

# Hitchin u3a Newsletter December 2024



## Chairman's Chat December 2024

*This is my last Chairman's Chat before my term of office ends at the AGM in March. Looking back, it makes me proud to say that our branch of the u3a has been thriving and we continue to attract new members almost every week. So thank you all for your support and help and for joining in the fun, whether at group activities, speaker meetings or musical Mondays.*

*However, we do need more interest groups to accommodate the increased membership and I will continue to beat the drum for volunteers to come forward to share their hobbies or knowledge. More on this theme on another day.*

*For now, I hope this festive season will bring you kindness, well-being, love and joy. Merry Christmas and a peaceful and happy New Year to all of you.*

*Heidi*

From the Creative Writing Group

### A Puzzle

I was on call that night. Nothing much seemed to happen in our village, so our local police station was locked overnight. I was at the end of a telephone in the unlikely event of any emergency. However, as I retired to bed my phone rang. "Police" I answered. "I want to report a disturbance," said the caller. "Something's going on at the house opposite me. I had just dropped off to sleep, and the noise woke me. They had some sort of house party and there was a lot of shouting, someone cried MURDER, and people were running out and driving off. The house looks empty now, no lights on but the front door is open. Something strange has been going on. I think you should investigate."

I rang my colleague, PC Plod. "Get your clothes on and I'll pick you up in ten minutes". We arrived at the house. Certainly, the door was open, and the house was in darkness. We entered carefully, using only our torches. We cautiously searched as we went from room to room until we reached the library. There was a body on the floor. I switched the light on and saw an elderly gentleman, quite dead, with a bloodstained candlestick at his side. He looked familiar, maybe a local dignitary. Plod looked on in horror. "It's Colonel Mustard in the Library with the candlestick" he cried.

"Now the puzzle really begins" I said. "We need to find out 'who dunnit'. I couldn't resist adding 'but who that person might, be I haven't a Cluedo."



Have you ever wondered why we hang up stockings—which are basically fancy socks—during the holiday season only to wake up on Christmas morning to find them filled with tiny gifts? According to one of the most popular legends about the tradition's origins is the tale of a poor widower who worried that he wouldn't be able to marry off his three daughters because of his lack of wealth.

Fortunately, **St. Nicholas** was wandering through the town where the man lived and heard villagers discussing that family's plight. He wanted to help but knew the man would refuse any kind of charity directly. Instead, one night, he slid down the chimney of the family's house and filled the girls' recently laundered stockings, which happened to be drying by the fire, with gold coins. And then he disappeared." In the morning, the family found the gifts and the daughters became eligible to wed. 'Twas a Christmas miracle!

## The Colour Purple

Some colours are light,  
Some so awful, an absolute fright.  
Some so bright they dazzle,  
Some just drive us into a frazzle.

But on colour is a cut above,  
It is one all of us should love.  
It is a colour between red and blue,  
Purple is just a heavenly hue.

Purple suits my niece, Oh so fine.  
Her favourite colour and also mine.  
Lilac is such a fragrant flower,  
Especially after a rain shower.

A violet smells oh so sweet,  
So tiny, so lovely, so neat,  
It is tempting to pick a few,  
They cheer us up when we feel blue.

Iris, lupins and crocus,  
Their purple draws our focus,  
A foxglove, so radiant, such grandeur,  
The French would say "Quelle jolie fleur."

Hibiscus, anemone, rhododendrons galore,  
Purple flowers are never a bore.  
Lavender smells just so heady,  
Our cameras always at the ready.

"The Colour Purple" a winning movie,  
Whoopi in purple, just so groovy.  
"Purple Haze" sang Jimi Hendrix,  
We'll add "Purple Rain" into the mix.  
For purple clothes we trawl the charity shops,  
We know all the nearby bus stops.  
Hats, scarves, blouses and a shirt,  
Even the occasional skirt.

If you buy a purple coat,  
And it doesn't float his boat,  
Tell him you don't care what he thinks,  
He can keep his browns and pinks.

So put on those purple blouses,  
Even the brightest purple trousers.  
Of all the colours it is the best,  
Better than all the rest.

Janina Kurszewska

## Spanish Beginners Group

Five Months have now passed,  
Learning Spanish has been a blast.  
We meet twice monthly after lunch.  
We are quite an eclectic bunch.

