

Unit 1C Celebrations: why do Christians give gifts at Christmas?

ABOUT THE UNIT

The starting point for this unit is the familiar practice of giving gifts at Christmas, shared by most Christians and people from a secular background. The unit explores the Christian belief that Jesus is God's gift to the world.

WHERE THE UNIT FITS IN

Children explored the idea of belonging in Christianity in unit 1B. This is the first unit on Christmas, although it is likely that children will be familiar with some aspects of the Christmas story. There are units on Christmas in year 4 and year 8. Each unit has a different focus. It is important that teaching about Christmas is progressive. There should be a different focus each time Christmas is taught, so that children explore different aspects of its significance and develop appropriate levels of knowledge, understanding and skills as they move through the key stages. Some schools may choose to teach this unit after Christmas, drawing on the children's recent experiences, and linking with the Christian festival of Epiphany.

PRIOR LEARNING

It is helpful if children have:

- had previous experience of the nativity story, eg *through nativity plays*

VOCABULARY

In this unit children will have an opportunity to use words and phrases related to:

- religion, eg *God*
- Christianity, eg *Jesus, Christmas, Christians* (already introduced in unit 1B), *frankincense, myrrh*
- feelings, eg *hope, love, joy, peace, safety, precious*

RESOURCES

- a selection of attractively wrapped parcels
- versions of the Christmas story that are appropriate in terms of language level
- recordings of simple Christmas carols, including '*In the bleak midwinter*' by Christina Rossetti
- a selection of appropriate stories that involve giving and receiving presents

EXPECTATIONS

At the end of this unit

most children will:

retell the main events of the visit of the wise men to Jesus; understand the concept of a precious gift and relate the ideas of giving and receiving gifts to their own experience

some children will not have made so much progress and will:

retell elements of the story of the visit of the wise men to Jesus; describe their own feelings and experiences of giving and receiving gifts

some children will have progressed further and will:

explain that Christians believe that Jesus is God's gift to the world and that this is why they give gifts at Christmas; make connections between the story of the birth of Jesus and Christian attitudes to gifts and giving

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

POSSIBLE TEACHING ACTIVITIES

LEARNING OUTCOMES

POINTS TO NOTE

CHILDREN SHOULD LEARN

CHILDREN

WHAT IS A SPECIAL GIFT?

- what is meant by the idea of something 'precious'
 - that some gifts cost nothing, but can be precious
- Provide a selection of attractively wrapped presents. *Can you guess what's inside? What would you like to be inside?*
 - Discuss precious or special gifts. *What makes a gift special or precious?*
 - Ask children to talk in groups about their own 'best present ever' and explain why it was so special to them.
 - Drama activity: in pairs, take turns at acting out the scene of giving, receiving and opening a gift. Discuss the different feelings that the children experience. Ask them to think about gifts that cost nothing but can make people happy. Ask the children to write a sentence about such a gift, saying why they have chosen it.

- identify aspects of their own experience and feelings in relation to giving and receiving gifts
- identify what they feel to be of value and explain why
- write a sentence about giving a precious gift

WHY DO PEOPLE GIVE GIFTS AT CHRISTMAS?

- about the story of the birth of Jesus
 - that the concepts of giving and receiving are important in Christianity
- Read or tell the story of the wise men and the gifts they brought to Jesus. Some children may have gifts that they were given as babies – talk about these. *What gifts do people give to babies today? What gift do you think a Christian might take to Jesus in the stable? Why did you choose this gift?* Ask the children to draw the gift they chose, and write a sentence saying why they chose it.
 - Act out a visit to the stable to give gifts to the baby Jesus.

- talk about the birth of Jesus, relating aspects of the stories to the ideas of giving and receiving
- draw and write about a gift a Christian might take to Jesus, explaining reasons

- The birth of Jesus is told in the Bible in Luke 2⁴⁷; the visit of the wise men is in Matthew 2¹⁻¹¹.
- The foundations for these concepts are likely to have been laid in nursery and reception, where they are related to the experiences of the children.
- Make links with work covered in unit 1A, where children reflected on what they have to give to those to whom they belong.

INVISIBLE GIFTS

- that religious ideas and personal feelings can be expressed in a variety of ways
- Listen to the last verse of '*In the bleak midwinter*', a carol that Christians sing at Christmas time. *What do you think the last line means ('give my heart')? What do you associate with 'heart'?* The children might talk about life and love. *Why might a Christian want to 'give their heart' to Jesus?* Children might say, 'Because I love Jesus'. Talk about who the children love. *How do you show your love?* Note their responses.

- talk about why giving is an important idea for Christians and has significance for how they celebrate Christmas
- talk about what is of value to Christians and how this may be expressed in action

- This is a difficult concept, which may be developed through careful questioning about how feelings can be expressed and through non-religious stories about gifts, giving and feelings.

WHY DO CHRISTIANS THINK JESUS IS GOD'S GIFT TO THE WORLD?

- that Christians believe that Jesus is God's gift to the world
 - about the qualities that Christians believe Jesus gives
- Christians believe that Jesus is God's son and that God gave him as a gift to the world. Discuss what the children think this might mean, and write down their responses.
 - Introduce some of the qualities that Christians believe Jesus brought to the world, *eg hope, happiness, joy, peace, safety*. Ask the children to choose a word from their list: decorate the words and display them around a large picture of Jesus in the manger. Ask them to explain why they chose that word.
 - Talk with the children about gifts they hope to receive at Christmas or at other times, and gifts they are planning to give. *Which of these gives you most pleasure – giving or receiving gifts?*
 - Draw together this unit by making a class display, featuring a large gift box with children's statements and drawings about gifts and giving going into it.
 - Invite a Christian to talk to the children about why they give gifts.

- talk about the Christian belief that Jesus is God's gift to the world
- list some of the qualities that Christians believe Jesus gives
- choose a word to describe what Christians believe Jesus gives and give reasons for their choice
- reflect on their own feelings about giving and receiving

- Giving presents at Christmas is a custom that is shared by people from many backgrounds. It has become part of secular life and most children will be involved in this aspect of Christmas regardless of faith or culture.
- However, it should not be assumed that all children will get or give gifts at Christmas.
- Other explanations about the origins of Christian giving are found in stories about St Nicholas.

FUTURE LEARNING

Children could go on to:

- study in more depth how and why Christians celebrate Christmas

OUT-OF-SCHOOL LEARNING

Children could:

- look in their local and school library for different versions of stories about the birth of Jesus, *eg in picture and story books for children of different ages*