

**Telling the audience where they can find further information**

I am afraid that I don't have time to go into this in any further detail. But you can find more information about it on this website (which is on the back page of your handout).

**Thanking the audience**

Thank you for your attention.

**Inviting the audience to ask questions**

You are welcome with your questions.

If you would like to know more, I shall be glad to answer any questions.

So, let throw it open to questions.

**What to say when you don't understand a question from the audience**

Sorry, could you repeat the question more slowly please?

Sorry, could you speak up please?

Sorry, I didn't hear the first/last part of your question.

Sorry, I still don't understand – would you mind asking me the question again in the break?

**Interpreting the questions**

If I'm not wrong, I think what you are asking is ...

Can I just be sure that I understand? You are asking me if ...

So your question is ...

**Avoiding difficult questions**

I'm not familiar with the details regarding that question.

I can't give you an exact answer on that, I am afraid.

That's a good question and I wish I had a ready answer, but I am afraid I don't.

I am not sure there really is a right or wrong answer to that. What I personally believe is ....

**Commenting on audience questions**

I know exactly what you mean but the thing is ...

I take your point but in my experience I have found that ...

You're quite right and it is something that I am actually working on now.

You can exploit useful phrases to deal with difficult questions, to react when you don't understand a question, to extricate yourself from difficult situations in the question and answer part of your presentation.

**5. CONCLUSION**

It is important that you structure your speech and use linking words and phrases to make your presentation sound logical. Using the most appropriate phrase in different stages of your presentation will give you confidence when you move from slide to slide and topic to topic. Signposts, language signals and transitions will also enable you to deal with unexpected situations and with difficult questions that the audience may ask you. You don't need to learn all the phrases listed in this article, just choose the ones you find easiest to say and remember.

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**CHRISTMAS SYMBOLICS IN CHARLES DICKENS' LITERARY WORKS**

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*The article deals with the description and analysis of Christmas symbols portrayed in "A Christmas Carol" and "A Christmas Tree" by Charles Dickens. The writer's contribution in the establishment and development of Christmas traditions in Great Britain is explained.*

Charles Dickens has had a great influence on the way people celebrate Christmas today. In 1988, the Sunday Telegraph of London gave Charles Dickens the title of "The Man Who Invented Christmas." This may seem like an enormous exaggeration. But the research carried out shows that the Telegraph's hyperbole turns out to be closer to the truth than it might be expected.

In England at the turn of the nineteenth century the celebration of Christmas was in decline. The medieval Christmas traditions, which combined the celebration of the birth of Christ with the ancient Roman festival of Saturnalia (a pagan celebration for the Roman god of agriculture), and the Germanic winter festival of Yule, had come under intense scrutiny by the Puritans under Oliver Cromwell. Moreover, industrialization and urbanization, in full swing in this time, made people leave behind most of their cultural traditions, such as the celebration of Christmas. Basically, the early Victorians were unsure how a rural festival could be celebrated by busy cityfolk in the industrial age – and Dickens took it upon himself to tell them.

Dickens did not invent Christmas traditions, he resurrected and popularized them. Much of what we assume to be true of Christmas celebrations today derives from the vision of Dickens, especially as portrayed in "A Christmas Carol" and "A Christmas Tree".

One of the main Christmas symbols is a decorated tree, usually an evergreen conifer such as spruce, pine, or fir, which is called a Christmas tree, "that pretty German toy" [5], as Dickens calls it in his story "A Christmas Tree". The custom of the Christmas tree developed in early modern Germany where devout Christians brought decorated trees into their homes. The tree was traditionally decorated with edibles such as apples, nuts, or other foods. In the 18th century, it began to be illuminated by candles which were ultimately replaced by Christmas lights after the advent of electrification. The German custom of decorating the Christmas tree was brought to England by Prince Albert. Charles Dickens describes this Christmas symbol as follows: "The tree was planted in the middle of a great round table, and towered high above their heads. It was brilliantly lit by a multitude of little tapers; and everywhere sparkled and glittered with bright objects. There were rosy-cheeked dolls, hiding behind the green leaves; and there were real watches... there were French polished tables, chairs, bedsteads, wardrobes, eight-day clocks (wonderfully made, in tin, at Wolverhampton), perched among the boughs, as if in preparation for some fairy housekeeping... there were fiddles and drums; there were tambourines, books, work-boxes, paint-boxes, sweetmeat boxes, peep-show-boxes... there were tee-totums, humming-tops, needle-cases, pen-wipers, smelling-bottles, conversation-cards, bouquet-holders; real fruit, made artificially dazzling with gold leaf; imitation apples, pears, and walnuts, crammed with surprises" [5].

