

# The History of Santa Claus

On the 24<sup>th</sup> December, thousands of children around the UK will be excitedly waiting for Santa Claus. As he is so mysterious, there are many different stories about where Santa Claus first came from.

## Was Odin Santa Claus?

One idea about the origin of Santa Claus comes from the Norse god Odin. One tale says that Odin flew through the sky on a chariot and dropped presents into children's shoes while they slept. Odin's chariot was pulled through the air by a horse with eight legs. Although this story is similar to the story of Santa Claus, some people think that Santa Claus was a kind person named Saint Nicholas.

## Who Was Saint Nicholas?

Saint Nicholas was thought to have been born around AD 300. Many people believe that Saint Nicholas, who was famous for being kind and generous, is the true origin of Santa Claus. One of the most famous tales of Saint Nicholas shares similarities with today's Santa Claus.

### Saint Nicholas and the Three Daughters

Over 1,700 years ago, a kind-hearted man named Saint Nicholas heard about three daughters who were so poor that they were about to be forced to become enslaved. When he heard the sad tale of the three girls, Saint Nicholas wanted to do something to help; he was wealthy and often gave money to people who were in need. One night, he threw a bag of coins through a window and the first daughter was saved from enslavement. The next night, Saint Nicholas threw another bag of coins through the window for the second daughter. The father of the three daughters wanted to thank the kind stranger. Therefore, on the third night, he chose to stay awake. However, Saint Nicholas saw him waiting at the window and dropped the coins down the chimney instead. When they reached the bottom of the chimney, they landed inside a pair of stockings which had been drying by the fire. In the morning, the third daughter found the sack of coins and all three were saved from becoming enslaved.



### Has Santa Claus Always Worn Red?

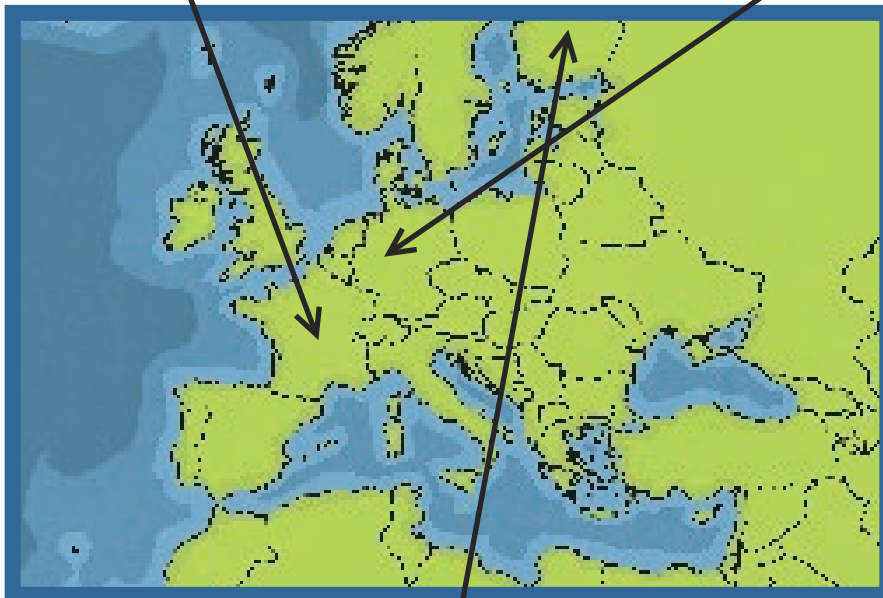
Today, we see Santa Claus wearing red but this hasn't always been the case. In 1843, 'A Christmas Carol' by Charles Dickens was published and was illustrated by John Leech. In one illustration, the Ghost of Christmas Present is drawn as a man with a beard and a green and white fur coat. Lots of people believe that this was meant to be Santa Claus. A few years later, Thomas Nast, who was famous for creating cartoons, drew Santa Claus wearing a red coat. It is believed that this drawing made people begin to think that Santa Claus wore red instead of green.

### Do Children in Other Countries Believe in Santa Claus?

Around the world, there are many stories of people who bring gifts to well-behaved children during the winter months.

In France, Père Noël is believed to wear a long, red cloak and he leaves gifts in children's shoes on Christmas Eve.

In Germany, Santa Claus is called Weihnachtsmann.



