

# Can Imagination Change History?

## Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer's Legacy

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The true story surrounding “Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer” has a unique legacy surrounding its birth. Chances are that you know Rudolph’s story, but do you know his history? Think about it. What do you know about Rudolph’s origin aside that it is a song and movie?

The “true story” of Rudolph was actually born and bred in the vivid imagination of Robert May, a 35 five year old copyrighter, in the latter part of the thirties. Isn’t it amazing that the power of one man’s imagination could actually change a part of Christmas history?

In 1939, this Christmas story/poem was written to help bring holiday traffic into a famous department store in Chicago. The character “Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer” was the creation of Robert May. He was an advertising writer for the Montgomery Ward Chicago Department Store. His goal was to create a booklet to give to parents who shopped at Montgomery Ward Department Stores.

May’s story (booklet) was titled “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer” was a Christmas story about Santa Claus' ninth and lead reindeer.

Of course, the story and song tells the endearing story of the most famous Christmas reindeer. His large bright red nose saves Christmas for boys and girls around the world, as he leads Santa through a foggy Christmas Eve. However, did you know the birth of Rudolph was the brain child of a department store chain in Chicago, not the North Pole?

The rhyme pattern was written similar to Clement Moore's "Twas the Night Before Christmas." In the story, May’s character Rudolph was a young reindeer teased by the other reindeer because of his large, glowing, red nose. As the story unfolds, on one foggy Christmas Eve, Santa (concerned about his deliveries) turns to the bright nosed reindeer to save Christmas. The story was a hit with customers and as the saying goes, “the rest is history.”

Montgomery Ward sold almost two and a half million copies of the story in 1939. In 1946, when reissued, the book sold over three and half million copies.

In 1947, the story of Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer was put to music by Johnny Marks, Robert Mays’ brother in law.

It was recorded and sung by a famous TV singing star named Gene Autry. The legacy of Rudolph now branched off into a new domain selling millions of copies of the song.

Since then, the story has been translated into twenty-five languages. In 1964, it was made into a television movie, narrated by Burl Ives.

When you think about it, in 1939 Rudolph was just an idea floating in Robert Mays head. Born in his imagination almost 70 years ago, Santa’s lead reindeer has now become the most famous reindeer of all.

Amazing isn’t it? What would Christmas be like now with no story or song of Rudolph? One thing is certain, without imagination, the infamous world of Christmas would have one less bright light around the world on Christmas Eve? *Well at least one less bright “red” light that is....*

Your name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

1. Can you name the author of the original "Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer" Story?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. What was the reason the story was written?

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Name the famous city and department store where the story originated.

\_\_\_\_\_

4. In the fictional story of Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer, what was the conflict in the story? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. How many books were first sold in 1939? \_\_\_\_\_

6. What year was the 2nd set of books published? \_\_\_\_\_

7. Who put the story to music and what was his relationship to the original author?

\_\_\_\_\_

8. Who sang the song in 1947? \_\_\_\_\_

9. In what year was the movie made about Rudolph? \_\_\_\_\_

10. Do you think the author of Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer changed a part of Christmas' history? Explain your answer.

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