Other, not less important Christmas symbols are mistletoe, ivy and holly (Fig. 1, 2, 3). Mistletoe is supposed to possess mystical powers which bring good luck to the household and wards off evil spirits. It was also used as a sign of love and friendship in Norse mythology and that's where the custom of kissing under mistletoe comes from. Holly and ivy remain green year round, signifying eternal life, and the bright red berries of some holly plants are cheerful spots of colour.

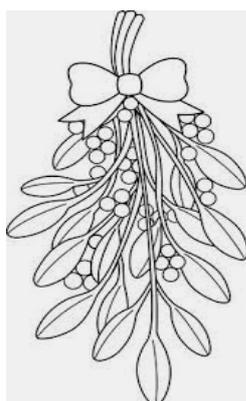


Fig. 1. Christmas Mistletoe



Fig. 2. Christmas Ivy

As said in "A Christmas Carol", "...and winking from their shelves in wanton slyness at the girls as they went by, and glanced demurely at the hung-up mistletoe», «The crisp leaves of holly, mistletoe, and ivy reflected back the light, as if so many little mirrors had been scattered there" [4].

The next symbol, widely used at Christmas, is light. It is presented in different forms: as light in general to make dark winter time brighter, as lights to decorate a Christmas tree, as fire in a fireplace. Scrooge in "A Christmas Carol" reminds his youth and a Christmas party at a well-lit room: "...the lamps were trimmed,

fuel was heaped upon the fire; and the warehouse was as snug, and warm, and dry, and bright a ball-room, as you would desire to see upon a winter's night" [4].

A Christmas dinner is an essential part of Christmas celebrations. Traditional Christmas food, as described by Dickens, includes a roast goose (later changed by turkey) served with stuffing; cranberry or apple sauce; roast potatoes (sometimes also boiled or mashed); vegetables; with dessert of Christmas pudding (or plum pudding): "Such a bustle ensued that you might have thought a goose the rarest of all birds; a feathered phenomenon, to which a black swan was a matter of course – and in truth it was something very like it in that house... At last the dishes were set on, and grace was said. It was succeeded by a breathless pause... There never was such a goose. Eked out by apple-sauce and mashed potatoes, it was a sufficient dinner for the whole family... The pudding was out of the copper... At last the dinner was all done, the cloth was cleared, the hearth swept, and the fire made up. The compound in the jug being tasted, and considered perfect, apples and oranges were put upon the table, and a shovel-full of chestnuts on the fire" [4]. The tradition to have a goose for Christmas dinner changed after Dickens had described the turkey as a main dish.



Fig. 3. Christmas Holly

Christmas time is always associated with prosperity and abundance: "Heaped up on the floor, to form a kind of throne, were turkeys, geese, game, poultry, brawn, great joints of meat, sucking-pigs, long wreaths of sausages, mince-pies, plum-puddings, barrels of oysters, red-hot chestnuts, cherry-cheeked apples, juicy oranges, luscious pears, immense twelfth-cakes, and seething bowls of punch, that made the chamber dim with their delicious steam" [4]. So, Christmas is the time for being equal and generous to other people.

Christmas is a holiday that unites families, relatives come to see each other and gather at the table or around the fire, making warm and cozy atmosphere. Such an atmosphere of comfort and coziness is considered another Christmas symbol. Dickens depicts a happy family in their cozy house preparing for Christmas dinner: "There was nothing of high mark in this. They were not a handsome family; they were not well dressed; their shoes were far from being water-proof; their clothes were scanty; and Peter might have known, and very likely did, the inside of a pawnbroker's. But, they were happy, grateful, pleased with one another, and contented with the time», «the flickering of the blaze showed preparations for a cozy dinner" [4].

To conclude, Dickens created his own "Carol Philosophy", the idea of Christmas as "a good time: a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time: the only time I know of in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of other people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys" [4].

Starting with "A Christmas Carol" published on December 19, 1843 Charles Dickens wrote stories for Christmas every year. Thus, his special contributions to Christmas traditions can be presented as follows:

1. Christmas as a major holiday. At the time of Dickens, it was relatively ignored by most people.
2. Christmas as an occasion for family and close friends to gather for luscious food, singing, dancing, and games.
3. Before "A Christmas Carol", turkey was uncommon on Christmas tables. After the book, it became the meat of choice for this holiday.
4. Christmas as the time for being generous to the poor.

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