

B2 ENGLISH

CHAPTER 2 Practice 4

In this practice you will learn

B2 ENGLISH CHAPTER 2 Practice 4		Completed <i>Yes No</i>		Your Score
B2 Reading	• The sharing economy	☐	☐	/20
	• Why bridges collapse	☐	☐	/26
	• Work-life balance	☐	☐	/22
<i>Read these articles</i>	➤ Lunar New Year	☐	☐	/22
	➤ New Year celebrations	☐	☐	/20
	➤ Christmas	☐	☐	/22
	➤ Thanksgiving	☐	☐	/20

The sharing economy

Read about the sharing economy to practise and improve your reading skills.

Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the text and do the exercises.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

Vocabulary

1. to facilitate
2. inconsistent
3. underutilised
4. lucrative
5. to make a quick buck
6. to not bother with something
7. consumerist society
8. an asset

Definitions

- a. not used a lot or enough
- b. something you own that has value if sold
- c. to make a process or action easier
- d. to make money quickly
- e. to not want to do something because it's too much trouble
- f. something that can make you a lot of money
- g. something that keeps and is not always the same
- h. a society where people who love owning things and are always buying new goods

Reading text: The sharing economy

If we look around us at the things we have purchased at some point in our lives, we would no doubt notice that not everything we own is being put to good use: the thick woollen coat which we thought looked trendy despite the fact that we live in a tropical country, the smartphone that got put away when we bought ourselves the newest model, the car that only gets used at the weekends, or even the guest room in our house that somehow got turned into a storeroom.

Those underutilised items may seem useless to some, but could be an asset to others. With the advent of the internet, online communities have figured out a way to generate profit from the sharing of those underused assets. Using websites and social media groups that facilitate the buying and selling of second-hand goods, it is now easier than ever for peer-to-peer sharing activities to take place. And this is known as the sharing economy.

These democratised online platforms are providing a chance for people to make a quick buck or two. To give an example, busy parents previously might not have bothered with setting up a stall at the local market or car boot sale to sell their children's old equipment, but with online marketplaces, parents are now able to sell on those hardly worn baby clothes that their

children have outgrown and the expensive pushchairs and baby equipment they have invested in, so as to put some cash back into their pockets.

Businesses have also caught on to the profitability of the sharing economy and are seeking to gain from making use of those underutilised resources. A business model that has rapidly risen in popularity sees companies providing an online platform that puts customers in contact with those who can provide a particular product or service. Companies like Airbnb act as a middleman for people to cash in on their unused rooms and houses and let them out as lucrative accommodation. Another example is Uber, which encourages people to use their own personal cars as taxis to make some extra cash in their free time.

This move towards a sharing economy is not without criticisms. Unlike businesses, unregulated individuals do not have to follow certain regulations and this can lead to poorer and inconsistent quality of goods and services and a higher risk of fraud. Nevertheless, in the consumerist society we live in today, the increased opportunities to sell on our unwanted and underused goods can lead to a lesser impact on our environment.

Tasks

Task 1

Circle the best answer.

1. The sharing economy does not involve ...
 - a. people selling their used things to others.
 - b. people offering their services to others.
 - c. businesses selling their goods to people.
 - d. businesses acting as a middleman for people who want to sell a product and people who want to buy it.
2. People can now sell things more easily because ...
 - a. people nowadays buy more things.
 - b. businesses want to buy the things they don't use.
 - c. there are now more market stalls and car boot sales.
 - d. there are now online platforms where they can meet people who want to buy their goods and services.
3. Parents might want to sell their baby clothes and baby equipment because ...
 - a. they want to make back some of the money some of the money they spent on those baby purchases.
 - b. they don't like the baby items they have bought.
 - c. the baby clothes and equipment are old and worn out.
 - d. they need the money for other investments.

4. Which of these is something that the author says we might underutilise?
 - a. A thick coat in a cold country
 - b. The latest smartphone
 - c. Clothes our babies don't or can't wear any more
 - d. The storeroom in our house

5. It might be a problem for unregulated individuals to sell to others because ...
 - a. they have to follow certain regulations.
 - b. what they sell might be of a lower quality.
 - c. they don't have a business licence.
 - d. they like to criticise their buyers.

