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Preface / Didactic-methodological reflections

*Why not, when kids are hard to tame,
before the hols, just play a game –
or burst into some melody
and work a bit creatively?*

*Let's work creatively, let's play
and warble Xmas songs! – Okay?*

Teachers (of modern languages) know that it is rather a vain endeavour to motivate their pupils, especially the low-ability ones, when the Christmas (or summer) holidays are just around the corner and the working morale has reached an all-time low. After a long period of swotting up on lots of (boring) subjects the kids are inattentive and listless because they are – and quite understandably so – finished and burned out.

So why not counteract this phenomenon and bring some fun and new drive into the classroom – without, however, losing touch with the didactic aims of the curriculum, of course. Getting the pupils into the Christmas spirit and learning by singing and playing and doing (interdisciplinary) creative work is the order of the day.

The following teaching unit is tailored to the needs of fifth-year students and higher levels of English.

Why the Christmas topic?

Xmas, it is true, is more and more tending to be an anachronism, i.e. a phenomenon incongruous with our modern materialistic time. It has lost its original meaning, that of the nativity of Jesus Christ, and become pure commerce instead. It seems to mean more to kids than just another opportunity of getting (heaps of) presents, though. There is a remnant of mystique inherent in Christmas which fascinates them. In adults, it conjures up nostalgic childhood memories.

Why do (interdisciplinary) creative work?

Pupils doing creative work have fun and do not actually have the feeling that they are “working”. Yet they **do** work – unconsciously – and very intensively so.

It is well-known that creative work, as long as there is sufficient tutorial guidance, can be quite fruitful. Moreover, in addition to giving the students an opportunity to rehearse and consolidate (Christmas) vocabulary, it is of paramount psychological importance:

It gives the pupils a sense of personal achievement since they can identify with the final outcome of their creativity, with what they have “produced” – a feeling of bliss and contentment of which the assembly line worker, who is but a cog in the wheel of the production process, is totally deprived.

Why sing in class?

In an age of constant exposure to canned music, where active singing is felt to be “out” and, consequently, more and more looked down upon and disapproved of, singing in class, at least once in a while, ought to be a must all the more. After all, it has been scientifically proved that active singing is relaxing and socially integrating. In addition to that, singing in a foreign language is a variant of the communicative educational aim of “speaking” and an unconscious memorizing of foreign lexis and linguistic structures furthered by rhythm and rhyme functioning as mnemonic aids.

1

THE STORY OF THE INKY BOYS

Put in a nutshell, the contents of the original Struwwelpeter story is this: three cheeky little whites tease a pickaninny just for the fun of it. Santa Claus, who comes to the scene threatens to sink them into his big barrel of black ink if they don't leave the little negro alone. The louts, however, cast the holy man's words to the wind and must bear the consequences of their misbehaviour.

First Louie boy came skipping by,
Sol smiting down like mad, the feller
was sauntering along the street.
at little Moorie strolling near
waving his banderole on high.
A little negro black and sweet
filled to the brim with slimy tar.
a luscious pretzel in his hand.
At last, young Willie joined the group (troop),
'cause he was raven-black. Oh dear!
neat-combed and with a hula-hoop.

The three began to scoff and sneer
put up his walking-stick umbrella.
Forth barged Saint Claus with his big jar
He said: "My lads, at once you cease
to tease that Moor! Leave him in peace!
It's not his fault, no, it is not,
The lecture, though, was for the birds.
The louts derided Santa's words.
They even jeered and pointed more
if he's not white like you, God wat!"
at the poor negro than before.

