

MEMBERSHIP

SCARY SANTA



About this activity

A teacher-led videotelling activity that explores different depictions of Santa Claus

⚠ WARNING: The short film in this activity could be quite terrifying for children. For that reason it is not recommended for under 16s.

- ▶ **Language level:** A2 upwards
- ▶ **Main task:** Writing sentences; listening, story sharing
- ▶ **Topics:** Christmas; Santa Claus
- ▶ **Language focus:** Past perfect; prepositional phrases

For this activity, you will need access to a short film on Netflix – see below.

Note: For all materials and discussion, please go to the corresponding page in the Resources section:

<https://membership.lessonstream.com/resources/scary-santa/>



The short film

All through the house is an animated short which is part of the Netflix *Love, Death & Robots* second series. It was directed by Elliot Dear and tells the story of two children who sneak downstairs on Christmas Eve to see Santa Claus in their home. However, Santa Claus is nothing like they expected! In order to play the short film, you will need access to a Netflix account.

⚠ Netflix gives the *Love, Death & Robots* series a 'Maturity rating' of 18. The rating is high because some of the other films in the series contain nudity or are quite violent. Unfortunately, there is no rating offered for the individual films in the series. Please exercise caution.

Activity outline

Notes: This lesson plan deals with the story of Santa Claus – the legendary figure from Western Christian culture. Please do not assume that all of your students share this common background. For any teacher, it is important to express an interest in our students and make an effort to learn about their religious and cultural backgrounds when possible.

1. Tell students that as Christmas is coming, you would like to ask them an important question. On the board or screen, write the following:

What do you know about Santa Claus?

2. Put students into small groups and ask them to write as many sentences as possible about Santa Claus which relate to the following:

- His character and appearance
- What he does and where he does it (according to children)
- The origins and history of Santa Claus

Notes:

- You can give students a time limit for this – 10 or 15 minutes, for example.
- If possible, give students access to bilingual dictionaries to help them write their sentences.

3. Pool ideas from students and write as many sentences as possible on the board or screen. Offer language corrections, reformulations and updates when necessary.

Character and appearance – possible answers

- He wears a red and white coat, trousers and hat, a black belt, black boots and spectacles.
- He carries a sack of presents for children.
- He is rotund (round and fat), has white hair and a white beard.
- He is jolly (= friendly and cheerful) and laughs a lot (“Ho ho ho”)

What he does and where he does it – possible answers

- He lives with the Christmas elves at the North Pole. The elves make the toys in his workshop.
- On Christmas Eve, he delivers toys to children who have been good.
- He gives a piece of coal or nothing at all to children who have been bad.
- He travels through the night sky on a sleigh which is pulled by flying reindeer.
- He goes down chimneys.
- He leaves toys in stockings which are hung on the mantelpiece or at the end of your bed.
- He likes milk and cookies (USA), brandy, sherry and mince pies (UK)

The origins and history – see *Santa Claus: the man, the legend* on page 6

4. Tell students that you are going to tell them a story. But before you do so, you want them to draw a picture. Give students the instructions in the box below. Don't let them draw until they have heard the full instructions.

I want you to draw a picture of a sitting room on Christmas Eve.
 It's nighttime and outside the window, you can see that it's snowing.
 There is a fireplace with a mantelpiece.
 And hanging on the mantelpiece are two stockings.
 There's a Christmas tree in the corner with lights and decorations and presents underneath it.
 Beside the tree there is a little table and on the table there is a glass of milk and a plate of cookies.
 Finally, there are two children hiding behind a sofa: a little boy and a little girl.

Notes:

- A lot of the words and phrases in the instructions may have emerged from the previous stages (i.e. stockings, mantelpiece, presents, cookies). If not, you can teach them using drawings of your own on the board or screen.
- Encourage students to create quick sketches rather than time-consuming masterpieces. You can give them a time limit – 3 minutes, for example.

5. Tell students that they will return to the drawings in a moment. Before they do so, you are going to tell them the story. It's a story about two children called Leah and Billy. Read out the text on page 5. Read it slowly and repeat it if necessary. Use gesture to reinforce the following words and phrases: *creep, gasp, in shock, shaking with fear, a pat on the head*

6. Ask students to guess why Leah and Billy were so terrified when they see Santa. Then tell them the following:

They had seen Santa Claus on Christmas cards.
 They had read about him in books.
 They had heard about him in stories.
 They had seen him in Coca Cola adverts.
 But this Santa looked nothing like the one that they were expecting.
 This Santa Claus was absolutely terrifying!

7. Ask students to return to their drawings and add a terrifying Santa Claus to the scene.

8. Ask students to compare their drawings and find out whose Santa Claus is the most terrifying.

9. Tell students that the story is based on a short film called *All through the house* which can be seen on Netflix. Play the short film and introduce students to the terrifying Santa Claus.

10. Ask students if they liked the short film. Did they imagine that the Santa to be so terrifying?

! WARNING: Please do not show the film to students under the age of 16. Even with mature students, you should warn them about what they are going to see. Tell them that although there is no violence, the film features a terrifying monster and they don't have to watch if they don't want to – especially if they think they might get nightmares. If students prefer, they could just close their eyes and listen to the audio track which has a lot to offer on its own.

An alternative would be to show some of the images that came out of the production of the short film. These are much less scary and you will find a link to them at the corresponding page in the Resources section. If you are in doubt, please speak with a more experienced teacher in your teaching centre or head to the Fishbowl.

