

Did you know?



A right royal German Christmas!

You may well know that Britons love their Christmas trees – but perhaps you didn't know that it was Queen Victoria who was instrumental in popularizing this tradition.

Victoria's mother was German and so was her husband, Prince Albert, and therefore German Christmas traditions played an important role throughout the queen's life-time. An engraving published nearly 180 years ago showed the royal family gathered around a Christmas tree inside Windsor Palace – and this started the craze for Christmas trees in the UK.

The current royal family also carries on some other German traditions: present opening takes place on Christmas Eve, just like in Germany and not on 25th December like the rest of the UK. And the Christmas tree isn't decorated in the middle of December but on the afternoon of 24th – just like in Germany! And rather like some parts of Bavaria, the royal Christmas decorations stay up until the beginning of February (although this has different reasons: some Germans keep their tree up until Candlemas on 2nd February whereas the queen keeps the decorations up in Sandringham to commemorate her father's death on 6th February).

Apart from these German-rooted traditions, there are others specific to the royal family – some of which are rather surprising.

The queen and Prince Philip send out over 800 cards each year – and they are signed during their summer holiday at Balmoral Castle, which certainly takes early Christmas preparation to a new level. On Christmas Eve afternoon, Prince William and Prince Harry take to the football pitch and captain two teams – the squads are made up of workers from the Sandringham estate and money is raised for local charities. Later in the evening there is the present opening by the tree; but of course normal presents have little significance to the family who have pretty much everything. So instead of standard presents there are 'gag' or joke presents – the crazier and quirkier the better. Kate Middleton gave the then single Prince Harry, a 'grow your own girlfriend' plant; Princess Diana gave him fake dog poo; Meghan Markle gave the queen a singing hamster (a toy one presumably) and Princess Anne gave her older brother Prince Charles a white leather toilet seat. After the mirth of present giving, there is a black tie dinner where the queen partakes of her favourite cocktail – Zaza – a mix of Dubonnet and gin, which in earlier times was also enjoyed by the Queen Mother.

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Did you know?

On 25th December, the royal family rise early and attend a private church service before travelling together to the local church St Mary Magdalene for the 11am public service. Then it's back to Sandringham House for a delicious Christmas lunch with turkey and all the trimmings – and of course crackers and paper hats. However, there is a particularly unusual tradition dating back over 100 years to the reign of Edward VII: *weighing in*. All guests at the meal are weighed before and after the meal to ensure that all of them are well fed. Whether it is to prevent gluttony or fussiness is unclear. After the lunch, the family sit down to watch the queen's speech on the television before enjoying a few rounds of charades – presumably former Suits actor Meghan Markle, now the Duchess of Sussex, will find no difficulty winning. And then after all that fun and a tasty buffet, the family move to the ballroom which is transformed into a cinema, to watch a film together: *On her Majesty's Secret Service? The Queen? The King's Speech? The King and I? The Madness of King George?*

If you would like to use the royal family's Christmas in your lesson, we have provided you with two activities **A right royal Christmas quiz** and **Charades**.

Teacher's notes

A right royal Christmas quiz (Level A2 and above, 10+ mins)

- Make a copy of **A right royal Christmas quiz**, one for each student.
- Elicit the names of three or four members of the British royal family.
- Explain that the royal family all get together for Christmas and they have some special family traditions.
- Hand out the quiz and tell students to choose the correct answer for each answer. Ask them to work alone and then compare their answers with a partner.
- Check answers together in class: Key: 1c, 2b, 3c, 4c, 5b, 6a, 7a
- Ask students if they have any special family Christmas traditions.
- Ask students if they would like to have Christmas with all their family. What do they think might be the problems?

Did you know?

Charades (Level A2 and above, 10+ minutes).

- Have a look at this [video](#) to see Charades played on the *Jimmy Fallon* show.
- Explain that students are going to play charades, a game that the royal family (and many other families!) enjoy playing. It is a miming game, where you have to act out the words of a film, song or television show.
- Go over the rules of charades with your class and encourage students to make the movements with you:

Film: Pretend to turn an old-fashioned movie camera.

TV show: Draw a rectangle to outline the TV screen.

Song: Pretend to sing.

Number of words in the title: Hold up the number of fingers.

Which word you're working on: Hold up the number of fingers again.

Small word (*the, an, of, in, to, on* etc): Hold finger & thumb close together.

- Act out the film: *The Queen*

Show action for film: Pretend to turn an old fashioned camera. Elicit *film*.

Hold up two fingers for two words. Elicit *two words*.

Hold up one finger to show you're working on first word.

Show that it is a small word. Elicit *the*.

Hold up two fingers to show you're working on the second word.

Show that you have a crown on your head, look regal! Elicit *queen*.

Try these:

Films: *Batman, Titanic, Taxi Driver, 12 years a slave, The silence of the lambs, Snow White and the seven dwarves, Spiderman, Four weddings and a funeral, The wizard of Oz, Star wars.*

Television: *Dinner for one, Friends, Dr House, Breaking Bad, Two and a half men, Hawaii Five O, The Sandman, Germany's next top model, South Park, Death in Paradise.*

Songs: *My bonnie lies over the ocean, Lemon tree, Yesterday, Lady in red, We are the champions, Purple rain, She loves you, Dancing queen, Eye of the tiger, Strawberry fields, Blowin' in the wind.*

A right royal Christmas quiz

What do you know about Queen Elizabeth's family traditions?

1 Where do the British Royal family spend Christmas?

- a Balmoral Castle
- b Buckingham Palace
- c Sandringham House

2 When do the royal family open their Christmas presents?

- a after lunch on Christmas Day
- b on Christmas Eve
- c at breakfast on Christmas Day

3 What game do all the family play on Christmas Day?

- a cards
- b chess
- c charades

4 When is the Christmas tree decorated?

- a at the beginning of December
- b in the middle of December
- c on Christmas Eve

5 How many times do the family attend a church service on Christmas Day?

- a once
- b twice
- c three times

6 At Christmas lunch there is a ceremony of *weighing in*. What is *weighing in*?

- a the guests are weighed before and after the meal
- b the turkey is weighed
- c the Christmas pudding must weigh over 2 pounds (~1kg)

7 In the evening on Christmas Day the whole family go to the ballroom to

- a watch a film together.
- b do Scottish dancing.
- c sing Christmas carols.