We strain our lips, teeth and jowls.  
Trying to pronounce those consonants and vowels.  
The "C" is pronounced like a "K", you see.  
But not if followed by an "l" or an "e".

What about the letter "V"?  
It's pronounced like a "B".  
It's amazing, we all cried,  
That Spaniards are not all tongue tied.

All those verbs and tenses, what a sight!  
What on earth is the "preterite"?  
We've lumbered through the present tense,  
The work we do is just immense.

Our brains revved up and in top gear,  
Adjectives, pronouns, adverbs is all we hear.  
Our neurons working like the blazes,  
To memorise those lovely phrases.

We've a better knowledge of all of Spain.  
The North, the East and Castillian Plain.  
If we ever go South, we would make merry  
Trying all the different types of Sherry.

We had a team in the u3a quiz,  
We came third, what a swizz.  
The organization was second to none,  
We all had so much fun.

Our tutor, an oddball, a bit of a nerd.  
Has she slipped in a swear word?  
She really is a jolly good sport,  
Gives us all a bit of thought.  
We are looking forward to learning more,  
Learning Spanish is no big chore.  
We are eleven ladies and three men,  
Hablamos Espanol bastante bien



## NEW FROM THE GROUPS

### Petanque

Petanque sessions will not be played during December and January, will review this at the end of January. Dictated by the weather.

Thank you,  
Graham Harris

### Theatre Group Chicago Theatre Trip



Thursday 17th October saw a group of Hitchin U3A members departing from St Mary's Church car park for Milton Keynes Theatre in a minibus. We were on the way to a performance of Chicago. As I only joined the U3A in September, this was my first opportunity to attend such an excursion. Before the show we enjoyed a delicious meal at Sultans, a Turkish/Mediterranean restaurant. The theatre production was excellent with many well-known songs, and we had a good view of the stage. The cast included Kevin Clifton, of Strictly Come Dancing fame, who we all discovered had an amazing voice! I look forward to joining more such trips and would like to thank Carol Mascarenhas for organising it.

Anne Moody

### By Popular Demand

**DORSET HOLIDAY 2025 - Monday**

**30 June to Friday 4 July 2025**



Check out the Travel Group  
Page on the Web site for  
further details.



### News from the Bookshelf of Book Group Two

Our Big News, is that we have moved home from the Sun Hotel to Hitchin Library.. It's great To be able to support such a valuable local resource in these hard times. Since I last wrote we have continued to read a wide variety of texts including the books pictured here. Robert Harris's *Munich* is set in 1938 and is an imagining of some aspects associated with Neville Chamberlain's visit to Munich for the "Peace in our time" conference. By contrast in *A Gentleman in Moscow*, Amor Towles imagines a Russian count under house arrest in a hotel in post-revolutionary Moscow. Both of these books have been made into series available on the commercial TV streaming platforms. Both are good to watch but to my mind the books provided me with better images. We also read Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*. Rhys's novel provides a back story to the "woman in the attic" which is at the heart of Bronte's victorian story.

You'll also see we read Jessie Burton's *The House of Fortune*. This is the sequel to *The Miniaturist*, and it probably makes sense to read the initial story before embarking on this tale set in Amsterdam in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century.

## History Group – Indian Partition Jeet – had a story to tell and here it is

### Science and Technology Group.

Each month we take it in turns to lead the discussion of a topic chosen from the wide space associated with science and technology: in other words life, the Earth and its inhabitants together with what has been discovered or developed. Over the past few months we've considered transportation systems involving cars, boats and planes (as yet no trains). Also we've considered "other minds" both animal and artificial. We debated **Is AI helping or Hindering?** In preparation everyone was asked to come with an example of a help and a hindrance. In addition we asked an "artificial friend". Many of you will have heard about the generative AI tool ChatGPT. There is a limited free version of the tool that is available to use freely over the internet. It was asked to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of AI (Yes, a SWOT) and the headlines from this is in the table below. We also asked it to explain Artificial Intelligence in various guises such as a child, an adult, an older citizen. As you may well know AI tools such as ChatGPT have to be 'taught' and so its response is dependent on the sources and potential prejudices of the programmers. Suffice it to say, that it showed itself to be a limited, bigoted and a little misogynistic entity. No matter we still had fun using it. We meet on the third Thursday of each month at the Sun Hotel.