He snapped them up without delay,
first Louie, then the pretzel jack,
deep down into the oozy slop.
Then Caspar came and took his stand,
The holy man flew in a rage,
behind the Moor, poor tarry boys.
Old Santa dumped the whole bad lot
as you can see here on this page.
The prospects of the boys grew grey:

to skip – to move lightly and quickly

feller – fellow

to saunter – to walk in a slow, relaxed manner

Moorie – little moor

luscious – mouth-watering, tasty

to scoff – to mock; to sneer – to mock

to barge – to burst in

lout – rowdy; to deride – to make fun of

to jeer – to mock

God wat – God knows

to snap up – to seize quickly

oozy – slimy, muddy; slop – soft mud

to take one's stand (Stellung beziehen)

tarry – covered with tar (geteert)

prospects – perspective

➤ **Max and Moritz metamorphose into real goodies**

The story of Max and Moritz who filled Old Lampel's pipe with gunpowder while he was busy playing the organ at church is finally put right. Nope! Wilhelm Busch's story is not in accordance with the facts.

Wilhelm Busch's rascals, like Heinrich Hoffmann's naughty boys, are shown in a completely different light. They are good boys! Instead of insidiously blowing up their teacher with gunpowder filled in his pipe, they have a positive surprise for Mr. Lampel: They create a Christmas atmosphere in his house and bring him Christmas presents.

Once upon a time, it was in the second third of the 19th century, to be precise, there lived two little orphans called Max and Moritz, who were extremely good boys. Unfortunately, though, an irresponsible German hack writer called Wilhelm What's-his-name, for what reason ever, brought them into disrepute by inventing and spreading untrue stories about them. According to him, they were real pests who stole fruit, maltreated animals, teased old folks, sabotaged bridges by sawing holes into them, put maybugs into old people's beds, broke into bakeries stealing buns and pretzels, slashed grain sacks, played truant and – which was worst of all – didn't go to church, not even on Sundays. He even accused them of having put gunpowder into their class teacher's meerschaum pipe.

Max and Moritz, to tell the truth, never did such acts of barbarism! They were anything but bad boys – God beware! On the contrary – they were models of charity and goodness!

So now, for once, let your eyes be opened up to the truth and listen to the following version of the tale – the only true one!

Well, I do not mean to recount all good deeds and acts of generosity that Max and Moritz did. This would definitely go beyond the scope of this narration, you see. Let me restrict myself to telling you about what they did on Christmas Eve to make their teacher, Old Lampel, happy.

Old Lampel was what one might call a strange customer. Pupils in general and the ones he instructed in particular could not stand the man. To them he was an old authoritarian bastard, a typical crammer who never stopped bending his students' ears, an inflexible fossil, and – which is worse still – totally uncool. Whereas other teachers sang groovy pop and rock songs or rap stuff with their kids, Lampel sang church hymns with them. Whereas other teachers read *Mickey Mouse* or *Batman* in class, Old Lampel boy read *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens.

So is it any wonder that everybody hated him? –

Well, did e v e r y b o d y hate him? My foot! Max and Moritz did not! They knew that Old Lampel was a good sort basically. If he was strict, it's because he was convinced it was for the good of his pupils.

If he was a crotchety weirdo, the reason for it was a purely psychological one: The poor man was unmarried and lonesome – a void in his soul that he tried to compensate in some way or other. Well, smoking his meerschaum pipe was his compensation.

WANTED
€ 5,000 REWARD FOR THE CAPTURE OF MEAN MAX
- DEAD OR ALIVE -



This person has

- insulted people and played nasty tricks on them;
- teased and plagued animals;
- stolen fruit;
- killed and stolen chickens;
- sabotaged a wooden footbridge;
- behaved disrespectfully (contemptuously) towards figures of (persons in) authority;
- blown up and severely injured an elementary school teacher;
- broken into a bakery;
- demolished furniture;
- slashed grain sacks

Description

Aliases: Benny Batter, Harry Hassle, Percy Pester

Date of Birth: September 19th, 2008

Place of Birth: Spalding / England

Height: 4'8"

Weight: 80 to 85 pounds

Build: Medium to stocky

Occupation(s): Truant, loafer, social parasite

Scars and Marks: Max's face is freckled, there is a scar on his right knee and a mole on his right shoulder blade. Max has an earring stud in both ears and two tattoos: the letter M on his right forearm and the name "Tootsie Bootsie" written in script on the left side of his chest. When he was last seen, he was wearing a T-shirt with a photo of the British Union Jack on it.