In Finland, Joulupukki wears long, red robes and is said to knock on people's doors before asking, "Are there any well-behaved children here?"

Whatever you believe the true origin of Santa Claus to be, make sure to look out of your window on Christmas Eve to see if you can spot him flying past!

# Questions

1. According to the legend, what was Odin's chariot pulled by? Tick one.

- eight reindeer  
 a horse with eight legs  
 an invisible creature  
 eight horses

2. Draw four lines and complete each sentence.

Père Noël...
Saint Nicholas...
The three daughters...
The Ghost of Christmas Present...

was born around AD 300.
were saved from enslavement.
is believed to leave gifts in children's shoes.
was drawn wearing a green coat.

3. Who illustrated 'A Christmas Carol'?

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4. Look at the paragraph beginning **One idea about the origin...**

Find and copy one word which is a type of vehicle.

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5. What does Joulupukki do **after** knocking on people's doors?

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6. Compare modern-day Santa Claus with Saint Nicholas.

How are they **similar**?

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7. **As he is so mysterious, there are many different stories about where Santa Claus first came from.**

Why do you think the author has used the word **mysterious** to describe Santa Claus?

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8. Which story do you think is the **most likely** origin of Santa Claus? Explain your answer.

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# Answers

1. According to the legend, what was Odin's chariot pulled by? Tick one.

- eight reindeer  
 **a horse with eight legs**  
 an invisible creature  
 eight horses

2. Draw four lines and complete each sentence.

Père Noël...	was born around AD 300.
Saint Nicholas...	were saved from enslavement.
The three daughters...	is believed to leave gifts in children's shoes.
The Ghost of Christmas Present...	was drawn wearing a green coat.

3. Who illustrated 'A Christmas Carol'?

**'A Christmas Carol' was illustrated by John Leech.**

4. Look at the paragraph beginning **One idea about the origin...**

Find and copy one word which is a type of vehicle.

**chariot**

5. What does Joulupukki do **after** knocking on people's doors?

**After knocking on people's doors, Joulupukki asks, "Are there any well-behaved children here?"**

6. Compare modern-day Santa Claus with Saint Nicholas.

How are they **similar**?

**Accept any sensible response provided that a comparison has been made, such as: Santa Claus and Saint Nicholas are similar because they have both given gifts to people at night. Santa Claus is also famous for leaving presents in stockings which are hung over a fireplace and the third bag of coins landed in a stocking which was over the fireplace.**

7. **As he is so mysterious, there are many different stories about where Santa Claus first came from.**

Why do you think the author has used the word **mysterious** to describe Santa Claus?

**Pupils' own responses, such as: I think that the author has chosen to use the word mysterious to describe Santa Claus because we still don't know very much about him. For example, nobody is certain about how he manages to deliver presents to every house in one night.**

8. Which story do you think is the **most likely** origin of Santa Claus? Explain your answer.

**Pupils' own responses, such as: I think that the legend of Odin delivering presents by flying on a chariot is the most likely origin of Santa Claus. This is because it sounds very similar to Santa Claus on his sleigh. Both the sleigh and the chariot are also both pulled by animals which you wouldn't normally expect to be able to fly.**

# The History of Santa Claus

Each year, on the 24<sup>th</sup> December, thousands of children around the UK will be eagerly anticipating the arrival of Santa Claus but where did he first come from? With Santa Claus being an elusive symbol of Christmas cheer, believers around the world have different ideas about his appearance.



## Was Odin Santa Claus?

One theory about the origin of Santa Claus comes from Norse mythology and the god Odin. Being a powerful god of many things, Odin was said to have flown through the sky on a chariot while dropping presents into children's shoes as they slept. Although pulled by an eight-legged horse instead of a reindeer, the myth bears a striking resemblance to Santa Claus and his sleigh. However, some people believe that Santa Claus was a generous person named Saint Nicholas.

## Who Was Saint Nicholas?

Saint Nicholas was a saint who was thought to have been born around AD 300. Many people believe that Saint Nicholas, who was famous for his kindness and generosity, is the true origin of Santa Claus. One of the most famous tales of Saint Nicholas, which has been passed down through many generations, shares similarities with today's Santa Claus.

