Christmas Song Picture Puzzle

Teacher Lesson Plan · A holiday warm-up that sneaks in some history

Grade level	Grades 4–12 (works for any class; ideal before winter break)
Time	30–45 minutes (puzzle 15–20 min, song stories and discussion 15–25 min)
Format	Whole class on a projector, small teams, or individual devices. Free, runs in any browser, nothing to install.
Activity link	https://duelinghistory.com/music/ChristmasSongPuzzle/

Overview

Students look at 25 cartoon picture clues and work out which Christmas song or carol each one stands for. Each picture is a visual pun or a scene from the song's lyrics. After solving, students open **About this song** on any card to read the story behind it: who wrote it, when, and why. Many of the songs are older than the students expect, and several began in other countries and languages.

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Interpret visual clues and connect images to words and ideas (visual literacy).
- Identify where and when familiar holiday songs came from, including songs that began in Germany, Austria, France and Wales.
- Place songs on a rough timeline and notice how technology (radio, records, film, music videos) changed how music spread.
- Work together, explain their reasoning, and back up a guess with evidence from the picture.

Materials

- Projector or interactive board for whole-class play, or student devices (Chromebooks, tablets, phones).
- Speakers, if you want background music or the YouTube "Made famous by" links.
- Student answer sheet (page 3), one per student or team. Optional for device play; useful for teams and projector play.

How the Activity Works

- Choose a song from the drop-down under each picture. Click any picture to see it bigger.
- **Check My Answers** marks each choice right or wrong. **Show Answers** fills in every answer.
- **Start Over** shuffles the cards for a new round, so neighbors can't copy positions.
- **Music** plays a medley or a single carol in the background; **Snow** runs from Off to Blizzard.
- **About this song** on each card opens the song's story, a "Made famous by" recording, and a YouTube link.

Procedure

1. Hook (3–5 min)	Put one clue on the screen enlarged, such as the Yellowstone Park geyser. Ask: “What song could this be?” Let a few students guess and explain their thinking before you reveal it (O Come, All Ye Faithful).
2. Solve (15–20 min)	Teams of 2–4 work through the remaining clues, using the drop-downs or the answer sheet. Turn on the snow and music for atmosphere. Remind them that each answer is used once, so they can work by elimination.
3. Check (3 min)	Click **Check My Answers**. Give teams a few extra minutes to fix any misses before you click **Show Answers**.
4. Song Stories (10–15 min)	Open **About this song** for 4–6 songs. Good choices: *Silent Night* (Austria, 1818), *Jingle Bells* (originally not a Christmas song), *Rudolph* (created as a store ad), *Let It Snow* (written in a July heat wave) and *White Christmas* (1942, wartime).
5. Wrap-Up (5 min)	Ask the discussion questions below, or do the quick timeline sort on the last page as an exit ticket.

Discussion Questions

- Which clue was the hardest? What made it hard: the picture, or not knowing the song?
- Several of these songs began in German, Latin or French. Why might a song travel to another country and language?
- *Let It Snow* and *The Christmas Song* were both written in summer heat. Why would songwriters write about winter in July?
- *White Christmas* came out in 1942, during World War II. Why might it have meant so much to soldiers far from home?
- How did radio, records, movies and music videos change which songs became famous?

Differentiation

- **Support:** Assign 10 clues instead of 25, play as a whole class, or allow partner work with the answer sheet.
- **Challenge:** Turn off the drop-downs (answer sheet only, no word bank) or set a time limit.
- **Make your own:** Students draw a picture clue for a song not in the puzzle (any holiday or era), and classmates guess.

Teacher tip: The cards shuffle with each Start Over, so card numbers on the answer key match the *default* order when the page first loads. If you have shuffled, use the picture descriptions or click **Show Answers**.

Christmas Song Picture Puzzle

Student Answer Sheet

Name(s): _____ Date: _____

Look at each picture clue and write the name of the Christmas song it stands for. Each song is used once.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____
11. _____
12. _____
13. _____
14. _____
15. _____
16. _____
17. _____
18. _____
19. _____
20. _____
21. _____
22. _____
23. _____
24. _____
25. _____

Word Bank (cut off or fold under for a challenge round)

All I Want for Christmas Is My Two Front Teeth
Away in a Manger
Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire
Deck the Halls
Frosty the Snowman
Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer
I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus
It Came Upon a Midnight Clear
I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas
Jingle Bell Rock
Jingle Bells
Joy to the World
Last Christmas
Let It Snow! Let It Snow! Let It Snow!
O Christmas Tree
O Come, All Ye Faithful
O Holy Night
Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer
Santa Claus Is Coming to Town
Silent Night
Silver Bells
The First Noel
The Twelve Days of Christmas
Walking in a Winter Wonderland
What Child Is This?

