

# CHAPTER-I

## THE BEST CHRISTMAS PRESENT IN THE WORLD

### I. Comprehension Check

**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.

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

**Answer:**

The author found a small black tin box, sello-taped to the top with a piece of lined notepaper on it. The notepaper read: “Jim’s last letter, received January 25, 1915. To be buried with me when the time comes.” Mrs. Macpherson had put it there.

## **II. Comprehension Check**

### **1. Who had written the letter, to whom, and when?**

**Answer:**

Jim Macpherson had written the letter to Mrs. Macpherson from the battlefield. He had written this letter to his wife to narrate to her an unexpected and wonderful incident that had happened on the battlefield. He had also promised that by next Christmas, he would come home.

### **2. Why was the letter written — what was the wonderful thing that had happened?**

**Answer:**

He had written this letter to his wife to narrate to her an unexpected and wonderful thing that had happened on the battlefield. The wonderful thing was that the German soldiers had waved a white flag from their trench and shouted “Happy Christmas, Tommy!”

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

**Answer:**

Hans Wolf worked a cello-player in an orchestra in Dusseldorf before he was enlisted; Jim Macpherson worked as a teacher in Dorset before becoming a soldier.

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

**Answer:**

Hans Wolf had never been to Dorset. He said he knew it because he had read a lot about Dorset and other parts of England from the books he had read in his school.

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

**Answer:**

No, Jim Macpherson never came back from the war. He died on the battlefield. I know this because Mrs. Macpherson's words clearly state that she read the letter many times hoping her husband would return by Christmas. But he never came; she read the letter time and time again. She even tried to hear his voice in her head.

### **III. Comprehension Check**

#### **1. Why did the author go to Bridport?**

**Answer:**

The author went to Bridport to return the letter to Mrs. Macpherson. He found the letter in the secret box of the table drawer. From the letter, he got the address of Mrs Macpherson, so he went there to find her house.

#### **2. How old was Mrs Macpherson now? Where was she?**

**Answer:**

Mrs. Macpherson was the wife of Captain Jim Macpherson, who was killed in the war. She was 101 years old and living in Burlington House nursing home

**1. Who did Connie Macpherson think her visitor was?**

**Answer:**

Connie Macpherson thought her visitor was Jim Macpherson, her husband. She had become mentally disturbed after the loss of her beloved husband. When the author went to meet her on Christmas Eve, he greeted her “Happy Christmas, Connie.” She thought he was her husband who had kept his promise by returning to her on Christmas.

**2. Which sentence in the text shows that the visitor did not try to hide his identity?**

**Answer:**

The sentence in the text shows that the visitor did not try to hide his identity is: ‘I explained about the desk, about how I had found it...’

**working with text**

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

**Answer:**

Connie had kept Jim's letter for many years; then with the passage of time and depressed by the loss of her beloved life-partner she developed some mental disorder; she became muddle-headed.

She had received the letter from Jim on January 25, 1915. The letter must have remained with her until she developed a mental disorder. She was one hundred and one years old when the author took the letter to her.

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

**Answer:**

The desk must have been sold by someone after the fire had destroyed almost everything at Mrs. Macpherson's house. Owing to her mental illness, she had been taken to Burlington House. In her absence, the council must have taken over her dilapidated house and must have disposed of the burnt furniture to a junk shop dealer.

**3. Why do Jim and Hans think that games or sports are good ways of resolving conflicts? Do you agree?**

**Answer:**

Jim and Hans think that games or sports are good ways of resolving conflicts; I agree with their point of view wholeheartedly. In the past conflicts led to wars and World Wars, which caused huge destruction of human life and property. Millions of people had to suffer. All this humongous destruction of life and property could have been avoided if the conflicts had been resolved through games and sports.

**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: Both armies celebrated Christmas together.

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

**Answer:**

The British and German soldiers had many things in common that helped them become friends. The first common thing was both of them were Christians and wanted to celebrate it. The second common thing was their love for drinking and eating. They shared their wines and food. The third common thing was their love for the sport. They made teams and played football. The fourth common thing was their love for peace. They wanted peace.