My story begins in Tanganyika in a little town Mwanza in 1946. At the age of six my parents and my four siblings embarked on a train to Dar es Salaam, where we excitedly boarded the SS Karagola on route to Karachi. Then we would journey to Lyallpur (now known as Faisalabad) to visit my grandfather. This was before partition and before Pakistan. You can imagine the excitement in making such a journey. First by train, then a long sea voyage and then again train from Karachi to Lyallpur. To get to my Grandad's residence required the use of horse carriages, there were no taxis. Out time was spent in happy pursuits as young children do, playing with others of different faiths. We lived as on community and had no idea of the impending disaster that would strike India in 1947. My elder sisters gained admission into a local Convent School under the care of my grandfather and a Muslim neighbour, before the rest of the family returned to Tanganyika. Soon after our return to Tanganyika, Independence was granted to India and two separate countries were created, namely India and Pakistan. The subsequent partition was rushed through without any thought to the wellbeing of the population, and law and order broke down. The boundary lines were announced, and Lyallpur was now part of Pakistan. Mr Hakim our Muslim neighbour suggested that Grandad and the sisters, pack and leave for India. Grandad decided to stay. Mr Hakim collected the sisters, dressed them as Muslim boys and their journey to India began. The sisters have been reluctant to speak about what they experienced. They saw abandoned children, dead animals and dead people in an environment, where previously it had been at peace. They journeyed first to an aunt's village, but when they got there the village had been attacked and there were dead and mutilated people all over the place. Mr Hakim, with local help, they managed to escape to where the aunt and her family had been smuggled to a transit camp for refugees destined for India. The aunt was reluctant to take on the sisters as that would have meant two extra mouths to feed. Her family comprised two boys and two girls, but eventually Mr Hakim persuaded their aunt to assist, but they had to dress as boys. They were dirty and the aunt took them to the ablutions where, amongst other women, they washed and had their hair cut so that they would look like boy Jatt farm workers. The camp was growing in numbers, and the Pakistan army took over and marched them eastwards towards India. At Baba Nanak Dera, a Sikhi Holi place, some 57 miles from the railhead of Lahore they were able fed, it is incumbent on Sikhs to help and feed if requested. However, on the journey to this oasis they came upon little food and water was very scarce. Bodies were seen floating in the canals and there was little option but to drink from those sources of water. They were still being escorted by the Pakistan army, but they were sometimes helpless as the Kafila (convoy) was attacked and five young women were abducted. They never made it to Lahore as it was too dangerous, with news that trains were being attacked and the passengers were being slaughtered. There was a Muslim Kafila coming the other way, looking for sanctuary in Pakistan with the result that both Kafilas attacked each other. They bypassed Lahore and entered India via Shahdara. The Pakistan troops passed on the duty of protection to the Indian army, who walked us through the border. Our point of arrival was the revered Sikh city of Amritsar. The sisters were taken to a camp, processed and joyfully reunited with their grandfather. Sadly, a young female cousin was lost during the attacks on the journey. Survival for them comprised dressing like boys, making food to sell at railway stations and bearing up to the tragedy of partition. The horrors of which remain with them and the family. But survive they did.

### UK Parliament Science, Innovation and Technology Committee 2024 AI SWOT Generated by ChatGPT

Strengths	Weaknesses
Language Comprehension: Vast Knowledge Base: Quick Access to Information Generative Abilities Personalization and Adaptability: 24/7 Availability Consistency and Lack of Bias:	Lack of Understanding Context Inability to Experience Empathy or Emotions: Limited Creativity and Originality: Potential for Biased Outputs: Difficulty with Real-time Learning and Adaptation: Limited Domain Knowledge: Security and Privacy Concerns:
Opportunities	Threats
Automation: Enhanced Decision Making: Personalization: Healthcare Innovation: Education and Training: Smart Cities and Infrastructure Financial Services: Natural Language Processing (NLP): Environmental Conservation: Creative Industries	Job Displacement: Bias and Discrimination: Privacy Concerns: Cybersecurity Risks: Autonomous Weapons: Algorithmic Manipulation and Disinformation: Social Isolation and Dependence: Economic Concentration: Unemployment and Economic Disruption: Existential Risks:

PHOTOGRAPHS



Alpacas in Hitchin



Mount Zug, Switzerland.  
Reeta Bhatiani.



