

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

The Best of O. Henry:

The Gift of the Magi and Twelve Other Stories

by O. Henry

written by Michael Fisher

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Objectives

By the end of this Unit the student will be able to:

1. comment on the use of the intrusive narrator in O. Henry's short stories.
2. discuss various elements of the short story.
3. understand the use of stock characters in O. Henry's short stories.
4. follow O. Henry's approach to social satire.
5. discuss the comedic techniques used in the stories.
6. detail O. Henry's endings, and how he used surprise or twist to catch the reader off guard.
7. discuss O. Henry as a recorder of his time—of the common people and their plights.
8. comment on the image of a dystopian society depicted in these short stories.
9. trace the role of heroes and anti-heroes.
10. discuss the use of diction and characterization that marked O. Henry's style.
11. identify and comment on the following major themes that run through O. Henry's works:
 - Appearance can often be deceiving
 - Luck plays a major role in one's life
 - The world is often governed by irony and paradox
12. Identify conflict in O. Henry's short stories.
13. Discuss whether Rudolf Steiner, from "The Green Door," is an anti-hero.

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Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Discuss the use of literary terms in “The Furnished Room,” “The Last Leaf,” and “The Cop and the Anthem.” Cite examples and show how this device is effective in helping to convey the mood and tone of the stories.
2. Discuss the use of the intrusive narrator in “The Gift of the Magi,” “The Green Door,” and “The Third Ingredient.”
3. Find examples illustrating the social roles of men and women as depicted in O. Henry’s stories and discuss how the roles differ from those of today.
4. In the following example, O. Henry describes the character Josefa, from “The Princess and the Puma,” anecdotally:

“Josefa while riding her pony at a gallop could put five out of six bullets through a tomato-can swinging at the end of a string. She could play for hours with a white kitten she owned, dressing it in all manner of absurd clothes. Scorning a pencil, she could tell you out of her head what 1545 two-year-olds would bring on the hoof, at \$8.50 per head. Roughly speaking, the Espinosa Ranch is forty miles long and thirty broad—but mostly leased land. Josefa, on her pony, had prospected over every mile of it. Every cow-puncher on the range knew her by sight and was a loyal vassal.” (Pg. 66)

Discuss O. Henry technique of describing characters through what they have done in this and other instances throughout the book.

5. Why is there a conspicuous lack of typical ‘heroes’ in O. Henry’s stories? Does this depict a larger world-view being by the author. Point out some instances of ‘anti-heroes’ to back up your argument.
6. Discuss the technique of the unreliable narrator, used by O. Henry in “The Princess and the Puma” and other stories. Why is it necessary? Does it work, or does it detract from the story?
7. How are “An Unfinished Story” and “The Third Ingredient” social satires?
8. In describing Piggy in “An Unfinished Story,” the narrator tells us: “He is a type.” (Pg. 84) Judging from context, what do you interpret this to mean? Use information provided to you by the author to elaborate on Piggy’s character, and what ‘type’ you think he might be.
9. Discuss the man vs. society conflict in “The Cop and the Anthem.”

The Last Leaf

Vocabulary

chivalric – noble, dignified
curative – a healing ability
dissolution – disintegration, ruin
flibbertigibbet – a frivolous and silly person
mastiff – a large, heavy dog
monocle – an eyeglass made for only one eye
morbid – gruesome
pharmacopeia – an encyclopedia of drugs and their uses
satyr – a mythological creature with characteristics of both man and goat
serrated – uneven, notched, jagged
smiting – harming or killing by a severe blow
solicitously – with care; concern
zephyrs – winds

1. Why do you think the author chooses to personify pneumonia? What is accomplished by doing this?

2. According to the doctor, what is Johnsy’s one chance to survive her Pneumonia? What does it mean when the doctor says “This way people have of lining-up on the side of the undertaker makes the entire pharmacopeia look silly.” (Pg. 15)

3. What is the doctor’s response when Sue tells him that Johnsy wanted to paint the Bay of Naples someday—as a motivation for surviving her pneumonia? What does the doctor’s response display about social attitudes of the period?

After Twenty Years

Vocabulary

egotism – self-centeredness
nigh – near
pacific – peaceful, tranquil
stalwart – strong, resolute
staunchest – most firm; truest

1. Explain the metaphor the successful man uses in describing himself to the policeman: “A man gets in a groove in New York. It takes the West to put a razor-edge on him.” (Pg. 42)

2. How does the following statement by “Silky Bob” prove to be ironic?

“We figured that in twenty years each of us ought to have our destiny worked out and our fortunes made, whatever they were going to be.” (Pg. 42)

3. What would you say is the theme of this story? Elaborate. Why could Wells not arrest Bob himself?

4. Where are the differences between Jimmy and Bob foreshadowed? Is it possible that Jimmy betrays Bob because he is jealous of Bob’s life and success?

5. Is there a lesson in this story about friendship? What is it? Is O. Henry’s view of friendship pessimistic?

13. Explain the theme in Jim’s statement that follows: “I’ve often wondered what good too much education is to a man if he can’t use it for himself. If all the benefits of it are to go to others, where does it come in?” (Pg. 79)

14. Where do you think the map came from? Is it possible that May Martha had anything to do with the fraudulent map? If so, what idea does this reinforce?

15. State a theme for the story. How does the repetition of Jim’s serendipitous statement about the misplaced pipe and slippers reinforce the theme?
