

LEVEL Z

Grades

5 and above

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The Gift of the Magi

Author: O. Henry

Illustrator: Alessandra Fusi



Book Summary

The Gift of the Magi is a classic short story written by O. Henry, a popular American writer. Set during the Christmas season, it tells the tale of Della and Jim, a young married couple, very much in love and very poor. Each wants to buy the other a special gift, but neither has enough money to do so. Della and Jim make their own sacrifices to procure the gifts, but in a surprise twist ending, realize they already have the most valuable gift of all.

Reading Strategy: Make, Revise, and Confirm Predictions
Comprehension Skill: Cause and Effect

Level Z • Fiction/Classic • 1 Part

How to Use the Lesson Plan

This lesson plan is designed to be used with Reading A–Z’s retelling of *The Gift of the Magi*. Assign and teach the book as a whole-class lesson. Or assign it to a reading group, and teach all or part of the lesson in a small-group setting. Worksheets support the learning objectives of the lesson. Discussion cards can be used to set up literature circles. A culminating comprehension quiz is included and covers the entire story.

About the Lesson

Targeted Reading Strategy

- Make, revise, and confirm predictions

Objectives

- Use the reading strategy of making, revising, and confirming predictions before and during reading
- Identify cause-and-effect relationships in the story
- Identify and use prepositional phrases
- Identify and understand the use of similes
- Recognize and understand the use of situational irony

Materials

- Book: *The Gift of the Magi* (copy for each student or group)
- Chalkboard or dry-erase board
- Recorded version of the text (optional)
- Student notebooks
- Make, revise, and confirm predictions; cause and effect; prepositional phrases worksheets



Before Reading

Build Background

- Explain to students that *The Gift of the Magi*, like other O. Henry stories, has a twist, or surprise, ending. Discuss with students how this would be make it difficult for readers to predict what was going to happen. Ask students to brainstorm a list of other stories or movies they know that have twist endings.
- Explain to students that the title refers to the Christian story about the birth of Jesus, traditionally the reason for the Christmas holiday. Explain that according to the Bible the magi were three wise men who brought gifts to the baby Jesus: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Introduce the Book

- Distribute copies of *The Gift of the Magi* to students.

Introduce the Reading Strategy: *Make, Revise, and Confirm Predictions*

- Remind students that engaged readers often make predictions, or educated guesses, about what will happen in a story. Readers predict on the basis of information in the story combined with their own prior knowledge.
- Have students preview the title and the cover art. Ask students to make predictions, on the basis of the title and cover illustration, about the story. Have them share predictions with a partner.
- Create two columns on the board. Label them *Prediction* and *Support*. Have students share both their predictions and the details that support each prediction. Record these details on the board. Discuss whether the details are from the text or prior knowledge.
- Point out that the process of revising and confirming predictions helps keep readers engaged. Remind students that readers confirm or revise their predictions according to new story developments.
- Introduce and explain the make-revise-and-confirm-predictions worksheet. Ask students to record their predictions as they read.
- Encourage students to use other reading strategies in addition to making, revising, and confirming predictions.

Introduce the Comprehension Skill: *Cause and Effect*

- Remind students that determining cause and effect is a reading strategy that can help them better understand any text, fiction or nonfiction. Explain that cause and effect is the relationship between things that happen and why they happen.
- Explain to students that you are going to play a game called CECR (Cause and Effect Chain Reaction). On an index card, write *Aliens invade Earth*, hold it up for the class to see, and then tape it to the board. Divide the class into small groups, and provide each group with an index card. Give groups one minute to brainstorm possible effects and write them on their index card (one effect per group). Have students hold up the cards to show the possible effects. Choose one of these effects, and hold it up for the class to see. Then tape it beside the first card. Repeat the process, creating a cause-and-effect chain reaction on the board.
- Ask students to watch for cause-and-effect relationships as they read *The Gift of the Magi*.

Introduce the Vocabulary

- Remind students that they can determine the meaning of unknown words by using context clues, examining affixes and base words, and rereading with synonyms. Point out that they can refer to a dictionary or glossary when these strategies don't help.
- Review with students how to use a glossary. Point out that only boldface words are in the glossary. Have students work with a partner to choose six words from the glossary. Ask students to find each word in the text, read the paragraph containing it, and then select a synonym for that word. Then, have students reread the sentence with the synonym to see if it still makes sense.