Cormorants having a friendly chat at Fairlands - Sarojin Ellis



Busy Quizzers



Hungry Quizzers



Now Who Has Won



Falmouth - Marula



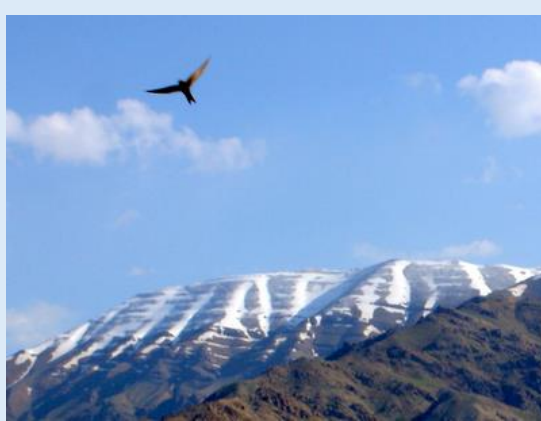
What is it?  
It's a Raindrop on a leaf  
Marula



Group Fest  
Craft Group's Work



Sunset in Mumbai



Kite Hawk in Flight  
Tehran



Lancaster and Spitfire  
over Pirton

## Zakomo!

That's 'thank you' in one of the three main languages in Zambia.

I wrote last time about the progress at the Baraka Learning centre in Kapiri. Some very kind members made donations to our fund to build reservoirs at the centre to harvest and store water as the rains are increasingly falling.

The good news is that the reservoirs are built and will be in operation for this year's rainy season, which - cross fingers - will start in November time. Here are a couple of photos of the reservoirs.

Thank you so much again.

Judy Howlett



## THANK YOU FROM ELIZABETH KEECH

A big 'thank you' to everyone in u3a who supported the Quilt Raffle in aid of the Friends of the British Schools Museum. The raffle was drawn on Friday 6<sup>th</sup> December and the quilt was won by our own Janet West!



## U3a Quiz

On 27th September, 56 eager quizzers met at Hitchin Town Hall to enjoy a fish/chicken & chips lunch followed by a challenging quiz. Maggie and Dennis led the way, posing some tricky questions to get our brains ticking. Eight rounds later, with a bit of banter about an answer or two, the team on table 1 squeaked through to victory by half a point! Thank you Maggie, Dennis, June, Bob and Margaret for helping to make the event a success. It has been suggested that we could have more than one quiz a year, what do you think?..... "

regards  
June Young

## Why did I join u3a?

There are many reasons to join u3a, but I would like to share my reasons with you.

My husband and I retired to Hitchin in 2002. Unfortunately, he was diagnosed with Parkinsons in 2015 and terminal cancer in June 2021. I became a carer, and our life changed. On September 17th, 2022, my husband of 59 years died, and I realised just how the last 7 years had affected me. I felt I had lost my identity and had lost touch with many of my friends resulting in a lack of confidence. I was aware that I needed to make changes and get back into the world again. It was then that a friend suggested I joined u3a and what a difference it has made to my life. It was difficult at first meeting new people, but everyone was really friendly. I joined two groups and was welcomed immediately. Both groups were subjects that really interested me and allowed me the opportunity to keep up to date. The coffee mornings were a great time to meet new people, the meetings were informative. There have been music evenings, quizzes, socials, and many lunches. I have been on a holiday, which when you are on your own is daunting, but we all mixed well and had great fun and am booked to go to Harrogate on Monday.

As with most organisations it is the committee who work hard. Accordingly, I volunteered to help on the committee so that I could repay the help that I have been given. The last two years in u3a have given me friendship, a social life which is the envy of my son, interesting debates, continued learning and most of all a good laugh.

Barbara Allison

## Sprout Tart

### From Judy Howlett

500 g block or ready rolled puff pastry

Mary Berry says buy it don't make it.

(If it's good enough for her, it's good enough for me)

40 g blanched hazelnuts

600 g sprouts, trimmed

200 ml double cream

250 g soft cheese

75 g mature cheddar, grated

50 g blue cheese, crumbled

\*Heat oven to 200 C, 180 fan, gas mark 6

\*Roll pastry large enough to fill 30cm x 20 x 4 baking dish

\*Lay on the baking tray, prick over with a fork, line with parchment and fill with baking beans and blind bake for 20 minutes, then remove parchment and beans and bake for another 5-10 minutes

\*Roast the hazelnuts for 10 minutes and set aside

\*Simmer the sprouts for about 5 minutes until tender, drain and run under cold water until cool. Dry with kitchen towel. Quarter the sprouts

\*Bring cream to a simmer, stir until thickened and reduce by about half. (I wonder about using that extra thick double cream but never have)

\*Remove from the heat and stir in the sprouts.