Answer Key and Song Stories

Card numbers match the order when the page first loads. Each story is expanded in the activity under About this song.

#	Song	Quick story
1	**O Come, All Ye Faithful**	Began as the Latin hymn *Adeste Fideles*; its composer is still debated. The common English version is Frederick Oakeley's 1841 translation.
2	**Walking in a Winter Wonderland**	Dick Smith of Honesdale, Pennsylvania, was inspired by his town's snow-covered park; first recorded in 1934.
3	**Jingle Bells**	Written by James Lord Pierpont and published in 1857 as "One Horse Open Sleigh." It was not originally a Christmas song.
4	**Let It Snow! Let It Snow! Let It Snow!**	Written by Sammy Cahn and Jule Styne in July 1945, during a heat wave.
5	**O Christmas Tree**	From the German folk song "O Tannenbaum" ("O fir tree"), tied to the German Christmas-tree tradition.
6	**It Came Upon a Midnight Clear**	An 1849 poem by Massachusetts minister Edmund Sears, later set to music.
7	**What Child Is This?**	Words by William Chatterton Dix (1865), an insurance manager; sung to the old English tune "Greensleeves."
8	**Santa Claus Is Coming to Town**	By J. Fred Coots and Haven Gillespie; first sung on Eddie Cantor's radio show in 1934.
9	**Joy to the World**	Words by English hymn writer Isaac Watts, based on Psalm 98.
10	**Deck the Halls**	A traditional carol set to an old Welsh melody; first sung for New Year's as well as Christmas.
11	**Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer**	Written by Randy Brooks and recorded by Elmo & Patsy in 1979.
12	**O Holy Night**	Composed by Adolphe Adam in France in 1847 ("Minuit, Chrétiens").
13	**All I Want for Christmas Is My Two Front Teeth**	A 1948 novelty hit for bandleader Spike Jones and his City Slickers.
14	**Silver Bells**	By Jay Livingston and Ray Evans; first performed by Bob Hope and Marilyn Maxwell in a 1951 film.
15	**Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer**	Robert L. May created Rudolph in 1939 as a store giveaway booklet for Montgomery Ward.
16	**Frosty the Snowman**	By Jack Rollins and Steve Nelson; first recorded by Gene Autry in 1950.
17	**Silent Night**	"Stille Nacht" was composed in Austria in 1818 by Franz Xaver Gruber to words by Joseph Mohr.
18	**The Twelve Days of Christmas**	An English cumulative carol; the twelve days run from Christmas Day to Epiphany (January 6).
19	**I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus**	Jimmy Boyd was only 13 when he recorded it in 1952.

#	Song	Quick story
20	**Jingle Bell Rock**	First released by Bobby Helms in 1957, an early rock ’n’ roll Christmas song.
21	**Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire**	“The Christmas Song,” by Mel Tormé and Bob Wells (1945); Nat King Cole made it famous.
22	**Last Christmas**	Wham!’s 1984 hit. Clue: last year’s December calendar, and the 25th is missing.
23	**Away in a Manger**	A carol first published in the late 1800s and sung across the English-speaking world.
24	**I’m Dreaming of a White Christmas**	Irving Berlin’s 1942 song; Bing Crosby’s recording is one of the best-selling singles of all time.
25	**The First Noel**	A traditional English carol, likely from Cornwall.

Exit Ticket: Old Carol or Modern Hit?

Sort these songs into two groups: **written before 1900** or **written after 1900**. Then circle the oldest one.

Silent Night · Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer · Jingle Bells · Frosty the Snowman · Joy to the World · Last Christmas · O Holy Night · I’m Dreaming of a White Christmas

Key: Before 1900: Joy to the World (oldest, Isaac Watts, 1719), Silent Night (1818), O Holy Night (1847), Jingle Bells (1857). After 1900: White Christmas (1942), Rudolph (1939 story; 1949 song), Frosty (1950), Last Christmas (1984).