CRAZY GAPPED TEXT (grammar, collocation, text cohesion)

Level: pre-intermediate and above
Teens, adults

If you’ve ever heard of Madlibs (www.madlibs.com), you’ll recognise this activity. This is a favourite Madlib adaptation of mine in the EFL classroom because it raises student awareness about word forms and revises grammatical terminology, and helps students think about text cohesion, sentence structure and collocations.

1. Review the grammatical terms listed in the gapped text.
2. Put students into pairs. Give student A the gapped text. Student A should look at the grammar terms next to the gaps in the text and ask student B for a word. For example, if the gap needs an adjective, student B should say an adjective.
3. Once the gaps have been filled with the correct part of speech, the students read the text. Of course, it will sound very silly because student B won’t have seen the text to know what word would make sense!
4. Give the students another copy of the gapped text and ask them to think about what words might have been in the original text.
5. Ask students say what clues they used to fill in the blanks. For example, in the level 1 text, they may have guessed that the place was England because the letter was from the Oxford Orchestra. In the level 3 text, students will have used the collocation clue ‘Eve’ and the phrase ‘merry Christmas’ to guess the holiday.
6. Hand out the original text so that students can compare.
7. There are a number of ways to follow up:

**Lower Level**
- a: Ask the student to write the next paragraph of the story
- b: Read or listen to the story with the class

**Higher Level**
- a: Ask the student to write what the nephew says to Scrooge next
- b: Discuss opposing views on Christmas - why is Scrooch rich but miserable and his nephew is poor but happy?
England 1995

‘Hey, Jan, look at this!’ Carol said. She had a letter in her hand and took it across to her husband at the breakfast table. ‘It’s from the Oxford Orchestra,’ she said. ‘They’re giving concerts in the Czech Republic this Christmas. They’re doing three concerts in Prague and they’re asking me to go because they need a harpist. Shall we go to Prague for Christmas? I can play with the orchestra, and you can come with us.’

‘When are the concerts?’ asked Jan. ‘I always have a lot of work in the weeks before Christmas. I must finish writing my new book then.’
One Christmas Eve, old Scrooge was working busily in his office. It was cold, frosty, foggy weather. Outside it was already dark, although it was only three o’clock in the afternoon, and there were candles in all the office windows. The fog covered everything, like a thick, grey blanket.

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‘Merry Christmas, uncle! God bless you!’ cried a happy voice. Scrooge’s nephew had arrived.

‘Bah!’ said Scrooge crossly. ‘Humbug!’

‘Christmas is humbug! Surely you don’t mean that, uncle?’ said his nephew.

‘I do,’ said Scrooge. ‘Why do you call it “merry” Christmas? You’re too poor to be merry.’

‘Well,’ replied the nephew, smiling, ‘why are you so cross? You’re too rich to be unhappy.’

‘Of course I’m cross,’ answered the uncle, ‘when I live in a world full of stupid people like you! You say “Merry Christmas”! But what is Christmas? Just a time when you spend too much, when you find yourself a year older and not an hour richer, when you have to pay your bills. Everyone who goes around saying “Merry Christmas” should have his tongue cut out. Yes, he should!’
One __________ (holiday) Eve, old Scrooge was working __________ (adverb ending in -ly) in his office. It was cold, frosty, foggy weather. Outside it was already __________ (adjective), although it was only three o'clock in the afternoon, and there were __________ (plural noun) in all the office windows. The __________ (noun) covered everything, like a thick, grey blanket.

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‘__________ (exclamation), uncle! God bless you!’ cried a happy voice. Scrooge’s nephew had arrived.

‘Bah!’ said Scrooge crossly. ‘Humbug!’

‘Christmas is humbug! Surely you don’t mean that, uncle?’ said his __________ (family member).

‘I do,’ said Scrooge. ‘Why do you call it “merry” Christmas? You’re too __________ (adjective) to be merry.’

‘Well,’ replied the nephew, smiling, ‘why are you so cross? You’re too __________ (adjective) to be unhappy.’

‘Of course I’m cross,’ answered the uncle, ‘when I __________ (verb) in a world full of stupid people like you! You say “Merry Christmas”! But what is Christmas? Just a time when you spend too much, when you find yourself a year ____________ (comparative adjective) and not an hour richer, when you have to __________ (verb) your bills. Everyone who goes around saying “Merry Christmas” should have his __________ (body part) cut out. Yes, he should!’