6. What might be a good title for this article?
 - a. The consumerist society
 - b. Parents who need money
 - c. The rise of the sharing economy
 - d. Why we buy things we don't need

Task 2

Are the sentences true or false?

	Answer	
1. We don't always use everything we buy.	True	False
2. By offering our goods and services online, we can make a profit.	True	False
3. Things that are useless to you will also be useless to others.	True	False
4. Businesses have realized that they can make money by buying people's unwanted goods.	True	False
5. Airbnb is a company that sells people's unwanted houses.	True	False
6. The chance to buy other people's unwanted goods can lead to a greener lifestyle.	True	False

Discussion

Do you participate in the sharing economy?

Why bridges collapse

Read a civil engineering article about why bridges fall to practise and improve your reading skills.

Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the text and do the exercises.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–j) with the vocabulary (1–10).

Vocabulary

1. susceptible to something
2. scrutiny
3. to collapse
4. tragic
5. a defect
6. to bring about
7. to occur
8. crucial
9. to prevent
10. a gorge

Definitions

- a. extremely important
- b. a deep valley with high sides
- c. careful examination of something
- d. to fall down suddenly
- e. causing great sadness
- f. to stop something from happening
- g. easily affected by something
- h. to happen
- i. a fault in something
- j. to make something happen

Reading text: Why bridges collapse

Some of the biggest and most expensive transportation projects in the world have involved building bridges. Bridges are crucial links that carry cars, trucks and trains across bodies of water, mountain gorges or other roads. As a result, they are one of the most important aspects of civil engineering and are subject to intense scrutiny, especially when they collapse.

Bridge collapses can be tragic events, leading to loss of life and serious property damage. That's why bridge engineers, designers and builders must always take their jobs very seriously. The best way for them to prevent these accidents is to understand why bridges collapse in the first place. Understanding bridge collapses can lead to major changes in the design, construction and safety of future building projects. The following are main reasons why bridges fall.

Fire

Historically, more bridges were made of wood and were much more susceptible to fire. This was particularly true of old-fashioned train bridges, where the spark created by the steel wheels and steel tracks could sometimes cause a bridge to catch fire and burn to the ground.

During construction

A large number of bridge accidents occur during the construction of the bridge itself. These accidents are often due to an error made by the engineers, such as a miscalculation. The bridge collapses under its own weight, and this can be deadly for the workers on it at the time.

Earthquakes

Earthquakes damage all structures, including bridges. Luckily, this kind of collapse is relatively infrequent, especially with modern bridges. Engineers have learned to design bridges in earthquake zones on areas that are much more resistant to movement.

By defect

Some bridge collapses are mysteries, and engineers only realise why after they conduct a complete investigation. In some cases, this could happen because inferior-quality material was used in the construction, or because of a defect in a key piece of the bridge. In other cases, the bridge was designed only to support a certain amount of weight and no more.

Boat or train crash

Both of these kinds of accidents are extremely rare, but boats and trains can cause a bridge to collapse for different reasons. With trains, it's the velocity of the impact that can bring a bridge down. With boats, it's the very large mass they have that can bring about the collapse, even if they are moving very slowly when it occurs.

The best way to avoid bridge failures is to plan for them. Modern technologies that can detect structural weakness, safer working environments and better designs can all help to reduce these terrible accidents.

Tasks

Task 1

Circle the correct answer.

1. Why are bridges considered so important according to the article?
 - a. They are important parts of a transportation network.
 - b. They cost a lot of money.
 - c. When they collapse it's a serious problem.
2. How can the people who make bridges stop collapse?
 - a. By studying for longer at university
 - b. By asking engineering experts to check their work
 - c. By studying the reasons for a collapse
3. Which of the following reasons is given as the cause of a bridge catching fire?
 - a. A lightning strike
 - b. The contact between train tracks and train wheels
 - c. The extreme heat of a train
4. Which is an example of an error during construction?
 - a. The bridge catches fire.
 - b. A mistake is made in the calculations.
 - c. There is a natural disaster.
5. How common is it for an earthquake to destroy a bridge?
 - a. Very common in earthquakes zones
 - b. Relatively common
 - c. Relatively uncommon
6. Which of the following is not mentioned as a defect in bridge construction?
 - a. A badly made part
 - b. Inexperienced designers or engineers
 - c. Poor-quality materials
7. How does a train cause a bridge to collapse?
 - a. By being too heavy for a bridge to support
 - b. By being very big
 - c. By hitting a bridge very fast
8. What role can modern technology have in reducing bridge accidents?
 - a. It can detect weak spots in the construction.
 - b. It can stop human error.
 - c. It can select higher-quality materials.