\*Pour the creamy sprouts into the tart case.

\*Roughly chop the hazelnuts and scatter on top, along with the blue cheese.

\*Bake for 10-15 minutes until golden.

\*Trim off any overhanging pastry.



## Allspice Gravy

### Ingredients

Makes: enough for 8-12 people

Metric Cups

- giblets from turkey (not including liver)
- 1 litre water
- 1 tablespoon allspice berries
- ½ teaspoon black peppercorns
- 3 bay leaves
- 1 x 4 centimetres stick cinnamon
- 1 stick celery
- 2 carrots
- 1 unpeeled onion (halved)
- 1 tablespoon Maldon salt or 1/2 tablespoon table salt
- juice of 1 clementine plus pulp from fruit
- 2 tablespoons plain flour
- 2 tablespoons honey

### Method

- 1.Put all the ingredients, except the flour and honey, into a saucepan and bring to a boil. Cover with a lid and simmer gently for 2 hours.
- 2.Strain the gravy stock through a sieve (or just pour, holding back the bits) into a large measuring jug: this should give you approx. 1 litre / 1 quart. All this can be done well ahead.
- 3.On the Day itself, whisk the flour in a saucepan with 2 tablespoons of the salty juices from the turkey roasting tin, then put the saucepan on the heat and slowly whisk in the rest of the stock and the honey.
- 4.Let the gravy bubble away, stirring every now and again with a wooden spoon, until it thickens a little and the floury taste disappears.
- 5.If you are preparing the gravy stock ahead, make sure when you add the flour and juices and reheat that it gets piping hot; preferably fill the gravy jug with hot water for 10 minutes before draining, drying and filling it with hot, invitingly aromatic allspice gravy.

Thanks Nigella

## Hitchin u3a Holiday:

North Yorkshire, 7th. - 11th. October 2024

We were a throng of hardy, mostly seasoned, u3a holidaymakers, assembling at St Mary's Square, in good time. On to the coach and off we go. It was a pleasure to find it modern, smooth riding and comfortable. The driver inspired confidence and later his skill negotiating tight bends through the narrow Yorkshire village streets earned him a round of applause on more than one occasion.

Coach rides are pleasant, but only the souls who manage to doze off seemed completely relaxed. The rest of us engaged in bouts of animated conversation, often indicating the notable passing views as the driver helpfully announces them. First stop was a lunch break at the English Heritage property, Broadsworth House. Sunshine greets us as our postprandial perambulations encompass a portion of the extensive and beautifully maintained grounds; perhaps imagining ourselves the residents of the large and lavishly decorated rooms we have deigned to inspect.

It is not too late in the afternoon when we arrive at the Crown Hotel, Harrogate. We have time to settle in and get ready to enjoy the programme for the days ahead.

We quickly adapted to the surroundings and routine. The only discipline required for the full itinerary of coach outings, was to arrive on time in the hotel foyer, and to return to the coach on time for departure. On two days, our stoicism, good humour, and spirit of community, made light of torrential rain. We travelled through the Yorkshire Dales, to the 'Wensleydale Cheese Experience'. On a "free" day, we visited either the RHS Harlow Carr gardens, or the City of York; although many of us opted to stay in Harrogate, and sample the delights of the famous Betty's Tea Rooms: one wag commented "never mind the cake, have you seen the loo?"

Day four was an excursion to Whitby, where we largely managed to dodge the rain by sampling the fish at one of several cafes and chip shops. Nevertheless, we were a little damp on the steam train ride to Pickering. The final day was a 9:15am departure for home. Our driver diligently checked the loading of our luggage, and there were no last-minute hitches. An excellent lunch and guided tour were provided at the Piece Hall, Halifax. Skipping the visit to Holmfirth we were able to arrive back at St Mary's Square at a reasonable hour in the late afternoon. All round, a most enjoyable holiday, for which we must thank Angela for the organisation and Heidi for her able, perceptive and patient group leadership.



Brodsworth Hall



Wet and Wind Whitby

From Bren Timson

The Architecture Group had a lively December meeting.

