

## Christmas Compared

Read through the following description of the shops at Christmas time from Stave 1.

For, the people who were shovelling away on the housetops were jovial and full of glee; calling out to one another from the parapets, and now and then exchanging a facetious snowball-better-natured missile far than many a wordy jest- laughing heartily if it went right and not less heartily if it went wrong. The poulterers' shop were still half open, and the fruiterers' were radiant in their glory. There were great, round, pot-bellied baskets of chestnuts, shaped like the waistcoats of fully-dressed gentlemen, lolling at the doors, and tumbling out into the street in their perfect opulence. There were ruddy, brown-faced, broad-girthed Spanish Friars, and looking from their shelves in wanton slyness at the girls as they went by, and gazed demurely at the hung-up mistletoe. There were pears and apples clustered high in blooming pyramids; there were bunches of grapes, made, in the shopkeepers' benevolence to dangle from conspicuous hooks, that people's mouths might water gratis as they passed; there were piles of filberts, mossy and brown, recalling, in their fragrance, ancient walks among the woods, and pleasant shufflings ankle deep through withered leaves; there were Norfolk Biffins, squat and swarthy, setting off the yellow of the oranges and lemons, and, in the great completeness of their juicy persons, urgently entreating and beseeching to be carried home in paper bags and eaten after dinner. The very gold and silver fish, set forth among these choice fruits in a bowl, though members of a dull and stagnant-blooded race, appeared to know that there was something going on; and, to a fish, went casting round and round their little world in slow and passionless excitement.

The Grocers! oh the Grocers! nearly closed, with perhaps two shutters down, or one; but through those gaps such glimpses! It was not alone that the scales descending on the counter made a merry sound, or that the twine and roller parted company so briskly, or that the canisters were rattled up and down like juggling tricks, or even that the blended scents of tea and coffee were so grateful to the nose, or even that the raisins were so plentiful, the figs so extremely white, the sticks of cinnamon so long and straight, the other spices so delicious, the candied fruits so caked and spotted with molten sugar as to make the coldest lookers-on feel faint and subsequently bilious. It was that the figs were moist and pulpy, or that the French plums blushed in modest tartness from their highly-decorated boxes, or that everything was good to eat and in its Christmas dress; but the customers were all so hurried and so eager in the hopeful promise of the day, that they tumbled up against each other at the doors, brushing their wicker baskets wildly, and left their purchases upon the counter, and came running back to fetch them, and committed hundreds of the like mistakes in the best humour possible; while the Grocer and his people were so frank and fresh that the polished hearts with which they fastened their aprons behind might have been their own, worn outside for general inspection, and for Christmas days to peck at if they chose.

1. Write down your first impressions of the atmosphere in this piece. Do you think it is a happy or sad scene? Can you pick out anything in particular that is evidence for your opinion?
2. Part of this atmosphere is created by the description of food. Find the words that describe the following foods and then explain, **in your own words**, how they are described:

Chestnuts  
Pears and apples  
Filberts (hazelnuts)  
Figs  
Plums  
Grapes

3. Which words would you use to describe a modern Christmas? Write a list of words and phrases which you think you would need to describe Christmas now and be prepared to share them with a partner or the class.
4. **Rewrite** the following extract, to give a more **exciting** and **descriptive** Christmas atmosphere. You might want to use some of the words you have already made a note of in your list above:

The supermarkets stayed open and were **full of** people. Each aisle was **full of** shoppers, **wearing** winter clothes. They **looked** for last minute bargains. Their trolleys were **full of** every possible food. There were **selection boxes, oranges, cheeses, wine, biscuits, crisps, and nuts**. A turkey balanced on the top, with promise of how it would **look** and **taste** when cooked. At the checkouts, the assistants wore Santa hats and **took money**.

5. Try to **complete** the following paragraphs to continue the Christmas atmosphere you have described above:

Outside cars **drove** by with trees on their roofs and children **looked** out of the windows...

The houses ...

6. Compare the modern Christmas with that of Dickens' time. What sorts of things have changed and what has stayed the same? Make a list or diagram of your ideas