Task 2

Circle the correct word to complete the sentences.

1. _____ a result, civil engineers study collapses closely.
 - a. As
 - b. For
 - c. In
2. The accident was subject _____ a full investigation.
 - a. for
 - b. of
 - c. to
3. Luckily there was no _____ of life in the accident.
 - a. lose
 - b. loss
 - c. lost
4. Young children are susceptible _____ illness.
 - a. for
 - b. of
 - c. to
5. It only takes a few minutes for the leaves to _____ fire.
 - a. catch
 - b. get
 - c. start
6. The accident was _____ to an error in construction.
 - a. cause
 - b. due
 - c. find
7. The bridge could collapse _____ its own weight.
 - a. below
 - b. in
 - c. under
8. The police will _____ an investigation.
 - a. conduct
 - b. do
 - c. make

Discussion

What are some of the most famous bridges you know? Have you ever visited them?

Work–life balance

Read what four people have to say about their working hours to practise and improve your reading skills.

Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the text and do the exercises.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–j) with the vocabulary (1–10).

Vocabulary

1. idle chit-chat
2. parental leave
3. to bounce ideas off someone
4. to wear someone out
5. to clock in
6. to make a concession
7. paid on a pro-rata basis
8. a freelancer
9. a commute
10. to be left to your own devices

Definitions

- a. a regular journey between work and home
- b. to be allowed to decide what to do by yourself
- c. to record the time you begin work
- d. a period of time a parent takes off work to take care of their new child
- e. calculated according to how many hours you work
- f. to make someone very tired
- g. to give or allow something in order to end an argument or conflict
- h. talk that is informal and irrelevant to work
- i. a person who sells their services or work by the hour or day
- j. to share ideas with someone in order to get feedback on them

Reading text: Work–life balance

Ronan

I work in a fairly traditional office environment doing a typical nine-to-five job. I like my job, but it's annoying that my commute to work takes an hour and a half each way and most of my work could really be done online from home. But my boss doesn't seem to trust that we will get any work done if left to our own devices, and everyone in the company has to clock in and out every day. It's frustrating that they feel the need to monitor what we do so closely instead of judging us based on our task performance, like most companies do these days.

Jo

I used to do a typical five-day week, but after I came out of my parental leave, I decided that I wanted to spend more time with my children before they start school. After negotiating with my boss, we decided to cut my working week down to a three-day work week. This of course meant a significant cut in my pay too, as I'm paid on a pro-rata basis. I've since noticed, though, that my workload hasn't decreased in the slightest! I'm now doing five days' worth of work in three days, but getting paid much less for it! I find myself having to take work home just so that I can meet the deadlines. It's wearing me out trying to juggle work with looking after my children and my family, but I don't dare to bring this up with my boss because I think he feels as if he's made a huge concession letting me come in only three days a week.

Marcus

I work for a global IT company, but because their headquarters is in the States, I do all my work online from home. That means that I don't waste time commuting or making idle chit-chat with colleagues. I work on a project basis, and this flexibility is very valuable to me because it means that I can easily take some time off when my children need me to go to their school performances or if I need to schedule an appointment with the dentist. The downside is that without clear office hours, I tend to work well into the evening, sometimes skipping dinner to finish a task. It can also get quite lonely working on my own, and I sometimes miss sharing ideas with colleagues.