Set the Purpose

- Explain to students that their purpose in reading *The Gift of the Magi* is to answer the following focus question: *How is irony developed in the story?* Point out that to accomplish this purpose they will use the reading strategy of making, revising, and confirming predictions as well as other comprehension skills, in particular cause and effect.

During Reading

Student Reading

- **Guide the reading:** While reading, periodically stop to have students record predictions on their worksheet and share them with the rest of the class.
- Have students stop throughout the reading to jot down instances of cause and effect in the story.
- Assign the entire story to all students, or divide the class into small groups and have them work on the story together.

Check for Understanding Section by Section

Pages 3 through 7

- **Summary:** It is Christmas Eve, and Della is distraught that she doesn't have enough money to buy her husband, Jim, a platinum chain for his prized pocket watch. Although she has been saving for quite some time, she isn't close to having the twenty-one dollars she needs. Della decides to sell the only thing of value she does possess, her incredibly long hair that reaches her knees.
- **Explanation:** The Queen of Sheba was a rich ancient queen from the Kingdom of Axum, in what is now called Ethiopia. King Solomon was a wise and wealthy ancient King of Israel. Both are figures from the Bible.
- **Comprehension (Cause and Effect):** Remind students that a cause-and-effect relationship describes events that happen and the reasons they occur. Have students reread the first two paragraphs of the story, then ask the following: *What causes Della to flop down on the couch and how?* (She only has \$1.87, and the next day is Christmas.) Illustrate how cause and effect are related by asking this question: *What effect did only having \$1.87 have on Della?* Next, have students work with a partner to identify the effect of Della flopping down on the couch, and discuss how the effect of one cause can then become the cause of a new effect. Have students work in groups to create a chain of cause-and-effect relationships from this section of the book, with at least three causes that were first effects. Now, have students discuss the following: *What effect do you think Della's short hair will have on Jim?*

- **Figurative Language (Internal Conflict):** Discuss with students the difference between internal and external conflict, and remind them that internal conflict is a problem or challenge that affects a character mentally or emotionally. Have students work in groups to determine and describe the internal conflict that Della faces in this section of the story. Call on groups to share their thoughts with the rest of the class, and record accurate conflicts on the board. Then, discuss as a class the external actions Della takes to resolve her internal conflict.

Pages 8 through 15

- **Summary:** With the money that she needs in hand, Della purchases the platinum chain for Jim. Once home, she attempts to fix her short hair, hoping that Jim won't be too angry with her for cutting it. Jim returns from work, and the two exchange gifts. Jim gives Della a set of beautiful tortoise shell combs for her hair, which she no longer has. Della gives Jim his present, but Jim had already sold his watch to buy the combs. Each sacrificed their most prized possession for the other.
- **Comprehension (Make Inferences / Draw Conclusions):** Explain to students that often, writers don't explain explicitly what is happening in the story. Discuss how instead, readers make an inference or draw a conclusion using evidence and clues from the story, plus their own knowledge and experience, to figure out what is happening or what the author is trying to convey. Ask students to talk with a partner about what the author means in these sentences at the end of the story: *But in a last word to the wise of these days let it be said that these two were the wisest. Of all who give and receive gifts, such as they are the wisest. Everywhere they are the wisest. They are the magi.* Invite students to share their ideas with the rest of the class, and discuss with students the kind of inferring they need to do to understand why Jim and Della are the wisest and why they are called magi.
- **Figurative Language (Tone):** Explain to students that a story's tone is the attitude that the writer or narrator takes toward the characters or the audience. Explain that the tone is often revealed in the language, word choice, and opinions of the text. Discuss with students the narrator of this story. Guide students to details that reveal the narrator's feelings (calling the readers "dear friends" on page 8, calling Jim "poor fellow" on page 10, drawing close to the reader with "let us regard" on page 12, and so on). Then have students work in groups to find more examples where

the narrator shares opinions or uses words to a particular effect, and have them share these details with the rest of the class. Finally, lead students to a class consensus on the tone of this work (friendly, intimate, warm, and welcoming).

