

Chatterbox #8 – Christmas

Transcript

Harp: Hello everyone, this is Harp...

Maura: And Maura...

Harp: And we're bringing you a special **Chatterbox** episode.

Maura: **Merry Christmas!**

Harp: Happy Holidays!

Maura: Yes, it's Christmas time.

Harp: It is indeed! So, basically, we're going to focus this podcast on Christmas and all its fun little things. So don't forget to check out the website Culips.com: C-U-L-I-P-S.com.

Maura: Right! As usual, we have tons of stuff for you, if you check out our Lipservice, you got the transcript and all kinds of good stuff to help you understand this podcast even better.

Harp: For sure! OK! So, let's get started. So, today we're going to talk about Christmas greetings, then we're going to talk about two funny Christmas traditions, and we're going to talk about my best and worst present ever.

Maura: **Merry Christmas!**

Harp: **Happy Holidays!**

Maura: So, yes, we're going to talk about Christmas greetings.

Harp: Yeah, so those are the two main Christmas greetings.

Maura: **"Merry Christmas"** is really the biggest. We say **Merry Christmas** all the time in, I think, every English-speaking place.

Harp: Yes, you can **never go wrong** saying **Merry Christmas**.

Maura: Right and "merry" is just like "happy," "have a good time." You're wishing someone a good Christmas.

- Harp: Exactly. In England they actually say “**Happy Christmas**,” that is more in just the U.K.
- Maura: Right. So, if you’re in England say, “**Happy Christmas**,” but if you’re in Canada or Montreal, say, maybe you want to stick with Merry Christmas. So use Merry Christmas.
- Harp: So “**Happy Holidays**,” it’s pretty much the same thing because it’s the holiday season and it’s because there are so many different kinds of religious holidays around that time there’s the Jewish holiday of Hanukah there is Kwanzaa, I think that is how you say it, and there is also a Muslim holiday that is around the same area. So when you say “**Happy Holidays**,” you are encompassing everyone.
- Maura: Right, and some people don’t celebrate any specific religious holiday, so saying “**Happy Holidays**” is a good way to just include everyone and offend no one.
- Harp: Exactly, so that is basically when you’re being **politically correct** when you say Happy Holidays.
- Maura: Right! And to be **politically correct** means to not offend any kind of group.
- Harp: Exactly! So, **Merry Christmas**!
- Maura: **Happy Holidays**!
- Harp: So, there are some expressions that you can see, but that you rarely hear someone say, or that you rarely use.
- Maura: Right, like we don’t say “**Season’s Greetings**.” You’ll see it a lot, but people don’t say that to each other.
- Harp: Nope. I would never say to my family or to my friends, “**Season’s Greetings**.”
- Maura: Right. You see it in stores or on signs, you might hear it on television or the radio, but not between regular people talking about Christmas.
- Harp: No, definitely not. So, “**Season’s Greetings**” means the same thing as “**Happy Holidays**.” It’s used in the same way but Happy Holidays you say and Season’s Greetings you’ll read on a sign or you will hear on TV or on the radio.

- Maura: Right. So, we say “**Happy Holidays,**” but we don’t say “**Season’s Greetings.**”
- Harp: Yup. And you can also see signs with “**Happy Holidays,**” but in terms of spoken English you’ll hear people say “**Happy Holidays.**”
- Maura: Exactly. What other expression do we see on cards but not use?
- Harp: I would say, “**We wish you a Merry Christmas,**” or “**I wish you a Merry Christmas.**”
- Maura: Right.
- Harp: So, if I was writing a note to someone, I could say, “**I wish you a Merry Christmas,**” but if I saw someone in person, “**Merry Christmas**” or “**Happy Holidays.**”
- Maura: Exactly! We don’t really say “**I wish you a Merry Christmas,**” it just sounds funny.
- Harp: It is a little bit too formal, I think, because when you say “**Merry Christmas**” you are saying, “**I wish you a Merry Christmas,**” but without saying the full sentence.
- Maura: Exactly. So “**Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays,**” those are the most popular expressions to use when you’re talking.
- Harp: Exactly. Let’s talk about some Christmas traditions now.
- Maura: Yeah, everyone knows the typical stuff like the **turkey** for dinner and the **Christmas tree**, but we have some other smaller, lesser-known traditions, not as popular.
- Harp: Yeah, so the first one is **fruitcake.**
- Maura: **Fruitcake!**
- Harp: So, basically, **fruitcake** is a cake made of fruit, but it’s usually candied or dried fruit.
- Maura: Right, and the cake is like a brown, a dark brown colour. It’s really interesting looking.