## Saint Nicholas and the Three Daughters

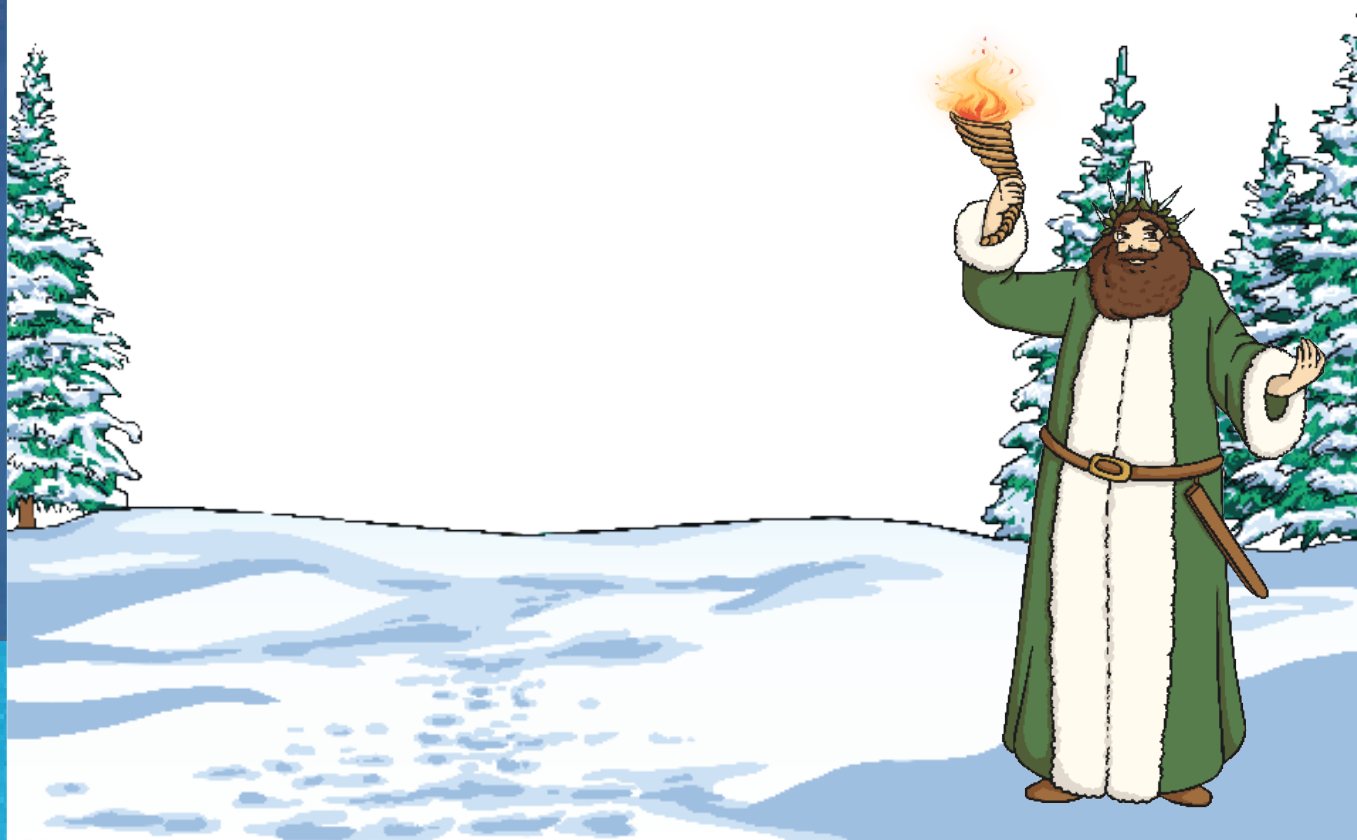
Over 1,700 years ago, a kind-hearted man by the name of Saint Nicholas heard about three daughters who were so poor that they were likely to be forced into enslavement. Upon hearing the sad tale of the three young girls, he knew that he must do something to help. Having been born into an affluent family, Saint Nicholas often used his wealth to support those in need. One night, Saint Nicholas threw a bag of gold through a window and the first daughter was saved from enslavement. The next night, Saint Nicholas threw another bag of gold through the window for the second daughter. Desperate to thank whomever was so generously donating the gold, the father of the three daughters stayed awake on the third night in an attempt to greet them.



However, Saint Nicholas saw the figure waiting at the window and chose to drop the gold down the chimney instead. When the gold reached the bottom of the chimney, it landed inside a pair of stockings which had been drying by the fire. In the morning, the third daughter found the sack of gold and all three rejoiced and thanked their mysterious saviour.