Lily

I'm a freelancer and work for myself. This is great because I am in control of what I do and how I spend my time. At first, I was working from home, but I found it really hard to concentrate. There were just too many distractions around: housework that needed doing, another cup of tea, my family members wanting my attention for various things. So I started to go to a nearby café to work, but the Wi-Fi connection wasn't ideal and I found myself drinking too much coffee. In the end, I decided to rent a desk in a co-working space with five other freelancers like myself. I liked getting dressed to go to work in the morning and being able to focus in an office environment. The other freelancers do similar kinds of web-based work to me and so it's nice to have workmates to bounce ideas off as well.

Tasks

Task 1

Circle the best answer.

1. Ronan would prefer it if he ...
 - a. wasn't left to his own devices.
 - b. could spend more time commuting and less time in the office.
 - c. could work from home and be judged based on task performance.
 - d. could trust his boss more.
2. Jo wanted to reduce her working hours because she ...
 - a. thought she would be more efficient and productive when she was at the office.
 - b. wanted to bring her work home.
 - c. wanted to go on parental leave.
 - d. wanted to spend time with her children.
3. Jo is unhappy with her three-day work week because ...
 - a. she didn't realise how much the change would affect her economically.
 - b. she now has to spend more time looking after her children and her family.
 - c. she has more deadlines to meet.
 - d. her workload has remained the same although she's reduced her hours.
4. In Marcus's opinion, which of these is a disadvantage of working from home?
 - a. You spend a lot of time in the house.
 - b. It's easy to get distracted by your family.
 - c. You tend to work later.
 - d. You end up eating more as you have access to the fridge all day.
5. Why did Lily not like working from home?
 - a. She found it lonely.
 - b. Her family didn't like her working.
 - c. She didn't have a good Wi-Fi connection.
 - d. There were a lot of distractions.
6. What solution did Lily find most suitable for her working needs?
 - a. Renting an office space to work from.
 - b. Working from a café.
 - c. Working for an employer.
 - d. Working for other freelancers.

Task 2

Are the sentences true or false?

	Answer	
1. Ronan's boss thinks his employees will not be as productive if they work from home.	True	False
2. Ronan thinks that the performance of employees should be judged according to how much time they spend in the office.	True	False
3. Jo is paid the same for a five-day work week as she is on a three-day week.	True	False
4. Jo feels exhausted trying to manage both a five-day workload and childcare.	True	False
5. Although Marcus sees the benefit in not having idle chit-chat, he misses interacting with his colleagues.	True	False
6. Lily didn't like working from the café because the coffee wasn't very good.	True	False

Discussion

What are the advantages and disadvantages of your working situation? What would you change if you could?

Were you born in the year of the Dog, the Monkey or maybe the Rooster? Read on to find out more about Lunar New Year and how it is celebrated in some places in Asia.

Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the article and do the exercises.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

Vocabulary

Definition

- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| 1. a cycle | a. to give something to someone for their good work or behaviour |
| 2. an emperor | b. to be successful and become rich |
| 3. to reward | c. to rest your body on your knees |
| 4. respect | d. what will happen to you |
| 5. to kneel | e. a group of events that happen in an order and are often repeated |
| 6. to bow | f. to bend forward the top of your body to show respect |
| 7. to prosper | g. a male ruler or king |
| 8. fortune | h. admiration for someone |

Lunar New Year

The lunar calendar is based on the cycles of the moon, so the date of Lunar New Year is different each year. However, it is usually in January or February. As well as being celebrated in China, Lunar New Year is also an important festival in many other places, including Vietnam, Singapore and Korea.

Each year is named after one of 12 animals. A traditional story explains how this came to be. One day, the Emperor decided to have a race for all the animals in the country. Unfortunately, only 12 animals actually managed to get to the race. The Emperor rewarded them by naming the 12 years of the lunar calendar after them. The first to finish was the rat, so the first year is named after him. The other eleven, in order, were the ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, goat, monkey, rooster, dog and pig.

A family celebration

Different places celebrate in slightly different ways, but Lunar New Year is very much a family celebration wherever it takes place. The younger generation greet their parents and grandparents with good wishes for the year ahead and show their respect for the older

generation. In Korea this is called *sebae*. The young people kneel on the ground and bow deeply.