- Harp: That's a nice way of saying it. It is not the most beautiful-looking cake, but some people think that it tastes better if you keep it for a longer time because you put rum or some sort of alcohol in it, and it just absorbs the flavours, and it becomes more flavourful.
- Maura: Well, I knew that it lasts a really long time, I knew that you could keep the **fruitcake** for maybe the next Christmas.
- Harp: Now I have never tried **fruitcake**. Have you tried it?
- Maura: Yeah, I have tried it. It's, you know, it's OK. I could swallow it, I could eat it, but wasn't delicious, but I'm not looking forward to it this year.
- Harp: Yeah, so **fruitcake** is given as a gift, people wrap it up nicely and give it to other families or to their friends but I don't know anyone who likes it.
- Maura: This is why it's a strange, hilarious tradition because so many people don't like it and they give it as gifts to people.
- Harp: Exactly. So, now there is a funny joke, which Johnny Carson from *The Tonight Show* started. He said that, basically, he thinks that there is only one fruitcake in the whole world and that each family just gives it to each other.
- Maura: That's hilarious!
- Harp: So, that is kind of why we think that **fruitcake** is funny in Canada or in North America.
- Maura: Yeah, it is kind of a joke. Do you know where **fruitcake** comes from though, because it's such a strange tradition?
- Harp: What I understand is that before when you couldn't get fruit in the Christmas season, when it was cold, when there wasn't the supermarkets that there are now, they would use the dried or candied fruit that they had, and the best way to serve it was with the rum or the alcohol in it which made the fruits taste really good in the cake.
- Maura: OK, so it is really a historical reason. We couldn't get fresh fruit, so we used dried fruit to make a dessert.
- Harp: Exactly!
- Maura: And now, even though we can buy fresh fruit, we continue with this strange tradition of **fruitcake**.

- Harp: Exactly.
- Maura: But if you're around **fruitcake** this holiday season, I suggest you try it, it's not so bad and it's a, you know, a fun new experience, **fruitcake**.
- Harp: Yeah, maybe I'll try it this year, and I'll write about it in the blog.
- Maura: Yeah, yeah, you should. Maybe I'll get you **fruitcake** for Christmas, Harp.
- Harp: Oh, that would be nice. OK, so now the other tradition that I want to talk about is **mistletoe**.
- Maura: That's a fun one.
- Harp: Yeah it is fun. So, I never had **mistletoe** at my house, but I have always seen it on TV. Can you describe to me what it is?
- Maura: Sure, it's a small plant and it has green leaves and little white berries and, yeah, I had one at my house when I was a kid, it was fake, it was not real. We used the same one every year, but yeah we had **mistletoe**.
- Harp: OK, so basically with **mistletoe** you hang it from the ceiling and when there are two people under it they have to kiss.
- Maura: Exactly, you need two people, you can't kiss yourself. So when two people suddenly find themselves underneath the **mistletoe** they're supposed to kiss.
- Harp: Exactly, so it's a fun, I would say harmless, tradition.
- Maura: Yeah, and it is not really serious. Sometimes you're under the mistletoe and you're with someone and you don't want to kiss them, you don't really have to kiss them, you don't need to.
- Harp: You can kiss them on the cheek, too, if you want to. No one is saying that you need to French kiss them.
- Maura: Right, just a kiss on the cheek is fine. It's a fun little tradition, **mistletoe**.
- Harp: Exactly, so now it has a really interesting history, though.
- Maura: What is it?