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

**Answer:**

Connie's Christmas present is her mistake in recognizing the author; she mistook him for her husband who had died in World War I; this mistake brought an abundance of happiness in her life. She was at the twilight of her life. This meeting with the author must have filled her life with hope, joy, and relief. Hence it was the best present in the world.



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

**Answer:**

I think it is the most appropriate title. The author took Mrs. Macpherson's lost letter to her hoping it would bring her happiness. However, on meeting her he found she just mistook him for her deceased husband. This brought her unimaginable happiness. Nothing could have been a better gift than this happiness to her.

The chapter could have some other titles such as The Forgotten Letter, Wounds of War, etc.

**working with the language**

**1.Look at these sentences from the story. (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:**

**(I).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.**

(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:**

(ii).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.**

**(a) My friends set out to see the caves in the next town, but I stayed at home, because I had seen them already.**

**(b) 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!**

**(c) So they sat outside and ate the lunch I had packed for them.**

**(d) By the time I returned, they had fallen asleep! Past  
Earlier past**

**Answer:**

<b>past</b>	<b>Earlier past</b>
-------------	---------------------

a. set out, stayed

had seen

b. arrived, came

had left, had gone

c. sat, ate

had packed

d. returned

had fallen

## 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:**

- \* House number 12 turned out to be nothing but a burned-out shell .. (destroyed by fire).
- \* That was the moment her eyes lit up with recognition, and her face (brightened).
- \* Hans Wolf and I looked on and cheered, clapping our hand : (considered somebody to be somebody)
- \* The time came, and all too soon when the game was finished, the schnapps and the run and the sausage had long since run out, and we knew it was all over, (become used up, finished)
- \* Hans Wolf and I looked on and cheered clapping our hands and stamping our feet, to keep out the cold as much as anything, (to avoid)

**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!**

<b>Nouns</b>	<b>Adjectives</b>
<b>elephant</b>	<b>circular, striped, enormours,</b>
<b>face</b>	<b>multicoloured, round, cheerful,</b>
<b>building</b>	<b>wild, blue, red, chubby,</b>
<b>water</b>	<b>large, medium-sized, cold</b>

**Answer:**

- 1.elephant—enormous, striped, wild
- 2.face—cheerful, round, chubby
- 3.building—circular, large, multicoloured
- 4.water—blue, cold.

## **Speaking**

**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 means bloodshed, hate and destruction. It shows the animalism in man. Even the animals fight for some sound reason. But nations go to war to settle some petty dispute or in the name of religion. War solves no problem. Understanding alone can end differences. All religions condemn greed and bloody quarrels. Let us learn this great lesson from history.

**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:**

Personally I am against the practice of exchanging expensive gifts. A rose or a token of affection suits every person and every pocket. This is why some guests offer bouquets or greeting cards alone. In case the gift is essential, it should satisfy some need and have utility. When I go to buy a present, I first take into account the liking of my classmate, relative or girl/boy friend.

## **Writing**

### **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**

**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 very much different from what I had imagined. It has been ravaged by war. Buildings are in



ruins and there is graveyard silence. My own house burnt when it was hit by a bombardment. The events of war have taken a toll of civilians as well as soldiers. I hate the fighting instinct in us and curse the war makers (monger). Can't we live in peace like brothers?

OR

**Answer:**

12-A, Block 4,

Dorset

August 10, 2009 Dear Smith,

I am in a dilemma. It seems to be insolvable. I, therefore, seek your help in making a decision.

You know I had purchased an old desk. Inside it I got a box containing an old letter. It was written by Jim, a British soldier, to his wife. I decided to deliver that letter to Mrs. Jim at Briport.

I reached her house. She was 101 years old. When I gave her the letter, her eyes lit up. She thought I was her long lost husband Jim, who had come home to keep his promise. She was excited and she kissed me. She didn't listen to what I tried to tell her about my identity.

I don't know whether or not I should tell who I am. I only walked away from her quickly.