### Has Santa Claus Always Worn Red?

Today, we imagine – and sometimes even see – Santa Claus wearing red but this hasn't always been the case. During the Tudor period, a character dressed in green was known for bringing Christmas cheer. Many people believe that the colour green symbolised the arrival of spring and offered hope during the cold winter months. In 1843, 'A Christmas Carol' by Charles Dickens was published and featured illustrations by John Leech. In one illustration, the Ghost of Christmas Present is drawn as a man with a beard and a green and white fur coat. A few years later, in 1881, Thomas Nast – a cartoonist – drew Santa Claus wearing a red coat. Many people believe that he took inspiration from the red robes worn by Saint Nicholas and believe that his drawing led to the popular belief that Santa Claus dresses in red.





### Do Children in Other Countries Believe in Santa Claus?

Around the world, there are many stories of people who bring gifts to well-behaved children during the winter months.

In France, Père Noël is believed to wear a long, red cloak instead of a suit and he leaves gifts in children's shoes on Christmas Eve.

In Germany, Santa Claus is called Weihnachtsmann and he is said to travel with a mean companion named Krampus.



In Finland, Joulupukki wears long, red robes and is said to knock on people's doors before asking, "Are there any well-behaved children here?"

Whatever you believe the true origin of Santa Claus to be, make sure to look out of your window on Christmas Eve to see if you can spot him flying past!



# Questions

1. Who is said to knock on people's doors and ask about well-behaved children? Tick one.

- Santa Claus  
 Père Noël  
 Joulupukki  
 Weihnachtsmann

2. Number the events from 1-3 to show the order that they occurred.

	'A Christmas Carol' was published
	Saint Nicholas is thought to have been born
	Thomas Nast drew Santa Claus wearing a red coat

3. Look at the paragraph beginning **Each year, on the 24<sup>th</sup> December...**

Find and copy one word which means **difficult to find**.

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4. What do many people believe was the reason that the Tudor figure of Santa Claus was dressed in green?

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5. Name one similarity between Odin and the modern-day Santa Claus.

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6. Look at the section entitled **Has Santa Claus Always Worn Red?**

Why do you think that the author has chosen to use the phrase **many people believe**?

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7. Compare modern-day Santa Claus with Saint Nicholas.

How are they **different**?

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8. Summarise the story of Saint Nicholas and the three daughters in 20 words or fewer.

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9. Why do you think that Santa Claus varies across different countries? Fully explain your answer.

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# Answers

1. Who is said to knock on people's doors and ask about well-behaved children? Tick one.

- Santa Claus  
 Père Noël  
 **Joulupukki**  
 Weihnachtsmann

2. Number the events from 1-3 to show the order that they occurred.

<b>2</b>	'A Christmas Carol' was published
<b>1</b>	Saint Nicholas is thought to have been born
<b>3</b>	Thomas Nast drew Santa Claus wearing a red coat

3. Look at the paragraph beginning **Each year, on the 24<sup>th</sup> December...**

Find and copy one word which means **difficult to find**.

**elusive**

4. What do many people believe was the reason that the Tudor figure of Santa Claus was dressed in green?

**Many people believe that the colour green symbolised the arrival of spring and Santa Claus wearing green offered hope during the cold winter months.**

5. Name one similarity between Odin and the modern-day Santa Claus.

**Accept any sensible response provided that a comparison has been made, such as: they both delivered presents; they both flew through the sky; they both had vehicles pulled by animals.**

6. Look at the section entitled **Has Santa Claus Always Worn Red?**

Why do you think that the author has chosen to use the phrase **many people believe**?

**Pupils' own responses, such as: I think that the author has used the phrase 'many people believe' to show that it is not certain or a complete fact. I think that this is because it happened a long time ago and you won't be able to go back in time and ask Thomas Nast why he drew Santa Claus wearing red.**

7. Compare modern-day Santa Claus with Saint Nicholas.

How are they **different**?