- Harp: So, now **mistletoe** has had, has been considered in history a very powerful medicinal plant, so it symbolizes a lot of fertility and long life, so they would hang it and you would kiss under it because that is what couples did who were in love and it was like a promise that they were going to get married and there is also the tradition that if there was a young girl under mistletoe and she was left un-kissed she wouldn't marry for a year.
- Maura: Oh! That is funny.
- Harp: Yeah, so that's an interesting tradition for Christmas, I think.
- Maura: Yeah, it's interesting these traditions because most North Americans don't even know where they come from.
- Harp: Yup, you see it in pop culture or you make fun of it, for **fruitcake**, but you don't really know the history of it.
- Maura: Right, so you also taught me about **mistletoe** and **fruitcake**, interesting traditions.
- Maura: So, of course, the most famous tradition at Christmas is exchanging presents. You give presents to your family and friends and, of course, you get presents, too.
- Harp: Yup! **Giving and receiving** the gifts, my favourite part.
- Maura: Well, what was one of the best gifts you ever got, Harp?
- Harp: I would say my best gift ever was about five or six years ago and my boyfriend Craig got me the most beautiful **pendant**, it's moonstone which is like a very cool gemstone, it's got some really cool properties to it and if you're into crystals and gemstones you know a little bit more about it.
- Maura: What colour is it?
- Harp: It's cool, it's almost opaque, like a white colour, but it depends on the light and it can be blue and it can be almost a white. It is beautiful!
- Maura: Really?
- Harp: Everyone notices it when I'm wearing it.
- Maura: Cool!

- Harp: So, yeah, that's my best gift.
- Maura: Nice. Of course, I have to ask you the other side, because sometimes when you get gifts from people you don't know really well you get really strange gifts. So do you have a worst gift?
- Harp: My worst gift was hilarious. When I was young, I was probably 10 years old, it was from my mom, so it was from someone who knew me. But she got me scissors. And ok it was a really nice thought because she knew I wanted to learn how to sew and that I was really interested in learning about sewing **and so forth**, but *scissors*. Come on, I was 10 years old. I wanted a toy, I wanted, I don't know, I don't know what you want when you're 10 years old, but I did not want scissors.
- Maura: No, you want something fun and exciting. Scissors are not quite fun and exciting.
- Harp: Yeah, like you don't want to go back to school and be like "I got scissors for Christmas." It's just like when you're ten, it's not the gift you want.
- Maura: No, you want something cool that everyone has, not scissors.
- Harp: The funniest thing about the story was that my Mom, before Christmas, told me what she was going to get my sister and she was like, "Oh Harpreet, I got her scissors," and in my head I was thinking "Ha ha ha! That's a horrible present," and then we both got scissors.
- Maura: That is hilarious. Whoops!
- Harp: So, but I love you, Mom!
- Maura: So, we want to say one last time **Merry Christmas** everyone!
- Harp: **Happy Holidays!**
- Maura: Yeah! We hope you enjoyed our Christmas episode at Culips and you learned some new things about Christmas that you didn't already know.
- Harp: Yeah, and remember to check out the website, C-U-L-I-P-S.com, and go to the Lipservice where you can find out more about this episode.
- Maura: Yeah, lots of fun stuff in there. So again, **Merry Christmas**.
- Harp: **Happy Holidays** everyone!

Maura: See you next year!

Detailed Explanation

Merry Christmas

Maybe we don't even need to explain this one. Like, we say in this episode, the expression "**Merry Christmas**" is accepted in every English-speaking country.

Harp says, "You **can never go wrong** with **Merry Christmas**". "You **can never go wrong with**" means that it will never be bad. In other words, you can always say "**Merry Christmas**".

