

# The End of Jimmy Valentine

A delightful adaptation of O. Henry's short story  
"A Retrieved Reformation"

## About the Story

**Lexile:** 890L (captions)

For qualitative complexity factors, go to Scope Online.

**Learning Objective:** to demonstrate analysis of characters and their decisions by writing a scene in which the main characters reflect on the decisions they make in the play

**Key Skills:** text structure, inference, figurative language, character, author's craft

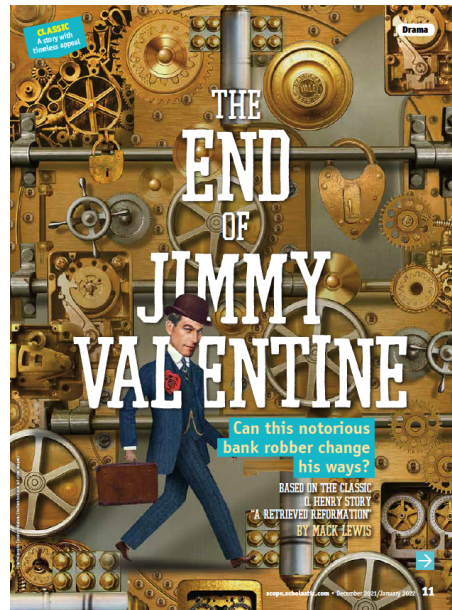
### Essential Questions:

- How and why do people change?
- What is the power of a second chance?
- How do you define justice?

### Standards:

The article and lesson support these Common Core anchor standards: R.1, R.2, R.3, R.5, R.7, R.9, R.10, W.3, W.9, SL.1, SL.2, L.4, L.6

For more standards information—including TEKS—go to Scope Online.



## Your Teaching Support Package

Find your full suite of support materials at [scope.scholastic.com](https://www.scope.scholastic.com).

### Audio:

- Text-to-speech
- Vocabulary

### Connected dramas from the Scope archives:

- "A Christmas Carol"
- "The Gift of the Magi"
- "The Mystery of the Stolen Jewel"

### Skill Building Activities to print, project, or share digitally:

- Preparing to Write: Writing Your Scene
- Theme Anticipation Guide
- Close Reading and Critical Thinking
- Vocabulary: Definitions and Practice
- **Core Skills Workout:** Inference
- Choice Board
- Quiz\*
- Contest Entry Form

\*Available on two levels

# Step-by-Step Lesson

Close Reading, Critical Thinking, Skill Building

## 1. Preparing to Read

10 minutes

### Do-Now: Anticipation Guide (5 minutes)

- Project the **Theme Anticipation Guide** on your whiteboard or share the Google Form version with each student (both available in your Resources tab). Have students decide whether they agree or disagree with each statement, then discuss. After reading the play, ask students to share whether any of their answers have changed and if so, why. You might also have them complete the Theme Anticipation Guide as one of the characters.

### Preview Vocabulary (5 minutes)

- Project **Vocabulary: Definitions and Practice**. Review the definitions as a class. (Optionally, have students complete the practice activity for homework.) Highlighted words: *bittersweet, clemency, dispose, embezzlement, feat, phoenix, saunters*. (To hear these words and definitions read aloud, go to the audio section at the top of the Resources tab in Teacher View, or go to the bottom of the story page in Student View.)

## 2. Reading and Discussing

45 minutes

- Have a volunteer read the As You Read box on page 12 of the magazine or at the top of the digital story page.
- Assign parts and read the play as a class.
- Break students into groups to discuss the following close-reading and critical-thinking questions.

