

0. A VISIT FROM SAINT NICHOLAS - Story Preface

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During America's Civil War, Thomas Nast created this illustration featuring a Santa Claus. It was one of the first-ever depictions of Santa Claus in America. The image was published on the cover of the January 3, 1863 issue of *Harper's Weekly* (and shows Santa Claus giving presents to the soldiers). The Library of Congress [maintains a copy of the original](#). Click on the image for a full-page view.

Clement Moore wrote a much-loved [poem](#) "A Visit from Saint Nicholas"—now known as "*The Night Before Christmas*"—on Christmas Eve, 1822. A gift for his six children, it was the first time anyone described Saint Nicholas as fat and jolly. (Moore probably derived the description from other literary works referring to Dutch merchants in those terms.)

It wasn't the first time a reindeer was part of the Santa Claus story, though. That occurred a year earlier, in a poem called "*The Children's Friend*." Expanding the number of reindeer from one to eight, Moore also gave them names.

About 40 years after *A Visit From St. Nicholas* was published, [Thomas Nast](#) used Moore's "fat and jolly" description to help create the familiar Santa Claus of today. As an illustrator for *Harper's Weekly*, Nast created numerous *Christmas Drawings*. His most famous, from 1881, pictures St. Nick with a rotund belly while his first, from 1863, shows Santa siding with the Union Army. That drawing, requested by President Lincoln, demoralized the Confederates.

Nast's engravings depict children calling, or mailing, their mounting requests to a Santa who tries to please. Instead of Saint Nicholas, the patron saint **OF** children, we now have Saint Nicholas, the patron saint **FOR** children.

Clement Moore and Thomas Nast particularly helped create that fundamental transition. One can only wonder what the **real** Saint Nicholas would make of his gift-giving legend today. And one can only imagine what Dorey Walker would have said in *Miracle on 34th Street* had **she** known what you now know!

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/A-VISIT-FROM-SAINT-NICHOLAS-Miracle-on-34th-Street>

See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](#)

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