

# The Gift of the Magi Lesson Plan



This The Gift of the Magi lesson plan packet has taken me years to compile!

“The Gift of the Magi” is without a doubt one of my favorite short stories, especially for the Christmas season. I’ve been teaching it to my students for years, and now I’ve compiled [15 different “The Gift of the Magi” lesson plans, activities, and resources](#) for you. It’s 108 pages of activities, handouts and worksheets that cover vocabulary, irony, the moral of the story, character analysis, close reading, critical reading skills, and a lot more. The packet even includes some assessment materials. Each resource comes with comprehensive teacher notes and answer keys.

## Isn’t “The Gift of the Magi” Too Difficult for ESL Students?

The story itself is actually very simple:

*A husband and wife are very much in love with each other. The wife has very beautiful hair that she loves very much. The husband has a pocket watch that he loves very much. They want to buy very nice Christmas presents for each other, but they don’t have much money. So, the wife sells her hair to get money. and buys a chain for the watch.*



*Unfortunately, the husband sells his watch to buy the woman beautiful combs for her hair. Each one gives up the thing they love for the other one. While tragic, the story proves that the couple love each more than anything.*

It's a beautiful and touching story, a perfect example of how situational irony can work. But we don't often do it in class, because it's a difficult story. But it's difficult for only two reasons, both of which I've addressed in my packet.:

1. The references: There are references to things that may be unfamiliar to a modern-day student, especially one from another country. There are also allusions to the Bible and other sources in the story that students may not be familiar with. That's why I've provided a lightly graded text with footnotes to explain the more obscure references and early 20th century items. This lesson pack also includes warm-up activities to get at the main theme and explain the references to the magi.
2. The vocabulary: Let's face it. O. Henry was a wordsmith and this story has a lot of words that are off the 200 most frequently used lists and the AWL. That's why I've included:
  - A master list of those hard words for your reference.
  - More importantly, a fun quick vocab match to teach *hair comb*, *pocket watch*, *watch chain*, and *gift*.
  - There's also an extensive vocabulary learning lesson plan which focuses on 24 words that students may not know, but which are fairly easy to explain, such as *butcher* and *howl* and *platinum*. Students use social learning methods to learn the meanings and then do a series of flashcard games to review them.
  - There's also a lesson plan on predicting the meaning of difficult words in context, including figuring out how much you need to know about a word to follow the story. Keep students from looking up every single word they don't know!

- Finally a critical reading skills lesson models reading for the gist, focusing on words you do know and grasping the main idea without knowing every word.



## What Does This The Gift of the Magi Lesson Plan Packet include?

- The original version of the story, untouched and unabridged. (From [the Gutenberg Project](#)-text in the public domain)
- The graded version, with some of the tougher vocabulary and turns of phrase simplified as well as explanatory footnotes for the more antiquated or obscure references.
- A brief one-paragraph summary and a scene-by-scene guide to the text that students could read as a simplified easy-to-read version.
- A word association warm-up where students brainstorm on the word "Gift"
- A quick vocab pre-teach activity to teach *gift*, *pocket watch*, *watch chain*, and *hair comb*. If students don't picture the right kind of

comb, the story can fall flat.

- Predicting vocabulary words meaning from context lesson plan.
- An extensive set of vocabulary activities to pre-teach 24 key words from the text.
- A thematic warm up on the moral of the story and the meaning of the magi. Students read the last paragraph closely and discuss the moral of the story. I love to start the lesson this way so that students can see the broader picture as they read.
- An alternate warm-up where students discuss what a wise gift is and compare wise things to valuable things. This gets at the heart of the theme of the story.
- A lesson on modelling critical reading skills, including ways of getting the gist of a story without knowing every word, lessons on forming questions and predicting as you read, and an unknown vocabulary prediction worksheet.
- Extensive comprehension questions to guide reading. There's also a "Find the Phrase" activity to help students find examples of common themes in the story.
- Worksheet on the Scene to highlight the way the author sets the scene and establishes that Jim and Della are poor, but love each other very much.
- Character Study Sheets for Jim and Della, plus a fun creative activity to retell the story through another character's eyes.
- A complete lesson on situational irony including what it is, how it works, and how it differs from coincidence or bad luck.
- Discussion Questions for students to dig deeper into the meaning of the text.
- Practice doing exegesis or deep passage analysis on selected quotations from the story.
- A set of essay and Creative Writing Topics
- Assessment tools in the form of various quizzes and tests, all in open-answer and multiple choice form.