Remarks: Max is extremely short-sighted and therefore wears glasses or contact lenses, respectively. Since he got bitten by his own pitbull, he has walked with a slight limp. Max, who used to maintain his physical fitness by jogging through the countryside with his bosom buddy Moritz Malicious (who is serving a ten year sentence in the Tower Dungeon) has been known to alter his appearance through the use of disguise.

Hair: Jet-black

Eyes: Dark green

Complexion: Light to medium

Sex: Male

Race: White

Nationality: British

Only the brave of heart should approach these outlaws!

Assignment

Act out the following dialogue.

Sonny: Whoopee!! Christmas Day's coming soon!

Mother: You're looking forward to it, aren't you?

S: You bet I am! I'm over the moon ... because I'm gonna get heaps of presents from good Old Santa:

a waterproof wrist watch, a pair of roller skates, a pair of skis, a little horsie, an electric train, and many more. – By the way, I hope Santa'll also bring me a half-pipe!

M: A half-pipe? What on earth is that?

S: It's one half of a very big pipe which roller skaters roll up and down in, having the time of their life. – But now I think we should decorate the X-mas tree, mum!

M: Yes, let's set to work and decorate it! ... with tinsel, electric candles, sparklers, multicoloured baubles, and so forth.

(after the tree has been decorated)

S: Why is Christmas called the 'feast of love', mum?

M: It's called 'feast of love' first because ... er ... er ... because ... because ... er ... because Christians, with great love, buy Christians shockingly expensive presents in department stores. Second, because they offer to one another these gifts wrapped up in colourful parcels piled up under the Christmas tree. Last but not least, it is called the 'feast of love' because on this day Christians truly wish Christians the very best of things – so help me God! ... And because on that day they also remember, e.g., their old grandfather eking out his life in an old people's home. They ring him up wishing him truly, from the bottom of their hearts, a Merry Christmas full of peace and happiness and a happy New Year ... In addition, Christmas Day is also the feast of piety, because little children, dressed up, if possible, like sweet little gold foil angels, recite wonderfully pious poems they've learned by heart before.

Sillyfilly: I do know a little poem by heart, too, mummy! Do you want me to recite it?

M: Of course I do, dear!

SF (reciting):

*In the icy winter's night
inundated by the light
of the moon I see the child
in his manger – meek and mild:*

*And my heart so sweet and wee
gets all filled with joy and glee!*



F: I'm so sorry, my oh so beloved heartlet! Can you forgive me, please! I know there's no excuse for this aberration of mine. But cheer up, honey, regain your composure, will you? ... Tell me, what can I do to restore your mental balance? What can I do to restore our marital peace?

M: (*happily*): You've hit the nail on the head, dear! There's indeed something you can do! Go on a trip with me! Let's go to the seaside! To Majorca ... the Canaries ... Hawaii ...

F: He gives twice who gives at once. You shall have what you want, darling. We'll go to the Balearic Islands at our earliest convenience! - And, tell me, how would you like to go there, dear? By plane? Or by ship? There's nothing more pleasant than a sea cruise!!

M: I don't want to go by ship! If I go by boat I get seasick, you know.

F: So let's jet to the Balearic Islands! What company shall we fly with? PAN AM? IBERIA?

M: It's much of a muchness ... It's up to you to decide, honey!

...

Vocabulary aids

over the moon – extremely happy; to eke out – to support with difficulty; gold foil – gold beaten or rolled out very thin; to inundate – to overflow; manger – Trog; meek – *sanftmütig*; wee – very small; glee – exultant joy; to unwrap – to remove the wrapping (*auspacken*); disgusting – unacceptable; phew – puh; aberration – here: mistake; composure – (*Fassung*); marital – *ehelich*; at our earliest convenience – as soon as we can

