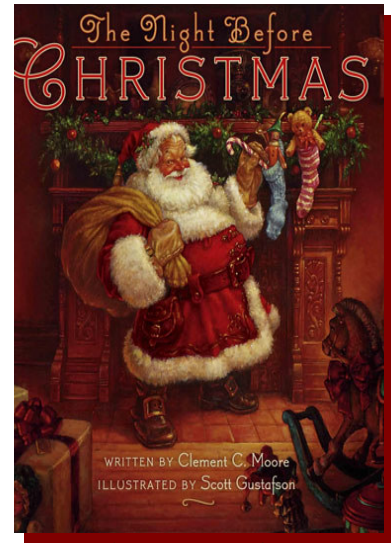


## 🎅 The Body Language of Good Ol' St. Nick 🎅

On Christmas eve, When I was a little girl my mother would get out a very special tall storybook covered with snowy glitter and read to us the night before Christmas.

Clement Clarke Moore composed "A Visit from St. Nicholas" on December 24, 1822 and though there were other nonverbal descriptions of St. Nick, the iconic image of Santa in this poem is stuck firmly into our consciousness with leftover Christmas cookie dough.



Let's have fun and look at powerful nonverbal cues of St. Nick given in the famous poem. The poem opens with Santa described as a "... little old driver, so lively and quick." His advanced age, makes us think of him as comforting and fatherly, but the nonverbal description of his behavior makes us also see him as vital and full of energy as well. This let's us know he has enough energy to defy the boundaries of time and space and deliver toys to every boy and girl in one night!



Next Santa is heard whistling and shouting and calling his reindeer by name. Now if all he was doing was shouting we probably would see Santa as rather an aggressive guy. After all you really shouldn't yell at animals. But, because he is also whistling and knows each of the reindeer's names we have a friendlier perception of him. Whistling is something fun, and the shouting is softened and becomes another indication of his boundless energy. The powerful paralanguage acts, assure us that he will get to our house in time for us to get our presents.

Then St Nick comes down the chimney, "...with a bound." I love that nonverbal behavior. The action "bounding" makes me see this red and white decked guy bouncing from house to house as if the fire place was a trampoline. This nonverbal detail lets us know that he is fun guy having a good time at work.

He is coming down a chimney and landing in a fireplace. Obviously, Santa lives on the edge. Think about it. He rides through the air in a sleigh and then jumps down a chimney without a parachute. And he is risking landing in fire. Santa is a daredevil. In fact these nonverbal actions are evidence that Santa is a truly bearded superhero.

Though, he is not wearing the typical super hero outfit. Instead, "He was dressed all in fur, from his head to his foot." Ok, I will admit there are mythic superheroes in the fur and leather sets; Shera, Thor, Grey skull and my all time fav, Tarzan. The fur gives him some primal superpowers that spandex and tights just don't illicit.

Santa is not described as wearing red and white in this poem, even though I gave him those super hero colors two paragraphs ago. Those colors were set into our Santa conscious through artists' depictions in the 1920's, most notably by an artist at *Harpers*. For trivia buffs this was long before Coca Cola created its string of ads picturing the red and white Clause. Though trivia websites often quote the soft drink company as the creators of his candy cane colored suit, Coca Cola give us a larger man sized Santa rather than the little elf fellow of this poem.



Red and white make a good dashing through the snow costume. Red is nonverbally a traditional power color. The color red is associated with strength, force, power, control and leadership, stimulation, warmth, excitement, good health, physical energy, and love. And white is associated with protection, purity, truth and sincerity.

But the purity from the white was in his heart not on his sleeve because; the poem says "... his clothes were all tarnished with ashes and soot." Don't you just love that detail? It makes us see him as a playful guy who is willing to get dirty. In the same line of the poem the bundle of toys is, "flung" on his back. He doesn't carry the bundle like a burden, but instead it's flung with joy, the same way a kid would carry his baseball gear to a game or her camping stuff on an outdoor adventure.

As a child the next description was my favorite part of the poem. "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."

I think I liked this part was because when it was read to us as children we would act it out and touch our eyes, cheeks, each part and laugh as we nonverbal articles on eyes and implies that the eyes are pulled little smile wrinkles around the happiness. The mouth drawn As does the detail that he had a broad face. When I see that in people I call it an open face that shows friendliness.



nose and mouth as we got to touched them. If you read my smiling you know that twinkling up at the side and there are eye, cues that indicate real up also indicates a true smile.

Let's skip the stump of pipe and smoke, realizing that it's something Santa did before the surgeon general put out the tobacco memo. Instead let's skip down to the next part of the poem the description of St. Nick's tummy, "...a little round belly that shook



when he laughed like a bowl full of jelly." This combined with his description as, "... chubby and plump, a right jolly old elf," Actually conjures up images of cute a cuddly laughing baby. We can not help but smile. Santa is full of satisfaction and happiness. He is certainly not starving on the Adkins diet, craving bread.

Santa then gives traditional nonverbal cues to show he is harmless and not going to attack with, "A wink of his eye and a twist of his head." Winking is a way of softening what could be threatening continuous eye-contact. That's why it is recommended in books on flirting. The head tilt is also cue showing "I'm harmless." Together they let the narrator feel this stranger who just bounded into his living room carrying a sack is charming interloper, not a dangerous intruder planning to abscond with the silver.

Santa doesn't speak but gets right to work putting out the toys. Anyone who has read the latest research on the costs of multitasking knows this makes Santa not only a hard worker but a wise man as well. And such a John Grey, Mars not Venus kind of guy.

Then he shows his super powers again by, "... laying his finger aside of his nose and giving a nod..." and rising up the chimney. When I was in first grade and saw Mary Poppins go up in the air by laughing, I thought Santa must have taught her the trick.

And isn't it interesting that he touches his nose before he rises, just like bewitched wiggled her nose. The nose nonverbal symbolism indicates that his action is something special and secretive.

Then St. Nick springs to his sleigh and whistles and shouts his farewell leaving us with a final nonverbal description of his confidence and omnipotence.

I love this poem and I love the Iconic Image of Santa it invokes. It's an image I have taken to bed with me on many a Christmas Eve and a comforting image for all good little boys and girls around the world.

Take time to re-read this wonderful poem during this Christmas season.

 *Seasons Greetings from Patti Wood* 