



## Twelve Days of Christmas

On the first day my teacher gave to me...

### An image

Study this image for a couple of minutes. What can you see in the picture? How does it make you feel? Write an opening of approximately 200 words which attempts to describe and explore the scene. You may wish to consider: the location, the residents/occupants, the overall scene, the architecture and the weather.



## On the second day... a piece of fiction

**Read** the following extract from **White Fang** by American novelist **Jack London**

*Dark spruce forest frowned on either side of the frozen waterway. The trees had been stripped by a recent wind of their white covering of frost, and they seemed to lean toward each other, black and ominous, in the fading light. A vast silence reigned over the land. The land itself was a desolation, lifeless, without movement, so lone and cold that the spirit of it was not even that of sadness. There was a hint in it of laughter, but of a laughter more terrible than any sadness — a laughter that was mirthless as the smile of the Sphinx, a laughter cold as the frost and partaking of the grimness of infallibility. It was the masterful and incommunicable wisdom of eternity laughing at the futility of life and the effort of life. It was the Wild, the savage, frozen-hearted Northland Wild.*

**How does the writer use language to create the feeling of coldness and hostility in this opening? Pick at least 3 words or phrases to analyse and interpret. What effect does this have on you as a reader?**

**On the third day... a verse from a famous Christmas Carol** written by English poet Christina Rossetti in 1872

*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.*

**Explore the similes and personification in the poem. Is it effective? What impression does Rossetti give of midwinter? Challenge yourself to write a paragraph using your own words. You might find it useful to use synonyms for words found in the poem.**

## On the fourth day... an extract from Sonnet 97 by Shakespeare

*How like a winter hath my absence been  
From thee, the pleasure of the fleeting year!  
What freezings have I felt, what dark days seen!  
What old December's bareness everywhere!*

**Who do you think Shakespeare is speaking to? What is he saying about the way he feels? Select at least 3 words or phrases to support your observations.**

## On the fifth day... the first verse from Phillip Larkin's poem First Sight

### *First Sight*

*Lambs that learn to walk in the snow  
When their **bleating clouds the air**  
**Meet a vast unwelcome, know**  
Nothing but a **sunless glare**  
Newly stumbling to and fro  
All they find, **outside the fold***

**Consider the words in italics and look them up if you need to. What is Larkin suggesting about the experience of the lambs in the snow? How might similar comparisons be made with small children?**

## On the sixth day... an extract from The Guardian “Opinion” section

Read the following opening of an article from the Guardian

### Of course pets need Christmas presents – but why get swanky with them?

Michele Hanson

You already know what they want: anything edible, noisy and wrapped up. Your dog doesn't give a sniff whether its ball thrower is a £24 retro wooden model

Sales of Christmas pressies for pets have gone up 300% over the last two years, according to newspaper reports. And the gifts seem to be getting swankier: dog cologne for £12.95 a pop, cat beds for £449, pet tip is at £54. And I thought most people were hard up.

There's nothing wrong with giving your pets presents. But, speaking as a dog owner, doing so should come with a warning. It's the present opening that dogs love even more than the present. What, after all, is more fun than ripping something open and tearing it to shreds? Even if it isn't yours.

Once a dog gets a taste for present opening, it will probably open everyone else's, too, or any parcel that arrives at any time of the year, so that means there are no more presents under the tree for us. I recommend putting them on a high shelf instead. And without close supervision, a dog tends to gobble up its edible presents in one go, so the next day you may have a sea of vomit and excrement to mop up. That will be your dog's only present to you.

**What is the writer's view on presents for pets? What is your view on this? Support your answer with references from the text.**

## On the seventh day... another extract from the Guardian

Read the following article from the Guardian, again it is the opening section

### Why the robin needs to be pushed off its snowy Christmas card perch

Richard Smyth

We all know by now that robins are outright beasts. Philip Hoare called our red-breasted national bird – re-elected to the post in 2015 – a “vicious, murdering bully”, and he wasn’t wrong: robins are **belligerent**, petty and brutally **confrontational** birds (Hoare noted that 10% of all adult robin deaths are “robin-on-robin incidents”, and they will go after other species too). Of course, this kind of behaviour is just a function of the robin’s evolved nature; it doesn’t mean to be a blood-soaked thug, and we can’t blame it for being one. All I’ll say is, I don’t think territorial murder is very Christmassy.

It’s too late, alas, to unseat the robin as the UK’s flagship bird, but I do think it’s high time we had a talk about putting it on our Christmas cards.