Older members of the family give younger ones cash presents, traditionally in small packets. Red packets are used in China and Vietnam, as red is a lucky colour. Nowadays, many people send money electronically too. It is lucky to send money in certain amounts, for example using the number eight, which in Chinese sounds like the word 'prosper'.

Traditional food

Traditional foods which are eaten at Lunar New Year often have another meaning. For example, in China, many people eat fish dishes because the Chinese word for 'fish' sounds similar to 'surplus', meaning you will have plenty.

In Korea, people serve a special soup. Thin pieces of rice cake are boiled in a clear soup with slices of beef and vegetables. The rice cake pieces are round and may represent coins and money. It is said that eating this soup at New Year makes you one year older. People joke that if you have two bowls of soup, you'll be two years older!

A traditional Vietnamese food is square rice cake, wrapped in leaves. It's stuffed with pork and vegetables and takes many hours to prepare, so many people buy the cake instead of making it.

Other traditions

There are many other Lunar New Year traditions. For example, in Vietnam, people believe that the first person to enter their home in the New Year will decide their fortune for the year ahead. They are careful to invite someone who is kind, well behaved and successful.

In Korea, families often play traditional board games together, such as *yunnori*. In this game, teams take it in turn to throw four specially shaped sticks into the air. They move around the board depending on how the sticks fall.

In China, many people have firecrackers, which burn and make a loud bang. They watch street performances, where acrobatic dancers dress up as a lion or a dragon. They dance, accompanied by music and drums.

People celebrate Lunar New Year in many different ways, but all the celebrations are about wishing everyone the very best for the year ahead. What do you wish for next year?

Tasks

Task 1

Are the sentences true or false?

	Answer	
1. The date of the lunar new year changes every year.	True	False
2. In the story, all the animals in the country joined the Emperor's race.	True	False
3. Young people in Korea give their parents money.	True	False
4. In China, it would be unlucky to give someone 88 dollars.	True	False
5. Eating rice cake soup is a way of showing you are now a year older.	True	False
6. In Korea, the round shape of the rice cakes does not have any special meaning.	True	False
7. Street performers in China may dress up as a dragon or tiger.	True	False
8. All the Lunar New Year celebrations are about hoping for a good year ahead.	True	False

Task 2

Where do people do these things to celebrate Lunar New Year? Circle the correct answer.

- People invite someone special to visit their house.
 - China
 - Korea
 - Vietnam
- People use firecrackers.
 - China
 - Korea
 - Vietnam
- People eat a square rice cake.
 - China
 - Korea
 - Vietnam
- People play a game called *yunnori*.
 - China
 - Korea
 - Vietnam
- People think it is lucky to eat fish.
 - China
 - Korea
 - Vietnam
- Young family members bow deeply to older ones.
 - China
 - Korea
 - Vietnam

Discussion

What do you wish for the new year?

New Year celebrations

On the night of 31 December and the morning of 1 January, people in many countries all over the world will celebrate the beginning of a new year. How will they celebrate and how did this tradition begin?

Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the article and do the exercises.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

Vocabulary

Definition

- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| 1. to coincide | a. a cereal used for making food or alcohol |
| 2. astronomical | b. to cover the surrounding land with water |
| 3. to flood | c. a promise to do something |
| 4. to be recorded | d. to happen at the same time |
| 5. barley | e. something done regularly in the same way to mark an important occasion |
| 6. a ritual | f. relating to the stars |
| 7. a host | g. to be written down for future reference |
| 8. a commitment | h. the person or place that provides space for a special event |

New Year celebrations

'For last year's words belong to last year's language
And next year's words await another voice.
And to make an end is to make a beginning.' – TS Eliot

New year, old celebrations

There have been celebrations to mark the beginning of a new year for thousands of years. Sometimes these were simply an opportunity for people to eat, drink and have fun, but in some places the festivities were connected to the land or astronomical events. For example, in Egypt the beginning of the year coincided with when the River Nile flooded, and this normally happened when the star Sirius rose. The Persians and Phoenicians started their new year at the spring equinox (this is around 20 March when the Sun shines more or less directly on the equator and the length of the night and the day are almost the same).