### Close-Reading Questions (15 minutes)

*The following questions can be shared in printable or interactive form.*

1. **In Scene 1, the Warden says, “This is your chance, Jimmy. You’re not a bad fellow at heart. Stop cracking safes and live a better life.” Why is this line important?** (text structure) *This line is important because it foreshadows what will happen later in the play: Jimmy Valentine will stop cracking safes and live a better life. Additionally, this line helps establish Jimmy’s character, because what the Warden says is true—Jimmy really isn’t a bad fellow at heart.*
2. **At various moments in the play, Jimmy either pins a rose to or removes a rose from his lapel. Explain the significance of these moments. What causes Jimmy to attach or remove the rose?** (inference) *Jimmy wears a rose on his lapel while he is working as a criminal. You can infer this from the fact that when his old friend Mike sees Jimmy attach a rose to his lapel in Scene 2, Mike says, “Another job already?” In other words, the rose is a signal to Mike that Jimmy has a robbery planned. In Scene 6, when Jimmy removes the rose from his lapel and asks the hotel clerk to throw it away, it’s because Jimmy has decided to give up his life of crime. In the last scene of the play, Jimmy stuffs a rose in his vest pocket just before breaking into the safe; he thinks he is about to be arrested for the crimes in his past.*
3. **At the end of Scene 6, N3 says, “And with that, Ralph Spencer, the phoenix that arose from Jimmy Valentine’s ashes—the ashes left by the flame of a sudden attack of love—goes up to his room.” Explain what this line means.** (figurative language) *A phoenix is a mythological bird that, when it reaches the end of its life, sets its nest and itself on fire and is then reborn out of the ashes left behind. N3 is using the phoenix as a metaphor to say that the old Jimmy Valentine—the criminal Jimmy Valentine—has been reborn as an honest and law-abiding new Jimmy, who is now going by the name of Ralph Spencer. N3 is also saying that the thing that caused the old Jimmy to “go up in flames,” or come to an end, was falling in love with Annabel.*
4. **In Scene 9, what does Jimmy think will happen to him when he cracks the safe and rescues Agatha? How do you know?** (character, author’s craft) *Jimmy thinks that when he cracks the safe, he will be revealing himself to Detective Price, who will arrest him and send him to prison. Jimmy must think that he will lose everything about his new life—Annabel, his shoe store, and his community in Elmore. That Jimmy is aware of being watched by Price is clear from N3’s statement that Jimmy locks eyes with Price just before stuffing the rose into his vest pocket and starting to work on the safe. That Jimmy expects to be arrested is clear from the way he gives Annabel a “bittersweet” smile (showing his sadness that the life they have planned together is not going to happen) and the way he walks up to Detective Price after opening the safe and says, “Well, let’s go.” Jimmy means, “Well, let’s go to the police station,” because that is where he is expecting to be taken.*
5. **At the end of the play, Detective Price calls Jimmy “Mr. Spencer” and pretends not to recognize him. Why does Detective Price do this?** (character, inference) *Detective Price has*

*just watched Jimmy sacrifice his own freedom to save young Agatha, and this seems to have convinced Price that Jimmy really has changed. Witnessing Jimmy's selfless act seems to have made Price believe, as he did not believe up until that moment, that Jimmy is marrying Annabel not to gain access to the bank, but because he loves her. Price decides to give Jimmy a second chance—an opportunity to live the honest life he has created for himself. By pretending not to even recognize Jimmy, Price also helps Jimmy keep his former life a secret.*

6. **Detective Price's exact words to Jimmy at the end of the play are "Guess you're mistaken, Mr. Spencer. Don't believe I recognize you." What is the double meaning to this line?** (figurative language) *On one level, Price is pretending not to realize that Ralph Spencer is really Jimmy Valentine. On another level, Price is telling Jimmy that Jimmy is not the same man that he was—that he has become a new person who Price has never seen before.*

### Critical-Thinking Questions

(5 minutes)

*The following questions can be shared in printable or interactive form.*

1. **Do you think Detective Price makes the right choice at the end of the play when he lets Jimmy go?** *Answers will vary. Those who say yes may argue that Jimmy has changed and there's no point in sending him to prison—he's no longer a threat to society and has become a beloved member of his community and his new family. Those who say Detective Price does not make the right choice may argue that Price's job is to enforce the law, and in letting Jimmy go, Price fails to do that job. These students may say that Jimmy should have to pay the price for the crimes he committed before meeting Annabel and changing his ways.*
2. **At the end of the play, has Jimmy become an honest man? Why or why not?** *Answers will vary. Those who say yes may point out that Jimmy has given up robbing safes and is making an honest living with his shoe store. What's more, he is willing to put others above himself, as shown by his willingness to go back to prison and lose everything in order to rescue Agatha. Other students may say that while all of that is true, it also seems clear that no one in Elmore—including Annabel—seems to know anything about Jimmy's criminal past, so he is still not being completely honest. (Maybe he will level with Annabel after the events in the play?)*
3. **Think about the expression "you can't escape your past." What do you think it means? Was Jimmy able to escape his past? Explain.** *Answers will vary, but students may offer that "you can't escape your past" means everything you do and everything that happens to you contributes to the person you are now—in other words, that you will always remember and in some way be affected by your past. Another interpretation could be that if you do something wrong, you will eventually face the consequences of your actions. Some students may say that Jimmy did indeed escape his past because he created a whole new life for himself in which no one knew about his past life as a criminal, and what's more, he avoided being punished for the*

*robberies he committed just before arriving in Elmore. Other students may say that Jimmy did not leave his past behind, but rather, took the safecracking skills he learned in his past and found a new way to use them—for good rather than for harm.*

### 3. Skill Building and Writing

30 minutes

- Have students complete **Preparing to Write: Writing Your Scene**. This activity will help them organize their ideas in preparation for the writing prompt on page 15 in the printed magazine and at the bottom of the digital story page.
- Alternatively, have students choose a culminating task from the **Choice Board**, a menu of differentiated activities.

#### Connected dramas from the Scope archives:

- [“A Christmas Carol” \(December 2019/January 2020\)](#) *Also explores how and why people change*
- [“The Gift of the Magi” \(December 2018/January 2019\)](#) *Also based on a short story by O. Henry*
- [“The Mystery of the Stolen Jewel” \(December 2015/January 2016\)](#) *Also explores ideas about justice and second chances*