- **Vocabulary:** *adorned, cascade, coveted, discreet, fob, magi, pier glass, possessions, prosperity, sacrificed, tresses, yearned*

After Reading

Reflect on the Reading Strategy

- Review with students the predictions and revisions that they made. Discuss with students how making predictions helped them stay engaged as they read.
- **Independent practice:** With a partner, have students exchange worksheets to compare and contrast predictions made, revised, and confirmed.

Reflect on the Comprehension Skill

- Write the word *Cause* at the top one column on the board and the word *Effect* in another column. Next, in the Effect column write the following: *Della gained the money she needed. Della worried that Jim would be unhappy.* Ask students to suggest a cause for both effects and write it in the Cause column (Della cut off her hair and sold it for money). Discuss with students how one cause can have multiple effects, and one effect can come from multiple causes.
- Have students work in pairs or small groups to find other examples of cause-and-effect relationships in the text. Encourage them to look for cause-and-effect chains, or situations where multiple causes lead to one effect and vice versa. Invite students to share their cause-and-effect discoveries with the rest of the class.
- **Independent practice:** Introduce, explain, and have students complete the cause-and-effect worksheet. If time allows, discuss their answers.

Reflect on the Purpose

- Refer students back to the focus question: *How is irony developed in the story?* Have students work in groups to discuss their thoughts, and invite groups to share their ideas with classmates.
- **Enduring Understanding:** In *The Gift of the Magi*, we witness the sacrifices that two people make for one another. Have students discuss the following questions: *Have you ever sacrificed something for somebody else? Has someone else sacrificed something for you? How did you feel afterward?*

Build Skills

Grammar and Mechanics: *Prepositional Phrases*

- Review with students that prepositions are words that show the relationship between two parts of a sentence, often nouns or pronouns.
- Provide a few examples: *The book is on the table. The man is standing behind the curtain.* Point out that *on* and *behind* are both prepositions.
- Explain that prepositional phrases are groups of words in a sentence that contain a preposition and describe the relationship between elements such as nouns or pronouns. Point out that in the previous sentences, the prepositional phrases are *on the table* and *behind the curtain*.
- Have students reread pages 4 and 5 and underline all the prepositional phrases that they locate.
- **Check for understanding:** Have students share with the rest of the class the prepositional phrases they found and explain why they are prepositional phrases.
- **Independent practice:** Introduce, explain, and have students complete the prepositional phrases worksheet. If time allows, discuss their answers.



Word Work: *Similes*

- Remind students that a simile is a type of figurative language that compares two things to create a strong visual image or a new way of understanding something. Remind them that a simile includes the word *like* or *as* to make the comparison. Provide a few examples.
- Have students turn to page 10 and identify the simile that describe Jim's response to Della's short hair. Discuss with students the simile's meaning and whether it is effective or not.
- Have students complete the similes below:
Jim and Della are as lucky as _____.
Jim's watch is as valuable as _____.
- **Independent Practice:** Have students create two original similes that describe Della's short hair. Invite volunteers to share similes with classmates.

Literary Element: *Situational Irony*

- Explain to students that the type of irony in this story is called situational irony. Explain that this means that what happens in the story is the opposite of what readers expect or that the characters' actions have the opposite effect from what is intended.
- Provide for students several examples of situational irony: a fire station burns down, a dog trainer gets bitten by a dog, and so on. Discuss as a class why each one is an example of situational irony.
- Have students work in small groups to discuss why the ending of the story is an example of situational irony. Ask: *Why do you think the author chose to end the story with an ironic twist?* Have volunteers share their ideas.
- **Independent Practice:** Have students work in groups to discuss other works that use situational irony. Invite volunteers to share, and record a list on the board. Then, have groups compare how irony is used in this story to its use in some of the titles on the board.



Build Fluency

Independent Reading

- Encourage students to read the story independently. Additionally, partners can take turns reading parts of the story to each other.

Home Connection

- Give students their copy of the book to take home to read with parents, caregivers, siblings, or friends. Encourage them to practice the reading strategy of making, revising, and confirming predictions with family members.

Assessment

Monitor students to determine whether they can:

- consistently make, revise, and confirm predictions during discussion and on a worksheet
- effectively analyze cause-and-effect relationships during discussion and on a worksheet
- correctly identify and use prepositional phrases in discussion and on a worksheet
- accurately identify examples of simile in the text
- correctly identify and explain situational irony in the text and during discussion



Comprehension Check

- Retelling rubric
- Book quiz

Notes