The oldest celebration

The city of Babylon in ancient Mesopotamia was where the first New Year's celebrations were recorded about 4,000 years ago. The Babylonians held their celebrations on the first new

moon after the spring equinox and called this festival Akitu (which comes from the word the Sumerians used for barley). Barley was cut in Mesopotamia in the spring, and during Akitu there was a different ritual on each of the 11 days that the celebration lasted. Statues of the gods were carried through the streets of the city, and in this way the Babylonians believed that their world had been cleaned to prepare for the new year and a new spring.

Modern celebrations

In many cities all over the world, spectacular fireworks displays take place as soon as the clock passes midnight on 31 December. In recent years, Sydney in Australia has been the host to one of the first of these celebrations as New Year arrives there before most other major international cities. The display takes place in Sydney Harbour, with the Opera House and Harbour Bridge making it a stunning setting. Fireworks light up the skies in hundreds of cities as 12 midnight strikes around the globe.

Traditions that live on

There are a number of strange and interesting New Year's traditions around the world. In Scotland, New Year's Eve is called Hogmanay and 'first footing' remains a popular custom with people visiting friends' and neighbours' houses just after midnight. The first person who visits your house should bring a gift as this will mean good luck. In Spain, it is the custom to eat 12 grapes as the bells sound for midnight on 31 December. One grape is eaten at each sound of the bell and each grape is supposed to bring good luck for each month of the year ahead. In Brazil, Ecuador, Bolivia, Venezuela and some other Central and South American countries, people wear special underwear of different colours on New Year's Eve. Red is supposed to be good for bringing love in the new year, while yellow is supposed to bring money.

Out with the old, in with the new

The new year is a perfect time to make a change for the better. The tradition of making New Year's resolutions is more common in the western hemisphere but also exists in the eastern hemisphere. This tradition involves a person making a commitment to change an unwanted habit or behaviour or setting a personal objective. Typical New Year's resolutions might be to give up smoking, eat healthier food, do more exercise, become more organised or laugh more – but really, a New Year's resolution can be almost anything. However, research suggests that many New Year's resolutions fail. Being realistic about the objectives you set and not making too many New Year's resolutions might help you to achieve success.

Tasks

Task 1

Are the sentences true or false?

	Answer	
1. Many years ago, new year celebrations were almost always held at the time of an astronomical event.	True	False
2. During Akitu in ancient Mesopotamia, a variety of rituals took place.	True	False
3. The way Sydney welcomes the new year is very different from other important cities.	True	False
4. 'First footing' in Scotland involves people giving presents.	True	False
5. In Spain, people eat a number of grapes just after midnight during New Year celebrations.	True	False
6. Researchers have found out that many people do not succeed in keeping their New Year's resolutions.	True	False

Task 2

Write the correct form of the word in brackets to complete the sentences.

- On 1 January, people in many countries all over the world will hold a (celebrate) to mark the beginning of a new year.
- In Egypt, the (begin) of the new year was when the River Nile flooded.
- The spring equinox is when the sun shines almost (direct) on the equator.
- There are some (interest) New Year's traditions in different countries.
- New Year's resolutions often involve changing an (want) habit such as spending too much time watching television.
- It is important to be (real) when it comes to making New Year's resolutions.

Discussion

How do you celebrate the new year?

It's the time of year for Santa Claus, fairy lights and all the best pop songs. What are the essential elements of Christmas in the UK?

Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the article and do the exercises.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

Vocabulary

Definition

- | | |
|--------------------------|---|
| 1. in bad taste | a. a group of people who belong to a house (for example, a family, flatmates, etc.) |
| 2. a get-together | b. low quality and in bad taste |
| 3. a decoration | c. a brother or sister |
| 4. cheesy | d. happy or religious songs sung at Christmas |
| 5. a household | e. an informal meeting, usually between friends or family |
| 6. Christmas carols | f. a person or company which sells products to the public |
| 7. a retailer | g. not very sophisticated or elegant |
| 8. a sibling | h. a pretty thing put on a house or street to celebrate a special moment |

Christmas

It's that time of the year for family, friends ... and cheesy Christmas music. For many people, Christmas is quite simply (as an old pop song says) 'the most wonderful time of the year'. For others, it is an exhausting exercise in bad taste. So what does a British Christmas involve?