The next session is on 8th January (overlooking New Year's Day!)

Usual time and place - 10 for 10.30 in the Tavistock Room at the Sun Inn. We shall be delving into the architecture and design of the Arts and Crafts Movement, William Morris et al., and if time, Rennie Macintosh. All welcome

A note from Margaret Hughes the subscription for 2025 will be due on January 1st payments are being taken now for next year to help spread our workload.

### EXTRA HELPERS WANTED FOR THE 2025 HOSPITALITY GROUP

We need more members to come forward to lend a hand with the refreshments at the U3A fortnightly meetings.

There are currently three teams each consisting of four members on a Rota system.

New helpers will join in with an existing team then they can decide whether they want to make the commitment.

The ideal would be to create another team of four members, and this would mean a turn would only come round every two months.

We can access Christchurch hall from 1.30pm, firstly we switch on the two kitchen boilers. I bring the fresh milk and any supplies of tea/coffee and biscuits etc. that are needed.

The stock is kept in U3A blue and white striped bag on the kitchen shelf.

The duties consist of setting up the refreshments in the kitchen before the start of the meeting.

After 3pm refreshments are served at the hatch, cups collected, washed, dried, and put away leaving a tidy kitchen by 4.15pm.

If a team member is unable to take their turn when it comes around, then dates are swapped with one of the other teams, letting me know of any changes made or I will find a substitute for your turn.

Please come and give it a try we are a very friendly bunch, and by joining us you will get to know lots more members. Contact me by Email [jan.stearn@sky.com](mailto:jan.stearn@sky.com) or send a text message Mobile 07714 217447.

Jan Stearn - Hospitality Group Leader

# Do you need support this winter?

Speak to one of our advisers on what support is available.

You can speak with a member of the team - it is free and confidential.

**We can talk about ...**

- Pension credit entitlement and how to apply
- Other entitlements which may impact your pension credit entitlement
- Food and Energy support this winter
- Carer support
- Wider support which can be available, including:
  - Draught insulation and radiator reflectors
  - Free full winter welfare check available

To discuss what help you could be entitled to this winter call us on

**0300 123 4044**



## The Christmas Get Together Hitchin Town Hall

## PLAY READING GROUP



Maggie B

and

Maggie K

To Continue the Christmas Spirit the Play Reading Group did their annual Pantomime. Oh yes they did: etc; etc. Of course not to make it too easy, it was decided to do a pantomime, which was in fact a combination of two. Red Riding Hood and Dick Whittington. With, can you believe at one stage interchangeable characters. I am not sure how the Wolf and the Cat got on so well!! We had great enthusiasm and a not a little good humour a great time was had by all. Even some great renditions of popular panto music.

A cold and blustery day outside. It was Monday 9<sup>th</sup> December and Hitchin u3a were holding their Christmas Get Together. Late as usual, that's me, although I thought I was in time. Hey Ho (as Santa says). It was a sell out – wow, how successful these gatherings are. Arriving I was greeted by the Fantastic Greeters, wearing their lanyards, checked in and seated. They do a great job all year long, at the fortnightly speaker afternoons. Then the Hospitality Group, who tend to our needs at those meetings. It was time to remember them and a heartfelt thanks went out to them. So, between both Groups we were set fair for a great afternoon.

What do you expect when two Maggies get together? There was a lot of laughter and good u3a spirit. The organisation and the quizzes were first class. Everyone was enjoying themselves in good company and to round off with Carols, just made the day.

### A Big Thank You to the Maggies

Just a note from the Editor. Please remember that this Newsletter is an opportunity to promote your Groups activities. It can be used as an opportunity to promote some personal or charitable causes. Please do not hesitate to send any copy that you would like included.

Photographs are always welcome.

Have a great and peaceful Christmas and a Happy New Year



The Play Reading Group meet every second Tuesday at the Sun hotel

### Some Christmas Trivia

Answers at the bottom

1. Which one of Santa's reindeer has the same name as another holiday mascot?
2. What popular Christmas song was actually written for Thanksgiving?
3. In what country is KFC a popular Christmas meal?
4. How many reindeer are featured in the poem "Twas the Night Before Christmas?"
5. What country has a tradition of a Witch dropping gifts for children through the chimney on Christmas?

Answers

1. Cupid
2. Jingle Bells
3. Japan
4. Eight (No Rudolph)
5. Italy