

Teacher's notes and answer key

Level: Intermediate and above

Age: Adults

Time needed: 45 minutes plus

Procedure: The 'Twelve top tips' will give you extra ideas for using the plays in the classroom.

Notes on language and culture

1. At the beginning of the play, the two women are looking at large, soft toys. If you 'snuggle into' a cuddly toy like this, you make yourself warm and comfortable by sitting or lying next to it.
2. When Cath says 'you really don't want to know', she means that it's in Lyn's interest not to know the price of the toy, presumably because it's extremely expensive.
3. Cath's interjection, 'bless', means that she finds Marcia's love of pink cute.
4. 'Trouble was ...' means 'The problem was ...'.
5. 'What are you doing for Christmas?' – everyone seems to ask their acquaintances this question from the beginning of December onwards.
6. Cath mentions she's 'having a few close friends over'. If you 'have someone over', they come to your house to visit you or to stay with you.
7. If something 'causes ructions', it creates arguments and disagreements.
8. 'That's not exactly the Christmas spirit' – this comment reflects the expectation that people should be generous and caring at Christmas time. It implies that Lyn thinks Cath is not demonstrating these characteristics.
9. 'I take it' means 'I presume'.
10. 'Midnight Mass' is a traditional ceremony held in churches all over the world, which marks the beginning of Christmas Day.
11. When Lyn says 'Are you still in the club?' she means literally 'Are you still a member of that club'. A Christmas club is a savings account that usually pays out the full account balance to its account holders once a year, just before Christmas. However, in slang 'in the club' can mean 'pregnant', so Cath is very surprised by the question.



12. When Lyn says 'I hate to think ...' she is emphasizing that she does not want to think about how much Cath spends because it is shocking. She thinks Cath spends too much.
13. When Lyn says 'Well?', she is saying in a slightly rude way that what Cath has said does not matter or is not important.

Twelve top tips

1. Take away the title of the play. Students try to guess the context. – Who? Where? Why? What?
2. Ask students to describe the appearance, personality and social status of the characters in the play.
3. Cut it up into four sections. Students then put it back in the correct sequence.
4. Supply several statements of fact or opinion about the play. Ask students to assess whether each one follows from the play, supports it, contradicts it or is assumed.
5. Use the play alongside a news article on the same subject and hold a debate and discussion on the topic to link the content with students' experience or knowledge.
6. Students add their own stage directions, e.g. ... *he said angrily – rising from his chair.*
7. Students can finish the play off in their own words or change its ending.
8. Students interpret the play, perform it and then perhaps record and listen to themselves for correct use of stress and intonation.

Mini-plays

by Tim Bowen and Liz Plampton

Merry Christmas

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9. Students perform the play using the same words but in different styles, e.g. a romance, a ghost story, a thriller, etc.

10. Students identify vocabulary that has a negative connotation.

11. Students identify the word/phrase/phrasal verb that means ...

12. Take an adjective or adverb out of a sentence and put it in brackets at the end of the line. Students put it back in the correct place or wherever it will logically fit, e.g.

I mean, it's not like you've done it before. [EVER]

I mean, it's not like you've ever done it before.

Answer key

1. Find the correct order

d; e; b; a; f; c

2. Vocabulary

1. d; 2. c; 3. e; 4. a; 5. f; 6. b

3. Find the colloquial expression

1. right up your street; 2. aggro; 3. like it or lump it; 4. in the club; 5. clobber; 6. change your tune

4. Colloquial language: Ellipsis

1. I bet that's caused a few ructions.
2. Are you still in the club?
3. I certainly am.
4. It only lasted a week.
5. The trouble was, that's all it *could* do in the end.
6. It ended up in the dustbin!

5. What's the topic?

The two women are discussing what presents to buy for Christmas so c. and d. are both mentioned and, because they are shopping, the idea of consumerism is also relevant. Both women indicate they are short of money (and possibly in debt) so b. is mentioned. The main topic is probably f. because it is clear that one of them is going to spend a lot of money.