**Question 2:**

**Given below is the outline of a story. Construct the story using the outline.**

**A young, newly married doctor——- freedom fighter——- exited 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:**

It was the year 1930. India was a British colony. But English education enlightened a section of people. They started fighting for freedom. A young, newly- married doctor was implicated in a conspiracy case. He was sent to Black Waters (Kalapani) It was a group of Islands in the Bay of Bengal. Many freedom fighters and revolutionaries were sent there for life. They were put in cellular Jail for a few years. They were subjected to torture. The doctor was hanged. But his wife kept waiting for the return of her husband. She grew old. However, her hope and faith did not fade.

## **Summary of The Best Christmas Present in the World**

The Best Christmas present in the World is a story by Michael Morpurgo. In this story, the author buys a roll-top table from a junk shop, and to restore it starts working on it on Christmas Eve. While repairing it, he finds a secret space in the last drawer. In that secret space was a small tin box. He finds a letter inside the tin box written by Jim Macpherson, a captain of the English Army to his wife Connie. It was a narration of an incident that took place on the battlefield in 1914 on Christmas Day.

On that day, the German and English soldiers were celebrating Christmas together forgetting the rivalry between them and also that they were at war. They shared wine and food. Also, they played a football match and sang carols at night. The author took this letter to Mrs. Macpherson to the hospital and gave her the best Christmas present in the World

## THE ANT AND THE CRICKET

### WORKING WITH THE POEM

**1. The cricket says, "Oh! What will become of me?" When does he say it, and why?**

**Answer:**

The winter arrived and the cricket did not collect food for himself. The cupboards were empty and he couldn't find even a single crumb to eat. The earth outside was covered with snow and there were no flowers or leaves visible. He felt he would starve and die since nothing could be found.

**2. (i) Find in the poem the lines that mean the same as "Neither a borrower nor a lender be" (Shakespeare).**

**Answer:**

"Neither a borrower nor a lender be" is similar to the line 'But we ants never borrow; we ants never lend' in the poem.

**(ii) What is your opinion of the ant's principles?**

**Answer:**

When the cricket arrived to ask for food at the ant's home, the ant was against it. The ant told the cricket to stop being lazy and work hard. It advised the cricket not to just live in the present but save for the future too. I don't agree with ant's principle. The ant called itself to be a friend of cricket but instead of helping the cricket in times of distress, it started preaching about saving and how he should have been more careful.

**3. The ant tells the cricket to "dance the winter away". Do you think the word 'dance' is appropriate here? If so, why?**

**Answer:**

The cricket sang through the warm sunny summers and didn't store food or winters. On hearing this the ant replied he should do the same in the winters too and the winters shall pass. I don't think the word 'dance' is appropriate because it is commenting sarcastically on the cricket's tendency to be careless. In summers, instead of storing food for the winters it danced and sang. The ant, instead of helping him, is asking to dance and sing so that the time would pass quickly and summer would arrive again.

**4.(i) Which lines in the poem express the poet's comment? Read them aloud.**

**Answer:**

The line “Folks call this a fable. I'll warrant it true” expresses the poet's comment.

**(ii) Write the comment in your own words.**

**Answer:**

A fable is a literary genre, mostly prose or verse, and has animals, plants, inanimate objects, and nature as the main characters, which teach the reader a moral lesson. These stories don't have a scientific base and are fictitious. The poet tells his readers that it is a fable but he believes it is true since he likes the lesson that the story teaches. The cricket did not have anything to eat during winters because he was busy enjoying the warm summer weather. The poet wants the readers to be responsible during the sunny days so that they have sufficient time for the winter days

## **The Ant and the Cricket Summary**

### **Desperate Cricket**

There was a cricket. He used to sing all through the pleasant months of summer and spring. When winter arrived, he found that there was no food at home. Then he said “What will become of me ?” He became desperate by starvation. He went to an ant. He requested him to lend him a shelter from rain and some food. He promised to return it. He added that if the ant did not do what he wanted, he would die.

### **Miserly Ant**

The ant replied that the ants did not ever borrow or lend. He, however, asked the cricket if he did not lay by anything in good weather. He asked him what he did during the warm weather. The cricket replied he was very glad in that pleasant weather. In his happiness, he kept on singing all the time. At this the ant advised him to pass away the winter by dancing. Saying so, the ant turned the cricket out of his house.