

Santa: reading

I have a friend called Sam who hates December. Can you guess why? He's tall, quite fat and has a large beard. Yes! His boss always asks him to dress up as Santa Claus for the children's party, and he hates being Santa Claus! Also some people call him *Samta* Claus and he really hates that too!



Sam explains more, "First of all, I hate the costume. The red and white trousers and jacket look terrible on me. I also have to wear a hat, a belt, gloves and boots - I'm always far too hot. I have to say 'Ho ho ho' all the time, too.

"Secondly, the children never say 'thank you' when I give them a present. I think children nowadays have too many toys and presents already; they don't need any more. The presents are very expensive too - why do children only want expensive presents?

"Thirdly, Santa Claus, or Father Christmas, is not the most important thing about Christmas but that's all people think about - getting presents." Sam looks unhappy. He really doesn't want to be Santa Claus again this year.

He then tells me the difference between Santa Claus and Father Christmas. "They are not the same people," he says. This is news for me. "Father Christmas has a much older history. In the past, long before Christianity came to Britain, an old man from every village or town went to all the houses and asked for food and drink. The man was called 'Old Winter' and later 'Father Christmas'. People were kind and gave him food and drink."

So who was Santa Claus, then? "He was Saint Nicholas, a Bishop from Turkey hundreds of years ago. He helped people and gave presents to children. The Dutch called him *Sinterklaas* and when they immigrated to the US they took *Sinterklaas* with them and he got a new name: Santa Claus. That's why the Americans say Santa Claus but the British say Father Christmas."

I then have an idea. "Sam," I say, "I know your boss will ask you to be Santa Claus again. However, why not be Zenta Claus instead?"

Sam looks at me, surprised. "Who is Zenta Claus?" he asks. "Well, other people are also unhappy about Santa Claus and the buying of so many presents. In Japan there is now another person. This person looks like Santa Claus, the same red and white costume and beard etc, but there is a big difference. He doesn't give presents to children and he doesn't make people buy lots of things."

"So what does Zenta do, then?" asks Sam. I explain, "Well, he sits quietly on the floor and thinks about how bad it is that everyone buys so many things they don't need."

For the first time Sam is smiling. "This year, I'm Zenta Claus, not Santa Claus!" and then he laughs "Ho ho ho!!"