

CBSE Class –VIII English
NCERT Solutions
Chapter - 1
The Best Christmas Present in the World

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1: What did the author find in a junk shop?

Ans: The author found a very old 19th century roll-top desk in a junk shop. It was made of oak. It was in a very bad condition. The roll-top was broken into several pieces. One of the legs was clumsily mended and there were scorch marks down one side.

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

Ans: In a secret drawer of a roll-top desk, the author found a small tin box. There was a piece of lined note paper sello-taped to its top. It had, 'Jim's last letter, received January 25, 1915. To be buried with me when the time comes" written on it.

Most likely, it was put there by Mrs. Jim Macpherson, who was Jim's wife. Her name and address were on the envelope inside the box.

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1: Who had written the letter, to whom, and when?

Ans: Jim Macpherson, who had gone to fight the war against the Germans ,had written the letter to his wife Connie Macpherson on December 26, 1914.

2: Why was the letter written-what was the wonderful thing that had happened?

Ans: Jim wrote the letter to tell his wife about a wonderful thing that had happened on Christmas day. The British and the Germans were engaged in a war, yet on this day, both the troops met in no man's land. It was a thing of wonder because right in the middle of a war, the warring soldiers were making peace. They celebrated Christmas together and played a friendly football match.

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

Ans: Both Jim Macpherson and Hans Wolf were not soldiers in their normal life. Hans Wolf played the cello in the orchestra at Dusseldorf . Jim Macpherson was a school teacher from Dorset in the West of England .

4: Had Hans Wolf even been to Dorset? Why did he say he knew it?

Ans: No, Hans Wolf had never been to Dorset. He had learned all about England from school and from reading books in English. His favourite writer was Thomas Hardy from whose novels he must have learned a lot about England

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

Ans: No, it is most likely that Jim Mcpherson did not come back from the war. In the sellotaped notepaper it was written that the letter was Jim's last letter. Connie Mcpherson did not receive any more letters from him.

The statement given by the neighbours of Mrs. Macpherson and the nurse at the nursing home showed no reference of Jim. The neighbour said she lived alone and the nurse said she had no family as not one visited her till date.

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1: Why did the author go to Bridport?

Ans: The author went to Bridport because that was the address where Mrs. Macpherson lived. The address on the letter read "Mrs Jim Macpherson, 12 Copper Beeches, Bridport, and Dorset. He wanted to give that letter back to her. He was feeling guilty for opening her letter.

2: How old was Mrs. Macpherson now? Where was she?

Ans: Mrs. Macpherson was a hundred and one-year-old. She was in a nursing home in Burlington house, on the Dorchester road, on the other side of town.

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1: Who did Connie Macpherson think her visitor was?

Ans: Connie Macpherson thought that her visitor was her husband, Jim. as the narrator was carrying his letter.

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

Ans: The sentence which shows that the visitor did not try to hide his identity is, 'I explained about the desk, about how I had found it, but I don't think she was listening.'

Working with Text

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

Ans: Connie must have kept Jim's letter for a long time. This is because she told the narrator how she read it quite often every day so that she could feel that Jim was near her.

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

Ans: The desk must have been sold when the house in which Connie Macpherson lived had caught fire. She was taken to a nursing home. All the burnt up things must have been sold after that.

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

Ans: Jim and Hans thought that games or sports are good ways of resolving conflicts because nobody dies in matches. No children are orphaned and no wives become widows. Due to these reasons, games are good ways for resolving conflicts. Wars only lead to death and devastation.

I do agree with them as it is the best way to resolve any conflict between two enemy countries without losing so many things.

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 Ans.

Ans: The soldiers of the two armies were like each other. Below are some instances from the story to prove:

→ Both the armies celebrated Christmas

- Both the armies shared their food and spent time together in smoking, laughing, talking, drinking and eating.
- They played a football match and agreed that conflicts and disputes may be resolved by football match
- They agreed about the negative aspects of war and longed peace.
- They exchanged carols and hoped to unite with the families again.

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

Ans: On the cold, beautiful frosty Christmas morning the British and the German troops celebrated Christmas with each other. They enjoyed each other's food. All of them were smoking, laughing, talking, drinking and eating. Hans Wolf and Jim Macpherson shared the cake Connie had baked. They talked about Bathsheba, Gabriel Oak, Sergeant Troy and Dorset. They even talked about the books they liked. They agreed about everything. Both the troops played a game of football for which both Hans and Jim cheered, clapped hands and stamped feet. They also exchanged carols at night. In this way, they celebrated Christmas together, finding a lot in common between them.

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

Ans: When the narrator came to return Connie's letter and her the box, she mistook him for her husband Jim, due to memory loss and old age. She thought that Jim had come back home for Christmas. That delusion was Connie's Christmas present.

It was the best Christmas present in the world for her because Jim had written in the letter that he would come home on Christmas. She had read that letter several times every day to feel that he was near her. Now that he was finally there with her, she was extremely happy.

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

Ans: Yes, the title of the story is suitable for it. The spirit of Christmas is the theme that prevails throughout the story. The message of Christmas peace and good will to all is brought out so clearly through the story. It was on a Christmas day, in the middle of a raging war, that

two warring troops made peace. The moment of peace that the soldiers shared with each other was the best Christmas present for them.

Again, it was on a Christmas day that the narrator went to see Mrs. Macpherson. He went to return her husband's letters to her. The letter was precious to her, but even more precious was her allusion that the narrator was her husband Jim, who she believed had returned as promised on a Christmas day. This was the best Christmas present in the world for her.

Suitable titles could be "A Christmas wish comes true!", "Someday at Christmas..." "The Christmas Message".

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Working with Language

1: (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.

Ans: 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.

Ans: My little sister is very naughty. When she came (come) back from school yesterday, she had torn (tear) her dress. We asked (ask) her how it had happened (happen). She said (say) she had quarrelled (have, quarrel) with a boy. She had beaten (have, beat) him in a race and he had tried (have, try) to push her. She had told (have, tell) the teacher and so he

had chased (have, chase) her, and she had fallen (have, fall) down and had torn (have, tear) 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

Ans: (iii)

(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.

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Past	Earlier past
set out	had seen
stayed	had left

arrived	had gone
came	had packed
sat	had fallen
ate	
returned	

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2: Find these phrasal verbs in the story.

burn out	light up	look on	run out	keep out
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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.

Ans: (i) burn out

House number 12 turned out to be nothing but a burned-out shell, the roof gaping, the windows boarded-up.

(ii) light up

That was the moment her eyes lit up with recognition and her face became suffused with a sudden glow of happiness.

(iii) look on

Hans Wolf and I looked on and cheered, clapping our hands and stamping our feet, to keep out the cold as much as anything.

(iv) run out

The time came, and all too soon, when the game was finished, the schnapps and the rum and the sausage had long since run out, and we knew it was all over.

(v) keep out

Hans Wolf and I looked on and cheered, clapping our hands and stamping our feet, to keep out the cold as much as anything.

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3: 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!

Noun	Adjective
elephant	circular, striped, enormous, multicoloured, round, cheerful, wild, blue, red, chubby, large, medium- sized, cold
face	
building	
water	

Ans:

Noun	Adjective
elephant	enormous, cheerful, wild, large, medium-sized,
face	round, cheerful, chubby
building	multi-colored, blue, red, large, medium-sized
water	blue, cold