

The Gift of the Magi

Based on O. Henry's beautiful classic story

About the Story

Lexile: 970L

(informational text)

For qualitative complexity factors, go to Scope Online.

Learning Objective:

to apply a quotation about giving to the play and the informational text

Key Skills:

character, setting, inference, interpreting text, irony, key ideas and details, compare and contrast, integrating ideas

Essential Questions:

- Why do we give gifts?
- What makes a gift meaningful?
- How can we show people that we care about them?

Standards:

The texts and lesson support these Common Core anchor standards: **R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4, R.5, R.9, W.2, SL.1, SL.2, L.4, L.5, L.6.** For more standards information—including TEKS—go to Scope Online.



Your Teaching Support Package

Find your full suite of materials at
scope.scholastic.com.

Video: “Is It Ironic?”

Audio:

- Vocabulary
- Informational Text

Literature Connections: ideas for connecting to curricular texts

Activities to print or project:

- Vocabulary
- Close Reading and Critical Thinking
- Integrating Ideas: Giving Gifts
- Quiz*
- **Core Skills Workout:** Mood*, Inference
- **Literary Elements:** Character Thinking Tool, Theme Anticipation Guide
- Contest Entry Form

* Available on two levels

Step-by-Step Lesson Plan

Close Reading, Critical Thinking, Skill Building

1 Preparing to Read

Do-Now: Reflect on giving.

(5 minutes)

Give students two minutes to write an answer to this question: “What’s the best gift you ever received—and why?” Ask a few volunteers to share their answers. Briefly discuss what makes a gift satisfying to give and to receive.

Preview vocabulary.

(7 minutes, activity sheet online)

Project or distribute the **Vocabulary Words and Definitions**. Review the words. Play: *afloat, befit, haggle, sparsely, threadbare, tonic, unceremoniously*; Informational Text: *agonize, incandescent, neurochemicals, reap*

2 Reading and Discussing the Play

(30 minutes, activity sheet online)

- Read aloud the As You Read box on page 10.
- Assign parts and read the play as a class.
- Discuss the following questions in groups.

Close-Reading Questions

▶ **What do you learn about Jim and Della in Scene 1?** (character) *You learn that Jim and Della don’t have much money. You also learn that they care deeply about each other: Charlie tells Della, “Jim loves you so much,” and Della wants to give Jim the kind of wonderful present she thinks he deserves.*

▶ **How does the setting of Scene 1 help you understand Della’s problem?** (setting) *The details of Jim and Della’s living room (the threadbare rug, scuffed coffee table, and sparsely decorated Christmas tree) help you understand that money really is tight for the couple and why Della has only \$1.87 for Jim’s gift.*

▶ **In Scene 4, what emotions does Della experience when selling her hair? How can you tell?** (inference) *Della feels some grief, or at least anxiety, over giving up her hair; she tells Madame Sofronie, “Quick, cut it off before I change my mind,” and she winces when her hair is cut. But she’s also thrilled to get the money; after her hair is cut, she smiles and thanks Madame Sofronie enthusiastically.*

▶ **In Scene 5, Della says that neither gloves nor a coat seem “precious enough” to be her gift for Jim. What does she mean? Why might a watch chain be more precious?** (interpreting text) *A coat and gloves would keep Jim warm, but they wouldn’t necessarily bring him joy. Jim’s watch is his prized possession. By getting him a watch chain, Della can show she understands that and also enhance the pleasure he takes in owning a good watch.*

▶ **How do Jim and Della feel at the end of the play? What character traits do they have that cause them to feel this way?** (inference, character) *They’re both smiling; you can infer that they’re amused by the irony of their situation. The fact that they both have a sense of humor, are generous, and value each other over any material item allows them to see their situation with good humor.*

Critical-Thinking Questions

▶ **Do you think the play has a happy ending? Why or why not?** *Answers may vary. Some students might say that the play does not have a happy ending because Della and Jim receive gifts they can’t use on top of having lost their most prized possessions. But most students will probably say that the play does end happily: Della and Jim have shown that they value each other above all else.*

► **Irony is when the outcome of an action is the opposite of what was intended or expected. Explain the irony in the play.** *Della and Jim each expect that they will give the other person a wonderful gift. Instead they both end up giving each other something useless.*

► **In the biblical story of Christmas, the Magi bring special gifts to the baby Jesus. The Magi are referred to as wise men. Why do you think O. Henry named his story after them?** *Della and Jim give special gifts to each other. They are wise because they understand the true purpose of giving: to show love.*

3 Reading the Informational Text

(10 minutes, activity sheet online)

As a class, read “What Do You Get From Giving?” and discuss the following questions.

Close-Reading Questions

► **According to the article, what are the “remarkable things” that gift giving does for you?** (key ideas and details) *According to the article, giving a gift can improve your sense of well-being and health. It also reinforces feelings of love for the person you are giving the gift to.*

► **According to the article, how is holding a door open for someone similar to giving a gift?** (compare and contrast) *Both are acts of kindness that trigger the release of powerful brain chemicals that make you feel good.*

► **According to the essay, what are the benefits of receiving a gift?** (key ideas and details) *The article states that receiving a thoughtful gift makes you feel special.*

Critical-Thinking Question

► **If Lewis could walk into Scenes 1 and 2 of the play, what advice might she give Della and Jim?** *Lewis might tell Della and Jim not to worry about buying each other expensive presents, but instead to each just do something kind and thoughtful for the other person, because that will mean just as much as a costly gift.*

4 Skill Building: Integrating Ideas

(15 minutes, activity sheet online)

Have students complete the activity **Integrating Ideas: Giving Gifts**. This activity will prepare students to respond to the writing prompt on page 15. For alternate culminating tasks, see the box below.

Differentiate and Customize

For Struggling Readers

Kristin Lewis mentions the “warm glow” we feel when we give gifts. Describe a place in the play where Della seems to feel that glow, and explain how you can tell.

For Advanced Readers

Write an advice column as either Jim or Della, discussing how to find the perfect gift for a loved one. Draw on information from both the play and the informational text.

For Creative Writers

Imagine you’re making a play or movie version of “The Gift of the Magi” set in modern times. Write a summary of your idea. You may change as many details from the original as you like.

For Critics

Read O. Henry’s short story “The Gift of the Magi.” How is the play different from the story? Why do you think the playwright made the changes she did?