Merry Christmas

Transcript

Scenario: Two women in a toy shop in London at Christmas time

Characters: Cath, Lyn

- Cath** Wow! Look over there!
- Lyn** Aww, I love those!
- Cath** Ooh, makes you want to just squeeze it and hug it, doesn't it?
- Lyn** My Claire would love one of those.
- Cath** Oh, she's got so many soft toys she doesn't know what to do with them!
- Lyn** Yes, but not like *that*. He looks so cuddly, I could snuggle right into him.
- Cath** Who's it for, you or Claire? She's barely two years old. One like that would completely overwhelm her.
- Lyn** How much is it?
- Cath** I'll have a look. Er ... ooh, you really don't want to know.
- Lyn** Maybe they give some of the money to charity, you know, for poor people.
- Cath** You mean us?
- Lyn** Oh, now that's absolutely gorgeous! Marcia would love that!
- Cath** Really?
- Lyn** Yes! It's *pink*, isn't it? She loves *anything* pink!
- Cath** Bless. Ah, now you really must get that for Mark. That's right up his street.
- Lyn** What is?
- Cath** The remote-controlled puppy!
- Lyn** We got him one like that last year. Only lasted a week. It was supposed to sit up and beg. Trouble was, that's all it *could* do in the end. Ended up in the dustbin!
- Cath** What are you doing for Christmas?
- Lyn** Not sure. John's parents want us to go there – as usual – but I've already said 'yes' to *mine*!
- Cath** What a nightmare! You can't please all of the people all of the time. I'm staying at home. It's less aggro. I'm having a few close friends over just for a change.
- Lyn** Bet that's caused a few ructions!
- Cath** Yeah, but they can like it or lump it for all I care. It's not my turn, anyway.
- Lyn** That's not exactly the Christmas spirit, is it? I take it you'll be going to Midnight Mass?
- Cath** Uh? Hey, look! That woman's just bought *three* of those bears we were looking at!
- Lyn** Never mind. You still in the club?

Merry Christmas

Transcript

- Cath** Eh?
- Lyn** The Christmas club!
- Cath** Oh no. I stopped all that ages ago. Couldn't keep up with it. Twenty pounds a month, they wanted!
- Lyn** That's a shame.
- Cath** I've warned the boys. I told them they're not getting big presents. Not this year, anyway.
- Lyn** What are you getting them, then?
- Cath** Well, I said Toby could have a laptop and some of that posh Chanel aftershave and Tim's getting a new mountain bike and all the clobber that goes with it. You know, the shin pads, the helmet, the jacket, some of those special grip gloves ...
- Lyn** Ok, ok! I hate to think what you normally spend on them!
- Cath** I know. I'm still paying off the loan from last Christmas.
- Lyn** Ridiculous!
- Cath** What can you do? If you saw what their friends get ...
- Lyn** I'm making my own this year.
- Cath** What? Presents? You're making your own presents?
- Lyn** Certainly am.
- Cath** That's a bit ambitious! I mean, it's not like you've ever done it before. You've never even made your own cards, let alone presents!
- Lyn** Well? It's far more thoughtful and better for the environment.
- Cath** Oh! Well, you've changed your tune! I mean, I don't know about you, but I can't *bear* to see a disappointed face. 'Specially at Christmas.

Merry Christmas

Worksheet

1 Find the correct order

Here are six lines from the play. Put them in a logical order.

- That's a bit ambitious! I mean, it's not like you've ever done it before. You've never even made your own cards, let alone presents!
- Certainly am.
- Oh! Well, you've changed your tune! I mean, I don't know about you, but I can't bear to see a disappointed face. 'Specially at Christmas.
- I'm making my own this year.
- What? Presents? You're making your own presents?
- Well? It's far more thoughtful and better for the environment.

Now look at the play and check your answers.

2 Vocabulary

Match these words from the text with their meanings.

- | | |
|---------------|--|
| 1. cuddly | a. very beautiful |
| 2. snuggle | b. silly and unreasonable and deserving to be laughed at |
| 3. overwhelm | c. put yourself in a warm, comfortable, safe position |
| 4. gorgeous | d. soft and round |
| 5. ructions | e. be so big that someone cannot deal with it |
| 6. ridiculous | f. noisy protests or arguments |

3 Find the colloquial expression

Look in the play and find the following words and phrases. Note that they are in the order in which they appear in the play.

- a four-word expression meaning *exactly the type of thing you are interested in*
- a noun meaning *annoying problems*
- a five-word expression meaning *accept a situation even though you may not like it or approve*
- a three-word expression that can mean *pregnant*
- a noun meaning *clothes and/or equipment*
- a three-word expression meaning *change your opinion or attitude*

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Worksheet

4 Colloquial language: Ellipsis

Which words are missing from these examples from the play?

1. Bet that's caused a few ructions.
2. You still in the club?
3. Certainly am.
4. Only lasted a week.
5. Trouble was, that's all it *could* do in the end.
6. Ended up in the dustbin!

5 What's the topic?

What do you think is the main topic of this play?

- a. consumerism
- b. debt
- c. family life
- d. children
- e. relationships
- f. wasting money

6 Listen and read

Listen to the recording and read the play aloud in time with the recording.