

Did you know?

Sing a song at Christmas!



Do you like singing Christmas carols and other Christmas songs? Then you're sure to enjoy finding out about their histories.

Christmas carols started their life being sung in pubs and only recently arrived in churches – well, relatively recently – at the end of the nineteenth century. Carols were originally folk songs, and before that were dances: *carol* meant an old round dance with singing. So carols such as *Deck the Halls*, *The Holly and the Ivy* and *I saw three ships come sailing in* were almost certainly folk songs which were adapted to the new tradition of carol singing in churches.

Later, many carols were written specifically for the Nativity story. The words of *Once in Royal David's City* were written in 1848 by Frances Alexander and set to music one year later by English organist Henry Gauntlett. Since 1919 this carol has been the processional hymn for the Nine Lessons and Carols from King's College Cambridge – a highlight on Christmas Eve television and radio around the world. The religious carol, *Oh Little town of Bethlehem* tells the tale of the birth of Jesus, and was inspired by a pilgrim's moving Christmas Eve experience in the Holy Land in 1865. Returning home to the USA, Phillip Brooks wrote the carol. It had its first public performance three years later, performed by the children's choir of his church.

Some carols and Christmas songs have an unlikely provenance. The actual events in the carol *Good King Wenceslas* are almost certainly fictitious, but they represent King Wenceslas as a good and virtuous king. Born in 907, King Wenceslas died when he was only 28 – murdered by his jealous brother, Boleslav the Cruel. After his violent death, Wenceslas was considered a martyr and a saint; books were written which venerated him and poems were published. In the nineteenth century, one of these poems was translated and set to the tune of a 13th-century spring carol 'Tempus Adest Floridum' by JM Neale of East Grinstead, West Sussex and it became the carol we sing today.

Another Christmas song *Do you hear what I hear?* which was so beautifully sung by Bing Crosby and recorded in a very Christmassy

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setting, was actually written as a plea for peace during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. And *Jingle Bells* (would any Christmas celebration be complete without it?) was written for Thanksgiving in November and not for Christmas.

So whatever you like to sing, there is sure to be at least one song that brings out the best of the season in you and your students. If you would like to use a Christmas song in your lesson then we have provided you with an activity at A1 and above. See the **Teacher's notes** and **Worksheet**.

Teacher's notes

Deck the Halls (Level A1 and above 15 mins+)

This is a very old traditional Christmas song, originally from Wales. Although some of the language is difficult, there is a wonderful refrain which everybody can join in.

- Find a recorded version of Deck the Halls. This link has words and music: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SIFqnEoctI4>
- Make a copy of **Deck the Halls**, one for each pair of students. Cut into strips as directed. If you wish, you can also make a copy of the German version.
- Ask students to imagine a big party in winter 100 years ago. What would be important? Elicit: holly, big fire, singing, harp, dancing, girls and boys.
- Explain that students are going to hear a Christmas song: **Deck the Halls**. (*Schmückt die Säle*)
- Play the song once – encourage students to join in with the chorus.
- Distribute the cut-up song text, one set to each pair of students.
- Tell students to arrange the song words in the correct order. Direct students' attention to the last word of each line. Each pair of lines rhymes: first and second line, third and fourth line and so on. Encourage as much discussion as possible.
- Circulate and help, but encourage students to focus on the rhyme.
- Play the song again to check students have the words in the correct order. Encourage everyone to join in!
- If you think your students would find it helpful, hand out the sheet with the English and the German version so students can compare.



Deck the Halls

Deck the halls with boughs of holly.
Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la!

Tis the season to be jolly.
Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la!

Don we now our gay apparel.
Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la!

Troll the ancient Yule tide carol.
Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la!

See the blazing Yule before us.
Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la!

Strike the harp and join the chorus.
Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la!

Follow me in merry measure.
Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la!

While I tell of Yule tide treasure.
Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la!

Fast away the old year passes.
Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la!

Hail the new, ye lads and lasses.
Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la!

Sing we joyous, all together.
Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la!

Heedless of the wind and weather.
Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la!

(traditional English Christmas carol)

Schmückt die Säle

Schmückt die Säle mit Stechpalmzweigen.
Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la!

Dies ist die Zeit um fröhlich zu sein.
fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la!

Nun haben wir uns festlich gekleidet.
Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la!

Singt das alte Weihnachtslied.
Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la!

Seht das lodernde Licht, das kommen wird.
Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la!

Spielt die Harfe und singt im Chor.
Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la!

Folgt mir im festlichen Schritt.
Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la!

Wenn ich vom Schatz der Weihnacht erzähle.
Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la!

Schnell vergeht das alte Jahr.
Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la!

Preist das neue, Burschen und Mädchen.
Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la!

Lasst uns freudig singen, alle zusammen,
Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la!

Trotz des Windes und des Wetters.
Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la!



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Worksheet Please cut as indicated: -----

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Deck the halls with boughs of holly. Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la!

Tis the season to be jolly. Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la!

Don we now our gay apparel. Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la!

Troll the ancient Yuletide carol. Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la!

See the blazing Yule before us. Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la!

Strike the harp and join the chorus. Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la!

Follow me in merry measure. Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la!

While I tell of Yuletide treasure. Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la!

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