



Here's an excerpt from: "Tall Tales and World History"

Your students will enjoy this tidbit about this annual visitor.

Jack Frost

Carefully painting the ground with frost



A Fun Fact

Jack Frost doesn't paint at random. Whenever frost starts to form, it covers all surfaces that reach the freezing temperature (32° F). Therefore, rocks, metal, and glass surfaces will frost before soil and plants on the ground.

A Familiar Symbol...

Here's a scene that you might be able to relate to. Imagine going outside after it has gotten dark. You notice that the temperature is beginning to drop, and that the air is becoming cold and crisp.

It's late, so you decide to head back inside and go to bed. When you get up the next morning, you look out the window and see that everything is covered in frost. Every single blade of grass is covered by frost. So are the leaves on trees. And the car windows. It's almost as if someone came by in the dead of night and painted frost on everything he could find.

Does this sound familiar? The mysterious frost painter that we alluded to is the celebrated "Jack Frost." According to legend, Jack Frost is the one who leaves behind the frosty crystal patterns on the grass, leaves, and windows. Over the years, he has become a well-known symbol for those cold, crisp winter mornings.

As you might have guessed, Jack Frost isn't your everyday human. He's often portrayed as an elf, or even a sprite (*a kind of fairy*). Our modern picture of Jack Frost, with the pale skin covered in icicles, dates back only to the Civil War. But you'll learn more about that as you read on...

What it tells us about World History...

Like Santa Claus, our vision of Jack Frost came from the mind – and pen – of a man named Thomas Nast. During the mid-1800s, Nast was a cartoonist for the popular magazine, *Harper's Weekly*.

In 1863, Nast immortalized Santa Claus in one of his drawings. For the first time, Santa was seen as with his red suit, white beard, and jolly face. A year later, Nast did the same with Jack Frost. He published a two-page size cartoon entitled, "Central Park in Winter." At the top of the drawing was Jack Frost, seen for the very first time.

It's from Nast's drawing that we get the idea that Jack Frost is an old man with a beard, white skin, and icicles hanging from his nose. But the idea of Jack Frost was around long before Thomas Nast's time.

Jack Frost is believed to have derived from Viking folklore. They had a similar character named "Jokul Frosti," which literally translates to "icicle" (*Jokul*) and "frost" (*Frosti*). It's probably not difficult to figure out how we could Americanize that name and come up with "Jack Frost."

Of course, Jack Frost – or some version of him – exists in other cultures as well. The Australian aborigines believed that frost was dropped from the sky by a group of seven women. These women could be seen at night in the stars, grouped together in the constellation Pleiades.

In Japan, they have a very simple explanation. Frost is brought by a man named Frostman, and his brother, Mistman, brings the mist. In Russia, it's "Father Frost" who binds the world with chains of ice.

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