

Worksheet—The Night Before Christmas

Read this poem

THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

by Clement Clarke Moore

'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse;
The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,
In hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there;

The children were nestled all snug in their beds,
While visions of sugar-plums danced in their heads;
And mamma in her 'kerchief, and I in my cap,
Had just settled down for a long winter's nap,

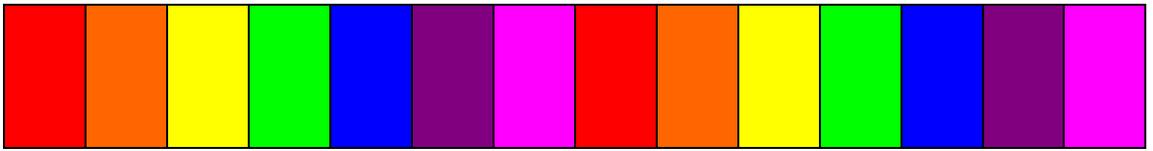
When out on the lawn there arose such a clatter,
I sprang from the bed to see what was the matter.
Away to the window I flew like a flash,
Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash.

The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow
Gave the lustre of mid-day to objects below,
When, what to my wondering eyes should appear,
But a miniature sleigh, and eight tiny reindeer,

With a little old driver, so lively and quick,
I knew in a moment it must be St. Nick.
More rapid than eagles his coursers they came,
And he whistled, and shouted, and called them by name;

"Now, Dasher! now, Dancer! now, Prancer and Vixen!
On, Comet! on Cupid! on, Donder and Blitzen!
To the top of the porch! to the top of the wall!
Now dash away! dash away! dash away all!"

As dry leaves that before the wild hurricane fly,
When they meet with an obstacle, mount to the sky,
So up to the house-top the coursers they flew,
With the sleigh full of toys, and St. Nicholas too.



And then, in a twinkling, I heard on the roof
The prancing and pawing of each little hoof.
As I drew in my head, and was turning around,
Down the chimney St. Nicholas came with a bound.

He was dressed all in fur, from his head to his foot,
And his clothes were all tarnished with ashes and soot;
A bundle of toys he had flung on his back,
And he looked like a peddler just opening his pack.

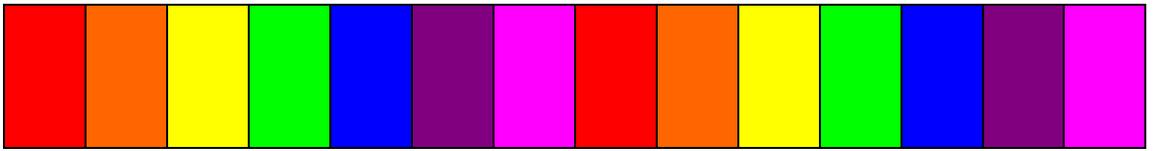
His eyes -- how they twinkled! his dimples how merry!
His cheeks were like roses, his nose like a cherry!
His droll little mouth was drawn up like a bow,
And the beard of his chin was as white as the snow;

The stump of a pipe he held tight in his teeth,
And the smoke it encircled his head like a wreath;
He had a broad face and a little round belly,
That shook, when he laughed like a bowlful of jelly.

He was chubby and plump, a right jolly old elf,
And I laughed when I saw him, in spite of myself;
A wink of his eye and a twist of his head,
Soon gave me to know I had nothing to dread;

He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work,
And filled all the stockings; then turned with a jerk,
And laying his finger aside of his nose,
And giving a nod, up the chimney he rose;

He sprang to his sleigh, to his team gave a whistle,
And away they all flew like the down of a thistle.
But I heard him exclaim, ere he drove out of sight,
"Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good-night."



First Stanza Explained

**'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse;
The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,
In hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there;**

- 'Twas means It was.
- A creature is anything that's alive.
- Stockings are like socks.
- A chimney is the thing above a fire in a house. Smoke goes out through the chimney.
- St. Nicholas is another name for Santa Claus..

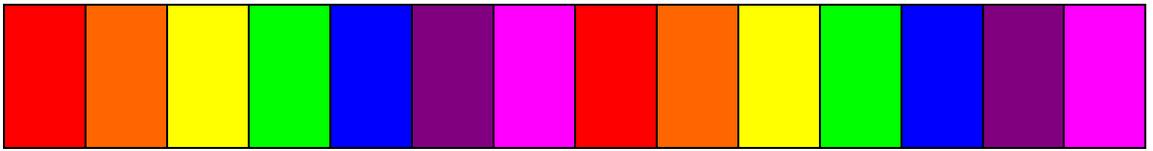
So...it was December 24th and the house was very quiet. No one was moving. Even mice (mouses) were asleep. The stockings (or socks) were put by the chimney because Santa Claus comes and puts presents in stockings. "In hopes that..." means they put their stockings by the chimney because they hoped Santa Claus would come and give them a present.

