NCERT Solutions for Class 8 English Unit 1 – The Best Christmas Present in the World here

The Best Christmas Present in the World

Comprehension Check (Page 10)

Question 1:

What did the author find in a junk shop?

Answer:

The author found a nineteenth century old roll-top desk which was put up for sale in a junk shop. It was in a very bad condition with several broken pieces as one leg was clumsily mended and scorch marks all down one side.

Question 2:

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

Answer:

The author found a shallow space underneath the roll-top desk drawer which was a secret drawer. There was a small black tin box which had a piece of lined notepaper that was sello-taped to its top. There was a note written on it in shaky handwriting: “Jim’s last letter, received January 25, 1915. To be buried with me when the time comes.”

It seems the letter was put inside the box by Mrs. Jim Macpherson along with her full name and address written on the envelope consisting the letter.

Comprehension Check (Page 14)

Question 1:

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

Answer:

Captain Jim Macpherson of the British army who was fighting a war against the Germans had written the letter to his wife Connie on 26th December, 1914.

Question 2:

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

Answer:

Jim Macpherson wrote the letter to his wife Connie and described the wonderful event that happened on the day of Christmas. Although a war was going on between the two armies-the British and the Germans, they celebrated Christmas and played a friendly football match together.

Question 3:

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

Answer:

Before joining the armed forces, Hans Wolf from Dusseldorf used to play the cello in an orchestra and Jim Macpherson was a school teacher from Dorset.

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Question 4:

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

Answer:

No, Hans had never been to Dorset in the past. He had learned about Dorset from school and read several English books. One of his favourite books was ‘Far from the Madding Crowd’ written by Thomas Hardy.

Question 5:

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

Answer:

No, it appears that Jim Macpherson never returned home from the war. Perhaps, due to this reason his wife Connie had preserved all his letters carefully.

Comprehension Check (Page 15)

Question 1:

Why did the author go to Bridport?

Answer:

The author went to Bridport to meet Connie Macpherson and which had her address – Mrs. Jim Macpherson, 12 Copper Beeches, Bridport and Dorset. He wanted to deliver the letter to her written by her husband, which the author had mistakenly opened and read the contents of.

Question 2:

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

Answer:

Mrs. Connie Macpherson was a hundred and one years old. She was in the Burlington House Nursing Home that was located on the Dorchester road, on the other side of town.

Comprehension Check (Page 16)

Question 1:

Who did Connie Macpherson think her visitor was?

Answer:

Connie Macpherson thought that the visitor carrying the letter was her husband, Jim Macpherson.

Question 2:

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”. From this sentence, we understand that although the author tries his best to explain how he found the letter in the old roll-top desk, Mrs. Macpherson didn’t pay attention to his words, rather she stroked the letter tenderly with her fingertips.

Working with the text (Page 16)

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Question 1:

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

Answer:

Connie kept Jim's letter for a long period of time. We understand this from the fact that she told the narrator how she used to read the letter every day and could feel Jim's presence around her always.

Question 2:

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

Answer:

The roll-top desk was put up for sale when the house in which Mrs. Jim Macpherson lived had caught fire and she was taken to the Burlington House Nursing Home. Most of the things got burned and were put up for sale thereafter.

Question 3:

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 lays down their lives in matches. Neither do children become orphans, nor do wives become widows of martyred soldiers. Both Jim and Hans were of the opinion that war only leads to death, conflict and devastation whereas, playing matches are a good way to end the conflicts.

Yes, I agree with both Jim and Hans that playing friendly matches are definitely an ideal way to resolve conflicts between two enemy countries without any loss to life and property.

Question 4:

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 are similar to each other as per the following reasons derived from the story:

1. Both the armies celebrated Christmas together.
2. They shared good moments together by eating, laughing, drinking and talking with each other.
3. Both the armies played a friendly football match and approved the fact that conflicts could have been resolved by playing a match.
4. They agreed about the consequences or negative impact that war has upon families.
5. Both the armies longed for peace and exchanged Christmas carols and hoped to unite with their respective families soon.

Question 5:

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

Answer:

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Both the British and the German soldiers were enemies at war and belonged to different camps. However, at the end of the day both armies comprised human beings who had similar feelings of love and compassion for their respective families and all those who are fighting the war. Both groups shared the festive spirit of Christmas, enjoyed a feast together by eating, drinking and making merry together. They also talked of Bathsheba and Gabriel Oak and Sergeant Troy and Dorset. They also sang Christmas carols together and spent some quality time with each other. They got over hatred and played a friendly football and wished if all conflicts in the world could be resolved by playing games. Both Jim and Hans hated war and knew well how war affected the lives of their families. Both were anxious to return home to their families once the war comes to an end.

Question 6:

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

Answer:

When the narrator visited Connie to deliver her husband's letter, she mistook him to be her husband, Jim Macpherson due to her old age and memory loss. She was looking forward to Jim returning home for Christmas. She felt this was the best Christmas present ever she could receive.