Stories from students

If you are working with students who all believed in Santa Claus as children, there are many story-sharing possibilities. Put students into groups and ask them to share their own Santa-themed stories. You can share one or two of your own to get the ball rolling.

Story idea	Example
Personal traditions: the Santa Claus story and routine in your own household	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In some households, a friend or family member will dress up as Santa and visit on Christmas Eve. • Some children use pillow cases instead of stockings. • What did your parents tell you if you didn't have a chimney? How did Santa enter your home?
Santa Claus and your siblings	I remember having a massive argument with my little sister. She believed in Santa and claimed that she had seen him in his sleigh flying through the night sky. I knew that it was a lie but was strictly forbidden from ruining the magic for her.
Meeting Santa Claus at the shopping centre (= the Mall)	This was one of the most terrifying experiences that my little brother ever had!
Your Santa Claus letter	In the UK, children were told to throw their letters into the fireplace so they would float up the chimney and fly to the North Pole.
Santa Claus evidence	My father once went to great lengths to falsify evidence of Santa's visit to our house.
How you found out that Santa Claus doesn't exist	Also, is it right to lie to children? There is a debate about this – see Wikipedia for information.
Santa Claus alternatives/other gift givers in your culture	E.g. the <i>Christkind</i> (also called <i>Christkindl</i> or <i>Kris Kringle</i>) or the <i>Tió de Nadal</i> from Catalonia.



Terrifying Santa

It's Christmas Eve
Children should be in bed
Leah and Billy should be fast asleep – but they're not
They're wide awake – they can't get to sleep because they're so excited

Before going to bed, they hung their stockings on the mantelpiece in the sitting room
They left a glass of milk and some cookies on a table beside the Christmas tree

And now, at 2am, they hear a noise
It's coming from downstairs
Could it be him? Could it be Santa?



Leah and Billy leave the bedroom
They creep through the corridor
They creep down the stairs
Slowly, they creep into the sitting room
Behind the Christmas tree, someone or something is moving

Leah and Billy hide behind the sofa
And then, they see him

Santa drinks the milk and eats the cookies
Leah and Billy gasp
Santa hears them
He stops what he is doing and moves towards the sofa
He looks behind the sofa and sees Leah and Billy – shaking with fear
Absolutely terrified

Santa looks closely at Leah
He can tell just by looking that she's been a good girl
So he gives her a present

He looks closely at Billy
He can tell just by looking that he's been a good boy
So he gives him a present and a pat on the head

Santa turns around
He walks towards the mantelpiece and disappears up the chimney
Leah and Billy can't believe what they have just seen

Back in their beds
Leah and Billy are still in shock
Lying on their backs, staring at the ceiling
Leah says to Billy, "What would have happened if we weren't good?"
So why were Leah and Billy so scared?



Santa Claus – the man, the legend



Santa Claus is a complicated character. At the age of 1700 years old, he has seen a lot of changes in his lifetime.

He was born out of the cult of Saint Nicholas of Myra – a 4th-century Greek Christian bishop who was famous for giving gifts to the poor. (Myra, which was part of the Roman Empire, was located on the Mediterranean coast of modern-day Turkey.)

Santa Claus has been shaped by many different European folk traditions and cultural influences. Most notably, he is a blend of the English Father Christmas, the Dutch *Sinterklaas* and the Norse god Odin. The modern-day secular Santa matured and was named in North America. Santa Claus is an anglicism of *Sinterklaas* and first appeared in print in 1773.

Many of the familiar Santa Claus associations that we know today were influenced by numerous American authors, cartoonists and poets. One of the best examples was a popular poem from 1823 titled, "The Night Before Christmas" (originally, "A Visit From St. Nicholas") which established the popular story of a jolly old, sleigh-flying, chimney-climbing stocking filler.

It is sometimes thought that the modern red-and-white Santa Claus was a Coca Cola creation. But this is not true. Those familiar colours had been established long before they started to appear in print advertisements in the 1930s. According to David Mikkelson at Snopes, "at best what Coca Cola popularized was an image they borrowed, not one they created."



Father Christmas

Father Christmas dates back as far as 16th century in England. He was a personification of Christmas and was not originally a gift-bringer, not associated with children, and certainly not synonymous with Santa Claus.

Sinterklaas

Sinterklaas is a legendary figure who is not immediately associated with Christmas. He is based on Saint Nicholas, the patron saint of children and is celebrated in the Netherlands and Belgium on Saint Nicholas Day (6th December) when he brings toys for children. *Sinterklaas* has a servant called *Zwarte Piet* (Black Pete) who is an increasingly-controversial figure.

Odin

Odin (or Wodan or Wodan) is a god from Germanic mythology. He is the father of Thor and is often depicted with a long white beard. He rides an eight-legged horse called *Sleipnir* across the night sky. Odin is associated with Yule – a pre-Christian midwinter celebration. When Germanic Europe was Christianised, many Yuletide traditions were absorbed into modern Christmas. Odin has much in common with Santa Claus and may have been an influence. Incidentally, the name Wednesday is derived from Old/Middle English and means "Day of Woden".

References:

- Wikipedia entries for *Santa Claus*, *Father Christmas* and *Odin*
- Snopes website: "Did Coca-Cola Invent the Modern Image of Santa Claus?"