A story about how the robin first became **ubiquitous** in our festive imagery because of an association with the red-coated Victorian postmen nicknamed “robins” sounds too neat to be true, but more or less is (some early cards depicted robins carrying letters in their beaks). Robins already had **folkloric** connections with Christianity and an ancient – perhaps even pre-Christian – place in our winter **iconography**. They cornered the Christmas market early doors and continue to wield a degree of marketing clout a Starbucks red cup can only dream of. It’s time for someone else to challenge the **monopoly**.

There is some challenging vocabulary in this article. Look up the following words and consider their meaning within the context of the sentence:

**belligerent, confrontational, ubiquitous, iconography, monopoly.**

**What is the writer’s main argument about the robin and its place as the UK’s flagship bird?**

On the eighth day... a picture taken from the busy streets of Glasgow in Scotland



Write the opening of a story which begins with the phrase, “I felt lost amongst the bustling streets of this strange town. I felt sure that I would be late and that would bring trouble.” Aim to write 150 words or more.

Extension: You could continue and write for 45 minutes. If you do this make sure that your writing is planned, well developed and connected and has a strong ending.

On the ninth day... an article

A recent article on a travel website has stated: 'There is no need to suffer the expense and uncertainty of going abroad for a holiday; Great Britain has everything anyone could desire.'

**What is your response to this statement? What are the advantages of going abroad on holiday, what are the disadvantages? What does Great Britain have to offer a holiday maker? Spend 15 minutes making notes or drawing a mind map. Would you argue for or against this statement?**

**Extension: You could write an article which responds to this statement arguing either for or against it. Do this in timed conditions allowing yourself 45 minutes.**

## **On the tenth day... a 19<sup>th</sup> century non-fiction extract**

**Read this article written by Charles Dickens in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In it he describes the streets of London in the early morning.**

### CHAPTER I—THE STREETS—MORNING

*The appearance presented by the streets of London an hour before sunrise, on a summer's morning, is most striking. There is an air of cold, solitary desolation about the noiseless streets which we are accustomed to see thronged at other times by a busy, eager crowd, and over the quiet, closely-shut buildings, which throughout the day are swarming with life and bustle, that is very impressive. Market-carts roll slowly along: the sleepy waggoner impatiently urging on his tired horses, or vainly endeavouring to awaken the boy, who, luxuriously stretched on the top of the fruit-baskets, forgets, in happy oblivion, his long-cherished curiosity to behold the wonders of London. Numbers of men and women (principally the latter), carrying upon their heads heavy baskets of fruit, toil down the park side of Piccadilly, on their way to Covent-garden, and, following each other in rapid succession, form a long straggling line from thence to the turn of the road at Knightsbridge. Here and there, a bricklayer's labourer, with the day's dinner tied up in a handkerchief, walks briskly to his work. Covent-garden market, and the avenues leading to it, are thronged with carts of all sorts, sizes, and descriptions, from the heavy lumbering waggon, with its four stout horses, to the jingling costermonger's cart, with its consumptive donkey. The pavement is already strewed with decayed cabbage-*



leaves, broken hay-bands, and all the indescribable litter of a vegetable market; men are shouting, carts backing, horses neighing, boys fighting, basket-women talking, piemen expatiating on the excellence of their pastry, and donkeys braying.

**What does Dickens find unusual about the early morning at the start of the extract? How does the picture start to change as the extract develops? Do you think Dickens is positive, negative or undecided about what he sees? Use references from the text to support your ideas.**

### **On the eleventh day... a fiction extract**

**Read the following extract from "The Dead" by Irish Writer James Joyce**

*"A few light taps upon the pane made him turn to the window. It had begun to snow again. He watched sleepily the flakes, silver and dark, falling obliquely against the lamplight. The time had come for him to set out on his journey westward. Yes, the newspapers were right: snow was general all over Ireland. It was falling on every part of the dark central plain, on the treeless hills, falling softly upon the Bog of Allen and, farther westward, softly falling into the dark mutinous Shannon waves. It was falling, too, upon every part of the lonely churchyard on the hill where Michael Furey lay buried. It lay thickly drifted on the crooked crosses and headstones, on the spears of the little gate, on the barren thorns. His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead."*



**How does James Joyce describe the movement and appearance of the snow? Follow through the whole extract tracking the description. What is the effect of this description? How does it make the reader feel about the presence of the snow?**

**And finally on the twelfth day... Dickens makes another appearance but this time in the form of a novel opening...**

**Read the following extract from the opening of A Tale of Two Cities by Charles Dickens**

### **A Tale of Two Cities (Charles Dickens)**

*It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way — in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only*

**Look up some of the vocabulary you may not know: epoch, incredulity, superlative. List the pairs of opposites that Dickens uses in this opening. What do you think Dickens is trying to say about the time in which this novel is set? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.**