Special days

Christmas is a celebration that lasts for several days. In the UK and many other countries, the main celebration takes place on Christmas Day (25 December). From the Christian origins of the holiday, this day marks the birth of Jesus Christ. Christmas Eve (24 December) is the time for last-minute shopping and preparations, present-wrapping and maybe a drink in the pub. Others will be at home preparing food for the big day or at a midnight church service to welcome Christmas Day. Boxing Day (26 December) is also a national holiday in the UK – a necessary one for many, to recover after eating too much the day before! Shops are usually open on Boxing Day and the big after-Christmas sales begin.

Decorations

From huge cities to tiny villages, the month of December sees buildings and streets covered in coloured lights, red ribbons and smiling Santa Claus faces. People also decorate their houses (and sometimes their gardens) for the Christmas period. The most famous decoration is, of course, the Christmas tree – a pine tree covered in little shiny decorations and fairy lights. Some people put a nativity scene in their house. This is a collection of little figures who represent the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.

Family and friends

Christmas is a time to be with the people you love. Often, this involves travelling to your hometown to be with parents, siblings, cousins, old friends, etc. For some households, it's the only time of the year when all the family is together. In the UK, this is usually a time for chats, cups of tea and watching Christmas films together. However, it can also lead to occasional family tension. But don't worry: there are plenty of impossibly cheerful pop songs to help everyone relax!

Food

Christmas meals vary across households, but the most common Christmas dinner in the UK is a roasted turkey with vegetables and potatoes. This may be accompanied by stuffing (made with bread, onions and herbs) and pigs in blankets (sausages wrapped in bacon or pastry). And, of course, delicious mince pies – little sweet cakes with fruit inside. This is, of course, fantastic if someone is cooking for you. If you're the cook, you may feel under a little pressure as the extended family start arriving for dinner!

Presents

Christmas is certainly the most wonderful time of the year for retailers! The days and weeks before Christmas are characterised by frantic shopping for presents. Many groups of friends or workmates take part in a 'Secret Santa' group. This is where each person buys a small present for one other person in the group, but the identity of the giver is never revealed. In many countries, Christmas Eve is a night for kids to go to bed early before their house is visited by Santa Claus, a magic man in a red suit who leaves presents for all the kids in the house.

Parties

Apart from dinner at home with family or friends, Christmas is also a time for parties. At school, children often do a Christmas theatre performance or sing Christmas carols in a concert, then have a party with sweets and cakes. For adults, most workplaces usually have their Christmas 'do'. This can be a dinner in a restaurant or just a few drinks in a bar. At workplace parties, many romances have started under the mistletoe, a special plant which people hang from the ceiling. If you meet somebody under the mistletoe, the tradition is to kiss that person.

However you celebrate Christmas, for many it's a time for having fun and spending time with the people you love. Plastic decorations and neon Santa Claus faces might be considered to be in bad taste by some people, but without them, it simply wouldn't be Christmas.

Tasks

Task 1

Are the sentences true or false?

	Answer	
1. The text suggests that everybody loves Christmas.	True	False
2. In the UK, 25 December is the most important day during the Christmas period.	True	False
3. A nativity scene is a reminder of the religious origins of Christmas.	True	False
4. The text suggests that Christmas can be a time for family arguments.	True	False
5. In the UK, roast beef is the most common food at Christmas.	True	False
6. The activity called 'Secret Santa' is usually only for children.	True	False
7. If you meet someone under the mistletoe plant, you have to give them a present.	True	False
8. Some people in the UK go shopping in the sales on Boxing Day.	True	False

Task 2

Put the words and phrases in order to make sentences.

- wonderful time is certainly Christmas for retailers. the most of the year
- for the period. decorate People Christmas their houses
- are usually Day. Shops on Boxing open
- bed early. Eve is Christmas a night to go to for kids
- Christmas carols do a Christmas theatre At school, performance or sing in a concert. children often
- time with the people having fun Christmas is and spending you love. a time for

Discussion

Do you celebrate Christmas? If so, how is your celebration different from what is described in the text?