Second Stanza Explained

**The children were nestled all snug in their beds,
While visions of sugar-plums danced in their heads;
And mamma in her 'kerchief, and I in my cap,
Had just settled down for a long winter's nap,**

- Nestled all snug means very comfortable because their blankets are tight over them.
- Visions are images (here, it means dreams)
- Sugar-plums are a kind of candy
- Mamma means mom
- A 'kerchief is a piece of cloth.
- Cap is a hat.
- To settle down is to relax, or to become calm
- Nap means sleep. These days it means short sleep, but in the poem it just means sleep.

So...The children are sleeping and they are very comfortable. They are dreaming about candy. Probably on Christmas, they will get candy. The mom is wearing a piece of cloth on her head, and the dad is wearing a sleeping hat. They just got into bed and were about to fall asleep, but...



Third Stanza Explained

**When out on the lawn there arose such a clatter,
I sprang from the bed to see what was the matter.
Away to the window I flew like a flash,
Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash.**

- A lawn is the grassy area around a house.
- Clatter is noises.
- Sprang means jumped (The verb is To Spring, Spring-Sprang-Sprung)
- Flew means to go very fast (The verb is To Fly, Fly-Flew-Flown)
- A flash is a quick light. Lightening flashes, for example.
- Tore means to break apart, here it means open. (The verb is To Tear, Tear-Tore-Torn)
- Shutters are doors on a window.
- Threw means moved something quickly. (The verb is To Throw, Throw-Threw-Thrown)
- A sash is a piece of cloth that hangs in front of a window, like curtains, but it goes up and down.

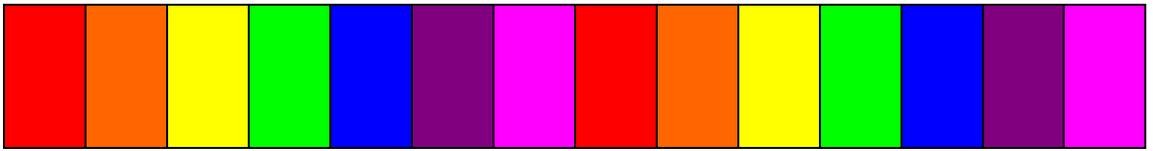
So...He wakes up and jumps out of bed because he hears lots of noises outside the house. He quickly goes to the window, opens the window doors, and moves up the cloth, which is covering the windows.

Fourth Stanza Explained

**The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow
Gave the lustre of mid-day to objects below,
When, what to my wondering eyes should appear,
But a miniature sleigh, and eight tiny reindeer,**

- Breast means top (but we don't use breast like that anymore).
- Lustre means light.
- Mid-day means noon.
- Wondering means to think carefully, with interest; to be curious
- Miniature means very small.
- A sleigh is a vehicle for going over snow.
- Tiny means very small.
- Reindeer are animals. They have similar bodies to horses, but they're smaller. They have antlers (like sticks coming out of their heads).

So...When he looks outside, there is a lot of light because the moon is shining on new snow. He says the night is as bright as the middle of the day. He looks with wonder and sees a sleigh. It's small because it's far. He also sees reindeer. The reindeer are pulling the sleigh.



Fifth Stanza Explained

**With a little old driver, so lively and quick,
I knew in a moment it must be St. Nick.
More rapid than eagles his coursers they came,
And he whistled, and shouted, and called them by name;**

- Lively means energetic.
- In a moment means very quickly.
- St. Nick is another name for Santa Claus.
- Rapid means quick.
- Eagles are big, fast birds.
- Coursers are things that pull a sleigh (here it means the reindeer).
- To whistle is to make a high noise with your lips. For example, people often whistle to make a dog come.
- To shout is to speak loudly.

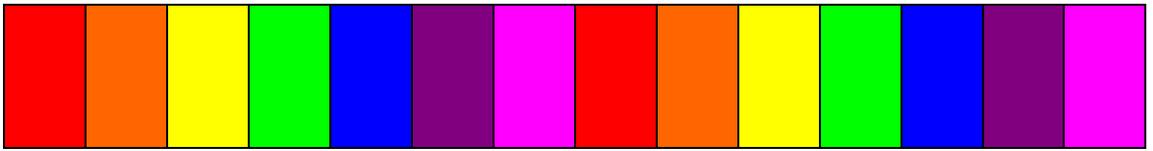
So...He sees the driver and knows it is Santa Claus. He knows because he looks energetic. The reindeer are pulling the sleigh and going very quickly. Santa Claus whistles and says the reindeer's names loudly.

