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# A Holiday Story and a Song

It's Christmas 1949, and the song about his life is climbing to the #1 spot on the U.S. pop charts. Not too shabby for an eight-year-old with an unusual nose.

Our juvenile celebrity got his start as the brain child of Robert L. May, who worked as a copywriter for the Montgomery Ward Company at their flagship store in Chicago. This huge retail and catalog giant had been buying and giving away children's coloring books during the holiday season as a way to attract more shoppers. The practice was getting expensive, so the company president asked the marketing department to create an original story they could produce themselves and save money.

On a January morning in 1939, May's supervisor called him into his office. The company, he explained, needed a Christmas story for youngsters, preferably something with an animal character like Ferdinand the Bull. Robert's natural ability for writing made him the man for the job. When he left the office that day, 34-year-old Robert May had some homework to do.

Taking inspiration from the eight reindeer hitched to Santa's sleigh in Clement C. Moore's very popular 1823 poem *A Visit from St. Nicholas* (a.k.a. *The Night Before Christmas*) and from his daughter's fascination with the deer at the Lincoln Park Zoo, May decided that his story would also be about a reindeer. His little hero, however, would be physically different. His would be a misfit, picked on and ridiculed for his big glowing red nose.

It took a while to settle on a name. May considered *Rollo*, but it sounded too cheerful for a bullied outsider. *Reginald* was too British. *Rudolph*. . . Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer. That was it!

## Two Pages in Full Text



# A Holiday Story and a Song

Refer to **A Holiday Story and a Song** to answer the following questions.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Which of the following is **not** true of the Montgomery Ward Company?
- (A) It was a huge retail and catalog company based in Chicago.
  - (B) The owners wanted a holiday story that they could produce and give to shoppers.
  - (C) The owners wanted to use Ferdinand the Bull as their story character but couldn't because of copyright laws.
  - (D) Before 1939, it had been buying coloring books and giving them away to holiday shoppers.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Robert May worked in Montgomery Ward's marketing department as a copywriter, which means he wrote the scripts (copy) for the store's ads and other promotional materials. Because the company had paid him to write his reindeer story, he did not own the copyright to the work. How is a *copyright* different from a *copywriter*?
- (A) A copyright gives an author the right to sell and profit from his work. A copywriter gets paid a salary by an employer, and he cannot sell the work to someone else.
  - (B) The person who creates a piece of writing always owns what he writes, but a company always owns the materials created by a copywriter.
  - (C) A copywriter gets paid for the work he creates each day, but by law a copyright holder can make a profit only once.
  - (D) If only one person does the writing, they the copyright belongs to the single author. A copywriter usually works with other writers and can never claim the copyright.
3. What sources inspired May to write a poem about a reindeer with a red nose?

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**Fourteen Questions in Full Text**

## Answer Keys

1. C (RI. 6.1, 7.1, 8.1)
2. A (RI. 6.4, 7.4, 8.4)
3. The company requested an animal story. Robert's decision to write about a reindeer was inspired by Clement C. Moore's 1823 poem *A Visit from St. Nicholas* and his daughter's fascination with the deer in Lincoln Park Zoo. The traditional story of the ugly duckling gave him the idea of a misfit. His own childhood experiences as the victim of bullying because of his small size inspired the reindeer's physical difference—the big glowing red nose. (RI. 6.1, 7.1, 8.1)

**Full Answer Keys with CCSS alignments included.**