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Illustration, of "The Nutcracker," by Maxim Mitrofanov, a prolific Russian artist who illustrates children's books (among other things). Copyright, Maxim Mitrofanov, all rights reserved. Image provided here as fair use for educational purposes.

Fritz and Marie—who is called Clara in versions of "The Nutcracker" based on the [adaptation by Alexandre Dumas](#)—live in 19th-century Germany where "[Saint Nicholas](#)" is known as the [giver of Christmas gifts](#).

Germany is also the place where a fir tree is called a "Tannenbaum."

A Tannenbaum, used for Christmas, is called a "Weihnachtsbaum" (literally, a "Christmas tree").

A Christmas tree, surrounded by wonderful presents, features prominently in Hoffman's "Nutcracker and the Mouse King." The tree is positioned on a table (as such trees often were in the 19th century).

*"Wow, how lovely!" sighed Marie as she gazed in wonder at the gorgeous Christmas tree. Fritz started jumping up and down with excitement.*

*"Go on," said Mama, smiling. "Find out what Saint Nicholas has brought for you good children!"*

*The children ran here, there and everywhere.*

*Marie discovered the most beautiful dolls, all sorts of picture books and a pretty silk dress with colored ribbons hanging from one of the branches.*

*Fritz found not only a fox but an entire squadron of hussars, too. These soldiers wore red and gold uniforms with real silver swords - and - they were mounted on awesome white horses.*

*Calming-down, a bit, the children started looking at their new picture books. Marie was enchanted with what she saw. There were strange flowers, lively portraits of people from all over the world, children laughing and playing. They almost looked real!*

*Soon their parents called them to a table where something was hidden behind a green curtain. It had to be Godpapa's special present.*

*The curtain drew back and there it was ... a magnificent castle. It had sparkling windows and golden towers with bells that chimed. Doors and windows could open to reveal little ladies and gentlemen in long robes and plumed hats. They walked up and down inside the rooms of the castle while tiny children, in silk gowns and velvet doublets, danced to the bells and a man in a green mantle popped out his head.*

*Even a small model of Godpapa Drosselmeier came to the castle doors. He was no bigger than a person's thumb.*

*"Let me go inside," begged Fritz.*

*"I'm afraid that's quite impossible, young man," said the real Drosselmeier, shaking his head.*

*"Then make them do something different," grumbled a rather put-out Fritz.*

*Drosselmeier explained that the figures were clockwork, so they couldn't do anything different. Fritz looked really disappointed. He thought they weren't half as good as his soldiers, which he could command to do anything he pleased. So ... he wandered off to play with his squadron of hussars. Soon he had them charging around in fierce combat.*

*Even Marie, who was also bored but was too kind and polite to show it, quietly slipped away.*

*Drosselmeier was rather offended until Mrs. Stahlbaum came to the rescue. She asked him to show her how everything worked.*

*Marie was nibbling on a piece of delicious gingerbread-man when she noticed something she hadn't seen before. Sitting quietly under the Christmas tree was an odd little gentleman in a hussar's jacket.*

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/The-Presents>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/The-Presents>