Sixth Stanza Explained

**"Now, Dasher! now, Dancer! now, Prancer and Vixen!
On, Comet! on Cupid! on, Donder and Blitzen!
To the top of the porch! to the top of the wall!
Now dash away! dash away! dash away all!"**

- Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Comet, Cupid, Donder, and Blitzen are the reindeer's names.
- To dash means to go fast.
- To dance is to move your body to music.
- To prance is to walk with high steps.
- A vixen is a female fox (a fox is like a small, red dog).
- A comet is a ball of ice that flies through space.
- Cupid is the Greek god of love.
- Donder and Blitzen aren't English words. They are English spellings of Dutch words. Donder means thunder. Blitzen means lightning.
- A porch is a place for sitting in front of a house.

So...Santa Claus is saying the names of his reindeer and telling them to go quickly to the top of the house.



Seventh Stanza Explained

**As dry leaves that before the wild hurricane fly,
When they meet with an obstacle, mount to the sky,
So up to the house-top the coursers they flew,
With the sleigh full of toys, and St. Nicholas too.**

- Leaves are the green things that grow on trees.
- Wild means not controllable.
- A hurricane is a strong wind.
- An obstacle is something that stops something else.
- Mount means to go up.

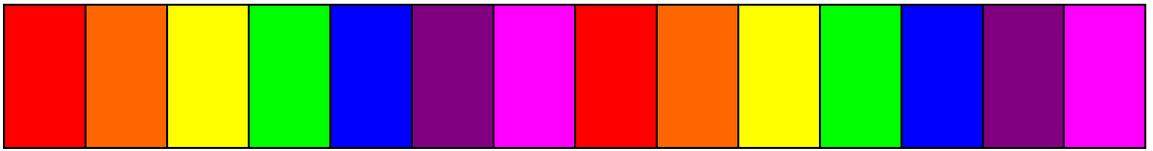
So...The reindeer are pulling the sleigh with Santa Claus and lots of toys. When they get to the house, they go straight up the side of the house and onto the roof. Imagine if a wind is blowing a leaf near a house. The wind will push the leaves up the side of the house.

Eighth Stanza Explained

**And then, in a twinkling, I heard on the roof
The prancing and pawing of each little hoof.
As I drew in my head, and was turning around,
Down the chimney St. Nicholas came with a bound.**

- A twinkling is a very short time, a moment.
- The roof is the top of the house. The roof covers the house.
- Prancing is walking with high steps.
- Pawing is moving a foot (or a hand, or a hoof, or a paw) along something, rubbing it, scraping it.
- Drew in means brought back to the original place. (The verb is To Draw, Draw-Drew-Drawn.)
- A bound is a big jump.

So...he hears Santa Claus and the reindeer on the roof. He brings his head in from the window and Santa Claus comes down the chimney.



Ninth Stanza Explained

**He was dressed all in fur, from his head to his foot,
And his clothes were all tarnished with ashes and soot;
A bundle of toys he had flung on his back,
And he looked like a peddler just opening his pack.**

- Fur is warm clothing made from animal skin. Foxes are popular animals for making fur coats.
- Tarnished means dirty.
- Ashes and soot are what's left after a fire. The wood burns and becomes ashes and soot.
- A bundle is a package with cloth around it.
- Flung means thrown. (The verb is To Fling, Fling-Flung-Flung)
- A peddler is someone who goes from place to place trying to sell things.
- Pack is like package. It's very similar to backpack.

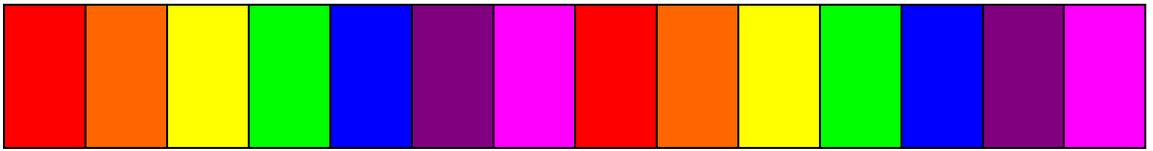
So...He sees Santa Claus. Santa is wearing fur and he's dirty because he just came down the chimney. He has toys in a package. He is holding the package with his hand, but it is laying on his back.