**Accept any sensible response provided that a comparison has been made, such as:**

**Modern-day Santa Claus gives presents whereas Saint Nicholas gave bags of gold.**

**Modern-day Santa Claus also delivers presents to everybody whereas Saint Nicholas chose to only give to those in need.**

8. Summarise the story of Saint Nicholas and the three daughters in 20 words or fewer.

**Pupils' own responses, such as: Saint Nicholas saved three daughters from enslavement by giving each of them a sack of gold.**

9. Why do you think that Santa Claus varies across different countries? Fully explain your answer.

**Pupils' own responses, such as: I think that Santa Claus varies across different countries because he is very difficult to see on Christmas Eve so nobody knows for certain what he looks like when he's delivering gifts. I also think that Santa Claus has different names in different countries because they speak different languages.**

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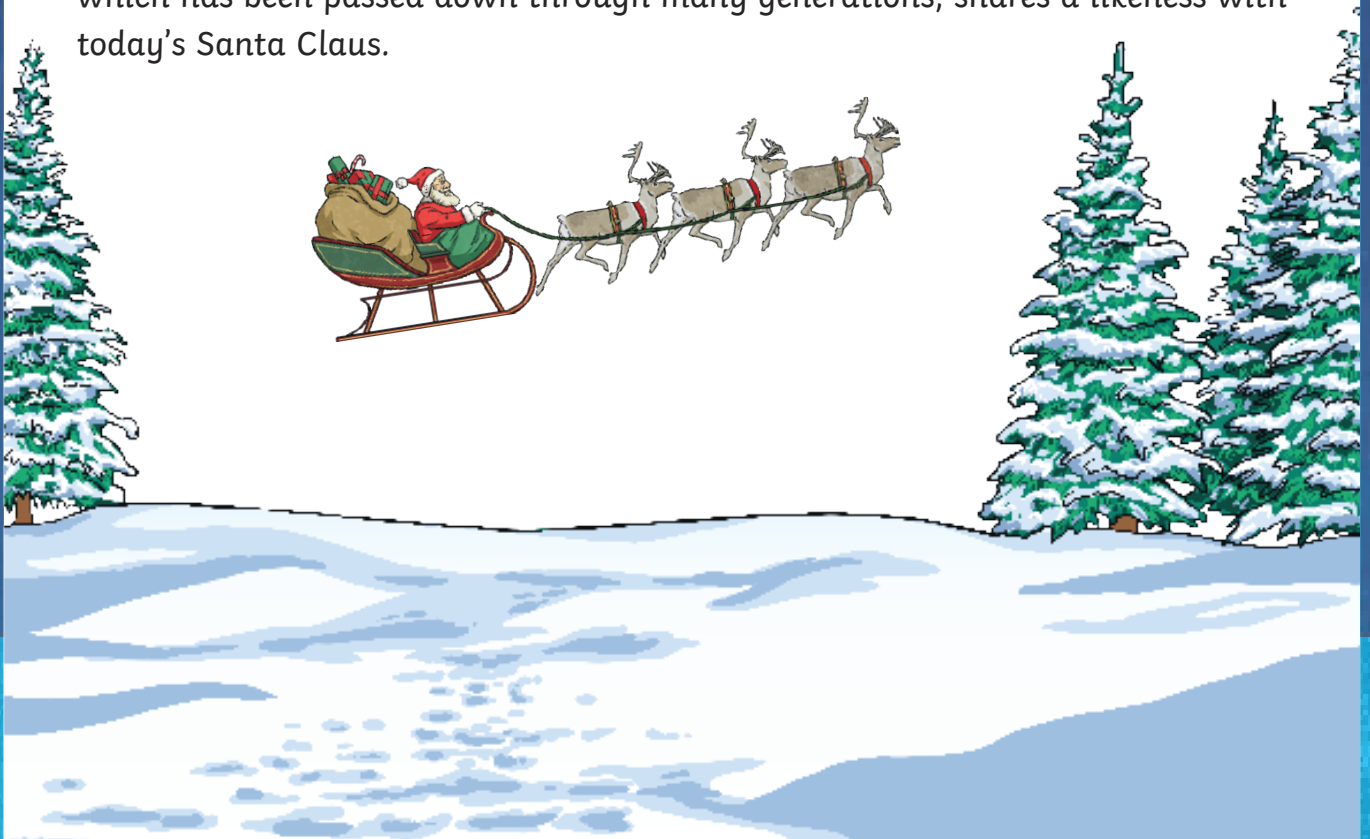
Each year, on the 24<sup>th</sup> December, thousands of children around the UK will be eagerly anticipating the arrival of Santa Claus and his loyal reindeer but where did he first come from? With Santa Claus being a famously-elusive symbol of Christmas cheer, believers around the world have different ideas about his appearance.