Here are some other examples of how you can use the expression, "**can never go wrong with**":

Brendan: Hey, do you want to add cheese to the recipe?

Aaron: Sure, you **can't go wrong with** cheese.

(This means that you can always add cheese to a recipe and it will not be bad. Of course, this is just Aaron's opinion. If you don't like cheese, you wouldn't say that.)

Sara: You **can never go wrong** with the Beatles. Everyone likes them.

Joe: Yeah. Good idea.

(Most people like the Beatles, right?)

Happy Holidays

"**Happy Holidays**," the expression for the holidays around Christmas and New Year, is becoming more and more popular. The reason it is becoming more popular is because people are more **politically correct**. Being **politically correct** means using vocabulary that does not offend or bother anyone; this is usually based on some difference.

"Christmas" is based on a religious holiday. Many people celebrate it who are not religious, but the origins of Christmas are most definitely religious.

And, of course, many people who live in western countries like Canada do not celebrate Christmas. This is why we say "**Happy Holidays**" because it includes all holidays at this time. Even if you do not celebrate any religious holidays, it is a holiday from work!

So, "**Happy Holidays**" is **politically correct** because it includes everyone and does not mention a specific holiday. Using "**Happy Holidays**" offends no one.

Season's Greetings

Here is another Christmas time expression, but this one we normally do not say. We see "**Season's Greetings**" on cards, in windows, on posters and signs. We can hear

“**Season’s Greetings**” on television and the radio, but that is it. It does not sound natural, and it sounds very formal to say “**Season’s Greetings**” between friends.

“**Season’s Greetings**” is also **politically correct** in that it does not specify one holiday. It is similar to “**Happy Holidays**” in that it includes everyone.

I wish you a merry Christmas

This expression is very similar to “**Merry Christmas**”, obviously. But just like, “**Season’s Greetings**,” we don’t often say “**I wish you a merry Christmas.**” It sounds very formal and so you might hear it on the radio and television too.

In fact, it is a traditional Christmas song. Christmas songs are called Christmas Carols.

Here are the first lyrics (words of a song) to “***We Wish You a Merry Christmas***”

We wish you a Merry Christmas;
We wish you a Merry Christmas;
We wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.
Good tidings we bring to you and your kin;
Good tidings for Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Traditional Christmas food

Many people know the traditional Christmas food, but we wanted to make a list for you anyway. There are some lesser-known items, too.

- Turkey
- Stuffing (bread and other stuff that is cooked inside the turkey)
- Cranberry sauce
- Gravy
- Potatoes
- **Fruitcake**
- Christmas log (another kind of cake)
- Eggnog (an egg-based sweet creamy drink, often had with rum or another kind of alcohol)
- Shortbread
- Gingerbread (often made into a house...and then eaten!)

Fruitcake

Fruitcake is a brown-coloured cake, made with dried or candied fruits and nuts. It is often made with rum and lasts a very long time. It is usually thick and heavy. It is not usually a light cake.

Most young people do not like it. Older people seem to like it more than younger people. It is not a very sweet cake and this may explain why it is not popular. **Fruitcake** has become a kind of joke because many so many people do not like it. The people who still give **fruitcake** as a gift must be the ones that actually like it!

You can also see **fruitcake** traditionally being given as a wedding gift (from the married couple to their guests).

Other Christmas traditions

- Christmas tree (some people get a real one, and others have a fake tree)
- Christmas stockings (hung by the fireplace, if you have one)
- **Mistletoe**
- Poinsettias (traditional Christmas plant)
- Sending Christmas cards to friends and family
- The advent calendar (For kids! For the month of December, we eat one chocolate a day until Christmas.)
- Christmas Carols (Christmas songs, remember?)
- Secret Santa (choosing someone's name from a hat and then buying that person a gift in secret)



Poinsettia plant

Mistletoe

Mistletoe is a plant. It usually has white round berries and green leaves.

