Dear Students:

Hello! How are you? I hope fine. Are you excited for the upcoming holiday season? I bet you are.

This letter is a holiday story for you, about Sinterklaas. Did you know there are different kinds of Santas? St. Nicholas is like Santa. The Netherlands is a country that has Sinterklaas and not Santa! Can you imagine that?

I lived in the Netherlands for a year. When it was Thanksgiving time (to me), I heard that Sinterklaas was coming to town on a boat. We went to the canal to see a boat arriving in town with someone who looked sort of like Santa Claus. He had a white horse and 6 helpers. The helpers were all named Zwarte Pete!

Then the people of the town followed Sinterklaas to the city hall. We went, too. Sinterklaas opened a huge book and began telling the children in the town if they had been naughty or nice that year. He told some stories that embarrassed the children! The grown-ups laughed at some of the stories. Sinterklaas talked to each child in the group, but they didn't get on his lap or tell him what they wanted.

That night and every night for about three weeks, the children in the town put their shoes outside by their back doors. Some of them left carrots or hay for the horse that went with Sinterklaas. At night, Sinterklaas, his horse, and his helpers would go around town and leave small surprises in the children's shoes. The children might have found a piece of candy or a small toy in their shoes in the morning. Some children might have found a lump of coal if they hadn't been very nice! Sinterklaas didn't go inside the houses at all.

All of the little gift giving from Sinterklaas ended on Dec. 5th, the eve of Sinterklaas Day. On that day, families gave each other presents or told jokes or shared funny poems. December 6th is also

called St. Nicholas Day. December 5th or 6th is the day the children get their largest gift.

After St. Nicholas Day, it was the Christmas season. The stores and houses just had tiny bits of decorating. No one had any Christmas trees.

Finally, about December 23rd, I saw some Christmas trees for sale in a neighbor's yard. I asked to buy one. The man, "What is your hurry to get a tree?" He didn't know that trees are for sale all during the month of December in America.

So, we took our tree home, decorated it, and Santa somehow found our tree on Christmas Eve for my children. The Dutch children don't get gifts on Christmas or Christmas Eve, as they already had their gifts. On New Year's Day, I took the decorations off the tree and put the tree on the curb for pick-up.

As we walked around the town, I noticed everyone else still had their trees up and decorated. I wondered when they would take their trees down.

During January, sometimes three boys would come to the door. They were wearing St. Nicholas type of paper hats, and they had blankets around their shoulders. They told me I was supposed to give them candy! I think they were pretending to be Wise Men or Sinterklaas, I'm not sure.

Then, on Epiphany, the neighbors all took decorations off their trees and put the trees on the cub for pick-up. The people in the Netherlands keep their trees up until the Wise Men reached baby Jesus. So, then it seemed right that maybe the boys were pretending to be the Wise Men. Epiphany is several weeks into January, so the trees were up about as long as they are in America, just different weeks.

But both countries have church services on Christmas Eve and Christmas. In that way they are the same.

I hope you have a happy holiday season, students. I hope you learn about many different types of holidays in other countries.

From,
a teacher who lived in the Netherlands

Here are a few links for your teacher:

The first link explains that Zwarte Pete is black from going down the chimney, and more about Christmas in the Netherlands:

http://www.theholidayspot.com/christmas/worldxmas/netherlands.htm

This link tells about Christmas around the world:
http://www.theholidayspot.com/christmas/worldxmas/index.htm