

TEXT	A <i>CHRISTMAS CAROL</i> (1843)
AUTHOR	Charles Dickens
THEMES	London (unit 2), food (unit 14)
VOCABULARY	Food and eating
WRITING	Students write a menu.
SPEAKING	Students role play ordering in a restaurant.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A Christmas Carol is one of Charles Dickens' (1812–1870) most famous and popular stories. Numerous film versions have been made, including one by The Muppets, a Disney version with Donald Duck as Scrooge and a visually stunning animated version starring Jim Carey. Dickens used to perform this story to audiences and was such a skillful storyteller that people in the audience are reported as having cried and screamed during the performance. But this is much more than a good winter tale. It is one of the earliest examples of time travel being used in literature. It was also making a powerful social argument. At the time it was written, adults and children who were very poor could be sent to a 'workhouse' – basically a factory prison – where they lived and worked in terrible conditions. Dickens spent part of his childhood living in a prison due to his father's debts, so he was especially aware of the distress and humiliation this involved. Dickens and other social reformers of the time thought workhouses inhumane and contrary to the values of society. The story can therefore be seen as a condemnation of these policies (in the figure of Scrooge) and the restoration of a caring, generous society where the better-off help those who are poor or in need.

WARMER

There are many film versions of this story. Find two film trailers of contrasting types of films (see *Background information*). You can find them on various websites dedicated to film trailers. Ask students to compare them. Which looks most interesting? Which looks scarier? Funnier?

ABOUT YOU

Use the discussion questions to get students thinking about special meals and occasions. Prompt them if necessary – weddings, birthdays, religious festivals, etc. Use the introduction to set the scene. Elicit the meaning of the word *crutch*. You might also want to discuss how difficult life might have been at this time if you had a physical disability. (How did you get around? How did you earn money?)

- 1 This is a good text to read out loud in order to create the atmosphere of excitement and anticipation. Try exaggerating phrases to make them more dramatic and use facial expressions that suggest what the characters feel. If you haven't done this kind of reading before, it might seem too much but students enjoy the 'drama' and it's a very good way of getting them to imagine the scene.

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Possible answers

- 1 The phrase *it seemed* emphasises the excitement and wonder of the family. You might want to discuss how we use *seem* to describe a subjective feeling.
- 2 Mrs Cratchit has done the cooking, Peter mashed potatoes, Belinda sweetened the sauce. Bob, Peter and the two young Cratchits fetch the goose. The two young Cratchits also set the chairs and unnamed people help arrange the table.
- 3 Elicit the idea of *procession* as something very special and serious. The way they bring the food to the table is therefore a special moment, done with great ceremony.
- 4 There is a *breathless pause* which suggests anticipation and excitement. Get students to copy the action – taking a sudden breath because they are anticipating something special. She is going to carve the meat and this is what they have been waiting for and preparing all day, so they are very excited.
- 5 Ask for suggestions. Perhaps it's very difficult to cook, or she's afraid it won't be as good as the goose, or she's worried they won't like it, etc.

VOCABULARY

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Answers

- 1 sweeten 2 tender 3 processions 4 carving 5 breathless

4

Answers

- 1 goose 2 mashed 3 gravy 4 sweetened ('carving' is not used)

WRITING

- 5 With the whole class, brainstorm different kinds of restaurants (Italian, Sushi, Chinese, etc). Ask how we describe the parts of the meal: *first course/starter, main course/second course, dessert/pudding*. Tell the students to work in groups and choose a restaurant type and create a menu. The menu should not just be a list – each option should have a very short description. For example: *Tomato soup – hot and spicy. Cheese – a local strong cheese*. Students will probably need help with vocabulary, so provide dictionaries and monitor their progress. Each group should produce a written menu. You can show students an example of a typical menu by searching menus online if that helps them.

SPEAKING

- 6 Choose a student from each group to be the restaurant staff for another group. They should present the menu, answer any questions and take the order. Remind students of the kinds of things we ask in a restaurant: *Is it fresh? Are the portions very big? Is it very sweet?* The activity can be repeated by choosing more students from each group to take the orders of another group and so on. Depending on how long you want to spend on this, there is a lot of other functional language you could bring in (asking about payment, complaining, thanking, complimenting, agreeing, disagreeing, etc.).

MIXED ABILITY

Activities 5 and 6 allow for a distribution of roles according to ability. Most of the input in Activity 5 will probably come from stronger students, while weaker students can have the responsibility of designing the written menu. In the Speaking activity, stronger students take the orders and answer questions. Weaker students are the diners.