional in Finland that there was a Yule Goat who was scary and asked people for presents - and certainly didn't give any out! Over time the goat became the gift giver and then Santa took over the gift giving duties but the name of the Christmas Goat was still retained in Finland!)

5 In some parts of France, it's traditional to have 13 different desserts! (True)

Source: www.whychristmas.com/cultures



Schools and
Colleges
Unit



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The Salvation Army

The Salvation Army works in more than 120 different countries, this means our members celebrate Christmas in their own way depending on where they live and what culture they are from.

Here are some images from Christmas in three different countries that The Salvation Army work in. (You may want the students to guess what country it is when you show the images, if you have time.)

Italy - On the 5th of January children believe that an old lady called 'Befana' brings presents for them. Children put stockings up by the fireplace for Befana to fill. On Christmas day 'Babbo Natale' (Santa Claus) might bring them some small gifts, but the main day for present giving is on the 5th of January (Epiphany).

Czech Republic - Here the main celebrations are on Christmas Eve. Some people fast during Christmas Eve in the hope that they will see a vision of 'the golden pig' appear on the wall before dinner! This is meant to be a sign of good luck!

'Little Jesus' (the Czech version of Santa Claus) brings presents during dinner and leaves them under the Christmas tree. He rings a bell right before he leaves. The presents are normally opened right after dinner.*

Source: www.whychristmas.com/cultures/

Kenya - Here family members get together on this festive occasion to enjoy a traditional Christmas meal. Nyama Choma (roast goat meat) and Tuskers Beer is the flavour of the season in this African country. The goat meat is eaten hot from the charcoal grill and the rule is to eat it in just one sitting. Among the Kikuyu and Masai tribes in Africa, certain parts of goats are to be eaten by boys and others by girls.

Source: festivals.iloveindia.com/christmas/christmas-celebrations/christmas-in-africa.html

Challenge

So if we all do different things at Christmas - what's it all about?

Although how we celebrate Christmas may be different to people in Africa, Asia or even other parts of Europe, the reasons the celebrations happen are all the same. Christians believe Christmas is a time to celebrate because it reminds us that God came into the world and lived with us. In the Bible and in some Christmas songs you might hear the word Immanuel:

The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel
(Isaiah 7:14 NIV)



Schools and
Colleges
Unit

www.salvationarmy.org.uk/schools



What's it all about?

Immanuel means 'God with us'. Jesus came to earth and lived with people and showed us how to love others by living alongside them. This is what we celebrate - that God is not distant but remembers us and gets alongside us in everything. For this reason we try to get alongside people through the work we do and show them some of the love that God shows us. This is why in the UK the Salvation Army do things at Christmas to help others in our communities, such as -

- Providing a Christmas dinner for people in the community who would usually be on their own at Christmas, or for those who can't manage to cook for themselves. This could be elderly or disabled people, people who are homeless, or those who don't have any family they can be with.
- Salvation Army centres and hostels celebrate Christmas with residents who have no other place to go at Christmas, providing a place where people can feel they belong and are valued and loved.
- Visiting elderly care homes or children's homes to lead a carol service and show the residents that they aren't forgotten and that they are important and valued members of the community.

However we don't stop after Christmas. Throughout the year we try to help people who are in need - whether they need a friend to support them, need help finding a way out of poverty, need help with finding housing, need help finding a job or need help with addictions. Whatever it is we want to get alongside people and help them rebuild their lives. This is what we believe celebrating Christmas leads to for us - to trying to follow the example of Jesus by loving people no matter who they are.

Reflection

Let's take a moment to think about what it means to celebrate Christmas and how we can bring hope to others by showing them love and getting alongside them just as Jesus did.

Prayer (Optional)

Dear God,

Thank you that we can celebrate Christmas in unique ways all over the world, thank you that Christmas tells the story of your love. We pray that you would help us show love others over Christmas, particularly those that don't have many people alongside them. But also help us to show generosity and love to others throughout this New Year.

Amen