Every autumn, Canadian and American families gather for a day centred around community, food and giving thanks – the day of Thanksgiving. Where did this holiday come from and how is it celebrated today?

Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the article and do the exercises.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

Vocabulary	Definition
1. a pilgrim	a. not connected to religion
2. a settler	b. a large meal
3. a harvest	c. a religious traveller
4. a feast	d. being thankful
5. secular	e. a decision that allows someone to go free
6. light-hearted	f. amusing and cheerful; not serious
7. a pardon	g. when food is collected from fields and gardens
8. gratitude	h. someone who moves to another region or country, starting a new home and life

Thanksgiving

The history of Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving combines the traditions of different groups of people. Travellers and migrants brought different religious traditions from Europe to the United States and Canada. Several celebrations are claimed as the first Thanksgiving. The best known is the celebration held by the pilgrims in what is now Plymouth, Massachusetts after their journey across the Atlantic Ocean on the famous Mayflower ship. Like the pilgrims, many groups held days of prayer, fasting or feasting to give thanks for successfully making the long boat journey. Later, settlers celebrated their successful harvest in a new land by holding feasts with their Native American neighbours. Over time, the Canadian and American traditions have become similar and developed into the modern holiday of Thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving today

In Canada, Thanksgiving is celebrated on the second Monday in October. In the United States, it is on the fourth Thursday in November. Although its origins are religious, today, Thanksgiving is a largely secular holiday. For most Americans and Canadians, it is a day for

coming together with family and friends to share a large meal. It is an occasion to spend time with loved ones and express gratitude for the year that has passed. In many households there is a tradition of everyone seated at the table sharing what they are most grateful for.

Thanksgiving food

Thanksgiving is also about food. Thanksgiving dinner traditionally includes roast turkey, mashed potatoes, cranberry sauce and, for dessert, apple, pumpkin or pecan pies. Every family has its own recipes, sometimes secret recipes handed down through generations. Turkey, a bird native to North America, is the unofficial mascot of Thanksgiving, with roast turkey on the menu and turkey decorations on the wall. In the United States, a tradition of gifting turkeys to the President has more recently evolved into a humorous turkey 'pardoning'. At this light-hearted ceremony, the President issues an official pardon for one or two turkeys, saving them from being cooked for supper.

More than food: football, parades and traffic jams!

Beyond food and gratitude, there are some unexpected sides to the American and Canadian holiday. One of these is football. This popular sport is an important part of the holiday, when families gather around to cheer on local or national teams. American football and Canadian football are both similar to rugby, played primarily not with the feet but with the hands.

Parades are another common part of the festivities. In the United States, the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade takes place in New York City on the morning of Thanksgiving. It's one of the world's largest parades and is broadcast nationwide. A similar Thanksgiving parade happens in Canada as part of the Kitchener – Waterloo Oktoberfest, a multi-day autumn festival.

Unfortunately, heavy traffic is also common at Thanksgiving. In both countries, the week of Thanksgiving is one of the most popular travel times of the year, as everyone heads home to visit their extended family. So try to avoid any road trips if you're visiting North America during this holiday!

Tasks

Task 1

Are the sentences true or false?

	Answer	
1. Thanksgiving was originally celebrated by European settlers in North America.	True	False
2. At many Thanksgiving celebrations, everyone tells the group what they are most thankful for.	True	False
3. Modern-day Thanksgiving celebrations are very religious.	True	False
4. The main part of Thanksgiving is the preparation and sharing of a big meal.	True	False
5. Only Americans play and watch football during Thanksgiving.	True	False
6. The American President kills two turkeys every year.	True	False

Task 2

Complete the sentences with words from the box.

feast	gratitude	light-hearted
pardon	secular	settlers

1. New from Europe brought religious traditions with them to North America.
2. Even though the first Thanksgiving celebrations were days of prayer, the modern holiday is largely
3. A roast turkey is the centrepiece of the big Thanksgiving
4. Modern Thanksgiving is a, fun holiday full of activities like football and parades.
5. The American President saves some turkeys from being feasted on by issuing a presidential
6. More than just food and fun, Thanksgiving is about and reflecting on a successful year.

Discussion

When do families gather to have a feast in your country?