## Odin as Santa Claus

One theory regarding the origin of Santa Claus comes from Norse mythology and the god Odin. The god of wisdom and poetry and the father of Thor, Odin was also said to have flown through the sky on a chariot while dropping presents into children's shoes as they slept. Although pulled by an eight-legged horse instead of a reindeer, the myth bears a striking resemblance to Santa Claus and his sleigh. Yet, some people dispute this idea and believe that Santa Claus originated from a generous figure named Saint Nicholas.

## Saint Nicholas

Saint Nicholas was a saint who was thought to have been born around AD 300 near modern-day Turkey. Many people believe that Saint Nicholas, who was famous for his kindness and generosity, embodies the spirit of Christmas and is the true origin of Santa Claus. One of the most famous tales of Saint Nicholas, which has been passed down through many generations, shares a likeness with today's Santa Claus.



### Saint Nicholas and the Three Daughters

Over 1,700 years ago, a kind-hearted man by the name of Saint Nicholas heard about three destitute daughters on the verge of being forced into enslavement. Upon hearing the woeful plight of the three young girls, he knew that he must do something to help; having received a large inheritance from his parents, Saint Nicholas often used his wealth to support those in need. One night, under the cover of darkness, Saint Nicholas threw a bag of gold through a window and the first daughter was saved from enslavement. The next night, Saint Nicholas threw another bag of gold through the window for the second daughter. Desperate to thank whomever was so generously donating the gold, the father of the three daughters stayed awake the next night in an attempt to apprehend and thank the kind stranger. However, Saint Nicholas saw the figure waiting at the window and chose to drop the gold through the chimney instead. When the gold reached the bottom of the chimney, it landed inside a pair of stockings which had been drying by the fire. In the morning, the third daughter found the sack of gold and all three rejoiced and thanked their mysterious saviour.

### Wearing Red

Today, we imagine – and sometimes even see – Santa Claus wearing red but this hasn't always been the case. In fact, in the UK, Santa Claus was historically depicted wearing a green and white suit. During the Tudor period, a character dressed in green was known for bringing Christmas cheer. Many people believe that the colour green symbolised the arrival of spring and offered hope to people during the long winter months. In 1843,



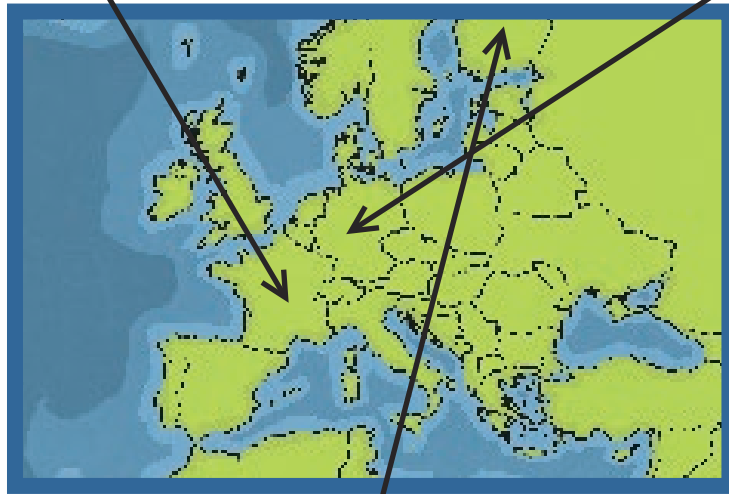
the famous novel 'A Christmas Carol' by Charles Dickens was published and featured illustrations by John Leech. In one illustration, the Ghost of Christmas Present is represented as a man with a beard and a green and white fur coat. In 1881, Thomas Nast – a caricaturist – drew Santa Claus wearing a red coat. Many people believe that he took inspiration from the red robes worn by Saint Nicholas and attribute the popularity of this cartoon to the modern notion that Santa Claus dresses in red.

### Santa Claus in Other Countries

Around the world, there are many stories of people who bring gifts to well-behaved children during the winter months.

In France, Père Noël is believed to wear a long, red cloak instead of a suit and he leaves gifts in children's shoes on Christmas Eve.

In Germany, Santa Claus is called Weihnachtsmann and he is said to travel with a sinister companion named Krampus.