It is, in some parts of the world, still considered medicinal. But it is also a poisonous plant. Do not eat **mistletoe**!

Most people use fake (not real) **mistletoe** at Christmas. You can easily find fake **mistletoe** to buy in any store that sells Christmas decorations.



Mistletoe plant

There are many explanations as to where this tradition of kissing under the **mistletoe** comes from. Like we say **in** this episode, it is not a strict tradition. Some people do not kiss under the mistletoe. It is now just for fun.

We had **mistletoe** at our Culips Christmas Party but not many people noticed when they were standing under it, so not many people kissed. Too bad!

Giving and Receiving

At holiday time, there is a lot of gift **giving** and **receiving**. We even have a general expression that goes with exchanging gifts.

The expression is “it is better to **give** than to **receive**.” This simply means that it is nicer to give a gift than to receive one. It is really an expression that reminds us to think of others first.

On another note, there is also a little rhyme about the spelling of “**receive**.” In English we almost always put the “i” before the “e” when we spell words. The word “**receive**” is an exception to this rule, because the “e” comes before the “i” (receive).

Here is the beginning of the rhyme to help us remember how to spell it:

“i” before “e”
except after “c”
And also in “eigh”
as in “neighbour” or “weigh”

Maura still repeats this to herself to remember how to spell “**receive**.” It is a useful rhyme!

Pendant

The “**pendant**” that Harp is talking about is a kind of necklace. There is a necklace and then a kind of ornament that hangs on the necklace, this is the **pendant**. In Harp’s case, the **pendant** is moonstone.

“**Pendant**” can also be spelled “pennant.”

And so forth

Harp says she wanted to learn how to sew **and so forth**. “**And so forth**” means “and similar things.” So, Harp wanted to learn to sew and other related things to sewing.

We can replace, “**and so forth**” with “and stuff like that” or more formally “and so on.” It also has the same meaning as the Latin word used in English “**et cetera**” (also “etc.”).

Here are some examples of these expressions being used:

John: Let's review your personal portfolio, financial review **and so on**.

Karen: I need a list of decorations, music, equipment **and stuff like that**.

Mathew: The farm has the typical barnyard animals, cows **and so forth**.

Peter: Please review all your notes, ***et cetera***, before the test on Friday.

As you can see, these expressions usually follow a list of things. And, "and stuff like that" is not formal, "and so on" and "**and so forth**" are more formal.

Sometimes people even say "and so on and so forth" together. For example, "please have all the necessary documents ready, your birth certificate, your driver's license **and so on and so forth**."

We also might repeat "*et cetera*," like, "Please bring all the documents, *et cetera*, *et cetera*."

There is no reason to say it twice! We just do it anyway!

Quiz (see the answers at the bottom of this Lipservice)**1. What is the politically correct way to say “Merry Christmas”?**

- a) Happy Hanukah
- b) Happy Holidays
- c) Happy Christmas
- d) Happy Birthday

2. Which of the expressions is strange to say?

- a) Happy Christmas
- b) Merry Christmas
- c) Season's Greetings
- d) Happy Holidays

3. What is funny about the Christmas tradition of fruitcake?

- a) There is no fruit in it
- b) It is brown
- c) Not many people actually like it
- d) No one knows where the tradition comes from

4. What do you do under mistletoe?

- a) dance
- b) sing
- c) hug
- d) kiss

**5. Jenny: Let's play games at the party. You _____ games.
Everyone likes games.**

Please fill in the blank with the correct expression.

- a) can't go wrong with
- b) can only go right with
- c) can be wrong with
- d) can't be right

6. Tania: I need some pens, paper _____.

Please fill in the blank.

- a) and forth on
- b) and so on
- c) and so
- d) and to be continued

7. What was Harp's favourite Christmas present?

- a) scissors
- b) eggnog
- c) Christmas Carols
- d) a pendant

Answers: 1.b 2.c 3.c 4.d 5.a 6.b 7.d