This was the best Christmas present in the world for Connie because Jim had mentioned in the letter that he would return home from war on Christmas. She used to read that letter multiple times in a day to feel her husband's presence nearby. Hence, when the narrator told her how he found the letter, she was extremely happy and felt it was Jim who had come to visit her after a long time.

Question 7:

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

Answer:

In my opinion, the title of the story is very apt and suits it perfectly. The festive spirit of Christmas prevails throughout the story. It clearly mentions how the warring troops longed for peace and had a strong desire to return home safely to their respective families. They shared a wonderful moment together by sharing food, drinks and talked to their heart's content and played a football match among themselves. However, when the narrator goes to visit Connie along with the letter written by her husband, Jim Macpherson, she presumes the author to be her husband and thanks him for gifting her the best Christmas present ever.

Some suitable titles could be – "The Best Christmas Gift" and "When a Christmas wish comes true".

Working with language (Page 17-19)

Question 1:

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.

Answer:

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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.

Answer:

My little sister is very naughty. When she ***came*** back from school yesterday, she had ***torn*** her dress. We ***asked***her how it had ***happened***. She ***said*** she ***had quarrelled*** with a boy. She ***had beaten*** him in a race and he ***had tried*** to push her. She ***had told*** the teacher and so he ***had chased*** her, and she ***had fallen*** down and ***had torn*** her dress.

(iii) Underline the verbs and arrange them in two columns, Past and Earlier past.

1. My friends set out to see the caves in the next town, but I stayed at home, because I had seen them already.
2. 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!
3. So they sat outside and ate the lunch I had packed for them.
4. By the time I returned, they had fallen asleep!

Past	Earlier past

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Answer:

Past	Earlier past
1. set out, stayed	had seen
1. arrived, came	had left, had gone
1. sat, ate	had packed
1. returned	had fallen

Question 2:

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:

- Burn out: “House number 12 turned out to be nothing but a burned-out shell, the roof gaping, the windows boarded-up.” – **This line implies that the house was destroyed by fire.**
- Light up: “That was the moment her eyes lit up with recognition and her face became suffused with a sudden glow of happiness.” – **This line implies that Connie’s face brightened up with happiness.**
- 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.” – **This line implies that both Jim and Hans watched and cheered each other while playing a football match.**
- 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.” – **This line implies that the game was over and so was the fun and food that was all used up.**

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- 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.” – **This line implies that they tried to avoid the cold by clapping their hands and stamping their feet.**

Question 3:

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)	
a/an/ the	nice/lazy/ beautiful	tall/ round/ old/young	red/white/ light/dark	silk/cotton/ woollen	t

Answer:

Check the question properly and try to understand the placement of noun phrase and adjectives in it.

Question 4:

The table below contains a list of nouns and some adjectives. Use as many adjectives as you can to describe each noun. You might come up with some funny descriptions!

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

Answer:

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Nouns	Adjectives
elephant	enormous, large, cheerful, wild, medium-sized
face	round, cheerful, chubby,
building	multi-coloured, blue, red, medium-sized
water	blue, cold

Speaking (Page 19)

Question 1:

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

Answer:

War brings in a lot of hatred and devastation with it. It exhibits the unseen and unfair side of humans. Nations fight a war sometimes for petty reasons like sharing or conquering a piece of land or due to religion. Soldiers who fight the war leave their families behind and their children become orphaned and wives become widows when they lay down their lives for their respective countries. Therefore, wars are definitely not an ideal way to end conflicts and cause huge destruction to life and property.

(**Note:** Students may depict their views in front of the whole class as per their own thinking).

Question 2:

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 re-read over a period of time.)

Answer:

On the personal front, I do not like the practice of exchanging costly gifts. However, if we really want to thank someone with a present, we can buy some flowers as a token of affection for the respective person. Due to this reason, we notice that in formal occasions many guests bring flower bouquets as gifts to express their warm feelings.

(**Note:** Students may depict their own views and discuss it with their partner as per their convenience).

Writing (Page 20)

Question 1:

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

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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:

25 December, 1919

It's Christmas today, but the town looks different from other days. The town was devastated by war. The buildings have been destroyed and are in complete ruins. My house is almost burnt by the bombardments happening due to war. All such events have taken a heavy toll on the lives of the soldiers as well as the civilians as a whole. I am in complete distaste of whatever is happening around and want to curse the war mongers. I truly long for peace and brotherhood among the countrymen and the people from across the borders.

Question 2:

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.

Answer:

In the year 1929 when India was under the British Raj, the English education system enlightened the minds of a few people. Gradually people started thinking progressively and were fighting hard to free the country from the British rule. At that time, a young, newly-married doctor was framed in a conspiracy case and sent to Andaman and Nicobar Islands which was located in the Bay of Bengal. He was a freedom fighter who was exiled to the infamous Cellular Jail for a few years. He along with other prisoners in this jail were subjected to inhuman torture due to revolt made by the inmates. One fine day, he was hanged. But his wife kept waiting for his return until she grew old. However, she never lost her hope and faith and continues to wait for her husband to return some day.

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