In Finland, Joulupukki, which translates as 'Yule goat', wears long, red robes and is said to knock on people's doors before asking, "Are there any well-behaved children here?" before delivering presents.

Whatever you believe the true origin of Santa Claus to be, make sure to look out of your window on Christmas Eve to see if he makes an appearance.





# Questions

1. Which of the following figures are said to deliver gifts into children's shoes? Tick **two**.

- Père Noël  
 Odin  
 Saint Nicholas  
 Weihnachtsmann

2. Draw four lines and match each person to the country they are most associated with.

Saint Nicholas
Père Noël
Weihnachtsmann
Joulupukki

Finland
Turkey
Germany
France

3. Why did Saint Nicholas drop the third bag of gold down the chimney?

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4. Read the paragraph beginning **Saint Nicholas was...**

Find and copy one word which means the same as **represents**.

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5. Who was the author of 'A Christmas Carol'?

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6. Compare modern-day Santa Claus with the tale of Saint Nicholas and the three daughters.

What are the similarities and differences between the two?

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7. Look at the section titled **Wearing Red**

Why do you think that the author has chosen to include this section?

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8. Who do you believe is the most likely origin of Santa Claus? Tick one.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Odin
<input type="checkbox"/>	Saint Nicholas
<input type="checkbox"/>	neither

Fully explain your answer.

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9. Describe the character of Saint Nicholas.

Support your answer using evidence from the text.

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10. The author does not know the true origin of Santa Claus.

Find evidence from the text which supports this statement.

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# Answers

1. Which of the following figures are said to deliver gifts into children's shoes? Tick **two**.

- Père Noël**
- Odin**
- Saint Nicholas
- Weihnachtsmann

2. Draw four lines and match each person to the country they are most associated with.

Saint Nicholas	Finland
Père Noël	Turkey
Weihnachtsmann	Germany
Joulupukki	France

3. Why did Saint Nicholas drop the third bag of gold down the chimney?

**Saint Nicholas dropped the third bag of gold down the chimney because he didn't want to be seen by the father who was waiting at the window.**

4. Read the paragraph beginning **Saint Nicholas was...**

Find and copy one word which means the same as **represents**.

**embodies**

5. Who was the author of 'A Christmas Carol'?

**Charles Dickens was the author of 'A Christmas Carol'.**

6. Compare modern-day Santa Claus with the tale of Saint Nicholas and the three daughters. What are the similarities and differences between the two?

**Accept any sensible response provided that a comparison has been made, such as: Santa Claus and Saint Nicholas are similar because they are both known for wearing red and delivering gifts to people. They are also both known for delivering gifts using chimneys. They are different because Saint Nicholas chose to help those who were in need whereas Santa Claus gives gifts to all well-behaved children.**

7. Look at the section titled **Wearing Red**

Why do you think that the author has chosen to include this section?

**Pupils' own responses, such as: I think that the author has chosen to include this section because it is interesting that Santa Claus hasn't always worn red. It is also interesting to see that Santa Claus's clothes have changed throughout history in the same way that people's clothes have changed and this is probably something that not many people know.**

8. Who do you believe is the most likely origin of Santa Claus? Tick one.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Odin
<input type="checkbox"/>	Saint Nicholas
<input type="checkbox"/>	neither

Fully explain your answer.

**Accept 'Odin', 'Saint Nicholas' or 'neither' provided that a full explanation is also given, such as: I think that Saint Nicholas is the most likely origin of Santa Claus because there are many similarities, such as wearing red and not wanting to be seen while delivering gifts.**

9. Describe the character of Saint Nicholas.

Support your answer using evidence from the text.

**Pupils' own responses, such as: In the text, it says that Saint Nicholas was 'famous for his kindness and generosity' which means that he likely gave money to other people and not just to the three daughters in the story. Saint Nicholas is also shy because he doesn't want anyone to know that it was him who gave the money to the three daughters.**

10. The author does not know the true origin of Santa Claus.

Find evidence from the text which supports this statement.

**Pupils' own responses, such as: In the text, the author repeats the phrase 'many people believe' which shows that what they have written isn't a complete fact. They also describe the stories as 'theories' or 'tales' which shows that they are uncertain as to whether they are true or not. If the author knew the true origin of Santa Claus, they would be presenting facts instead of opinions.**