Tenth Stanza Explained

**His eyes -- how they twinkled! his dimples how merry!
His cheeks were like roses, his nose like a cherry!
His droll little mouth was drawn up like a bow,
And the beard of his chin was as white as the snow;**

- To twinkle (for eyes) is when eyes seem very happy. Twinkle also is about light. When light hits a diamond. The diamond twinkles. Stars can twinkle too.
- Dimples are on a smiling face. They are two spots that are pushed in on the cheeks. Merry means happy.
- Cheeks are the area on a face to the right and left of the mouth.
- Roses are a red flower.
- A cherry is a small red fruit.
- Droll means funny but a little strange.
- Drawn up like means made to look like
- A bow is when a string or a ribbon is tied in a knot with two round parts and two loose parts. For example, girls sometimes wear a bow in their hair. A present sometimes has a bow on top of it.
- A beard is the long hair on man's face.
- A chin is the place on a face below the mouth.

So...Santa Claus looks very happy. He has a happy face (twinkling eyes, merry dimples, rosy cheeks, a cherry nose, a droll mouth) and a white beard on his chin.



Eleventh Stanza Explained

**The stump of a pipe he held tight in his teeth,
And the smoke it encircled his head like a wreath;
He had a broad face and a little round belly,
That shook, when he laughed like a bowlful of jelly.**

- The stump is the end of something.
- A pipe is used to smoke tobacco.
- To encircle is to make a circle.
- A wreath is a round decoration. You make it by taking branches from a tree and making them into a circle.
- Broad means wide.
- Belly means stomach.
- Shook means moved. (The verb is To Shake, Shake-Shook-Shaken)
- Bowlful means a bowl that is full (full means no extra space).
- Jelly is a soft food made from fruit and sugar.

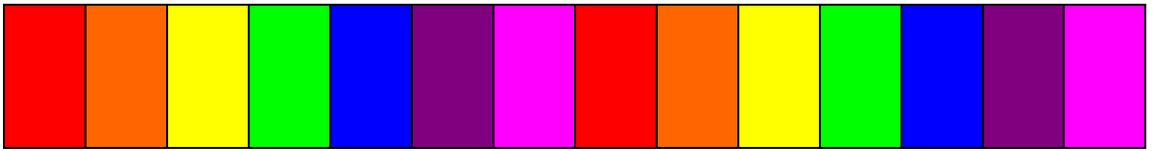
So...Santa Claus is smoking a pipe. The smoke is making a circle around his head. His face is wide and he's a little fat. When he laughs, his belly shakes.

Twelfth Stanza Explained

**He was chubby and plump, a right jolly old elf,
And I laughed when I saw him, in spite of myself;
A wink of his eye and a twist of his head,
Soon gave me to know I had nothing to dread;**

- Chubby and plump both mean a little fat.
- Right means total, definite, for sure
- Jolly means happy
- An elf is a human-like creature with long ears.
- In spite of myself means I didn't want to, but I did.
- A wink is when you open and close one eye.
- A twist is a turn.
- Gave me to know means let me know.
- To dread is to fear.

So...Santa Claus is a little fat and funny looking. He laughs at Santa Claus even though he doesn't want to laugh. Santa Claus winks and turns his head to let him know not to be afraid.



Thirteenth Stanza Explained

**He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work,
And filled all the stockings; then turned with a jerk,
And laying his finger aside of his nose,
And giving a nod, up the chimney he rose;**

- Straight to means directly to, no waiting.
- A jerk is a quick movement.
- A nod is when you move your chin up.
- Rose means went up. (The verb is To Rise, Rise-Rose-Risen).

So...Santa doesn't talk. He puts presents in the stockings then turns quickly. He puts his finger on his nose, nods, and goes up the chimney.

Fourteenth Stanza Explained

**He sprang to his sleigh, to his team gave a whistle,
And away they all flew like the down of a thistle.
But I heard him exclaim, ere he drove out of sight,
"Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good-night."**

- Sprang means jumped. (The verb is To Spring, Spring-Sprang-Sprung).
- His team are his reindeer.
- A whistle is a high noise made with your lips. For example, people often whistle to make a dog come.
- Down is the seeds of an old flower. It is white and the wind blows it off the old flower.
- A thistle is a type of flower, it has sharp points and a purple flower.
- To exclaim is to say, like in a speech.
- Ere means before.

So...Santa Claus goes into his sleigh and whistles so the reindeer know to go. They flew away quickly, but before Santa Claus is gone (can't be seen), the man hears him say "Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good-night."