

ELA: Grade 8, Lesson 16, The Gift of the Magi

**Lesson Focus:** The focus of today’s lesson will be on the fictional short story text, “The Gift of the Magi.”

**Practice Focus:** Students will analyze a literary text to determine the main ideas and study author’s craft.

**Objective:** Students will use “The Gift of the Magi” to determine the main ideas with a focus on author’s craft.

**Academic Vocabulary:** magi, bulldozing, imputation, parsimony, instigates, moral reflection, predominating, subsiding, furnished flat, vestibule, mortal, coax, prosperity, modest, unassuming, sterling

**TN Standards:** 8.RL.KID.1, 8.RL.KID.2, 8.RL.KID.3, 8.RL.CS.4, 8.W.TTP.2

**Teacher Materials:**

- The Teacher Packet for ELA, Grade 8, Lesson 16
- Chart paper (will need to draw the graphic organizer onto a sheet for display) and markers

**Student Materials:**

- Paper, a pencil, and a surface to write on
- The Student Packet for ELA, Grade 8, Lesson 16 which can be found on [www.tn.gov/education](http://www.tn.gov/education)

**Note:** Some small sections of the text have been omitted for the sake of time in this lesson.

Teacher Do	Students Do
<p><b>Opening</b> (1 min)</p> <p><b>Hello! Welcome to Tennessee’s At Home Learning Series for literacy! Today’s lesson is for all our 8th graders out there, though everyone is welcome to tune in. This lesson is the first in this week’s series.</b></p> <p><b>My name is ____ and I’m a ____ grade teacher in Tennessee schools. I’m so excited to be your teacher for this lesson! Welcome to my virtual classroom!</b></p> <p><b>If you didn’t see our previous lessons, you can find them at <a href="http://www.tn.gov/education">www.tn.gov/education</a>. You can still tune in to today’s lesson if you haven’t seen any of our others.</b></p> <p><b>[Show Slide 1] Today we will be learning about a short story called “The Gift of the Magi”! Specifically, we will be introduced to the characters of Della and Jim and learn why Della has been trying to save up to buy Jim a gift. This will lay the foundation for a really engaging story between these interesting characters. Before we get started, to participate fully in our lesson today, you will need:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paper, a pencil, and a surface to write on</li> <li>• The Student Packet for ELA, Grade 8, Lesson 16 which can be found on <a href="http://www.tn.gov/education">www.tn.gov/education</a></li> </ul> <p><b>Ok, let’s begin!</b></p>	<p>Students gather materials for the lesson and prepare to engage with the lesson’s content.</p>
<p><b>Intro</b> (1 min)</p>	<p>Students listen to the teacher and learn an overview of the lesson.</p>

<p>Today our goal is to begin reading a short story called “The Gift of the Magi” by O. Henry so we can analyze the text to determine its meaning. We will be reading through this text for several lessons so buckle up! This is a longer text so I had to cut out a few portions of it so we can be sure to finish it. But don’t worry, you’ll still have everything you need to understand the text.</p> <p>We will begin today with me reading portions of the text and then we will reread it and pause along the way for deeper understanding. At the end of the lesson, I will assign you independent work you can complete after the video ends.</p>	
<p><b>Teacher Model/Read-Aloud</b> (20 minutes)</p> <p>Now, let’s dig in to the short story we will be studying, which is a story about a young husband and wife and how they deal with the challenge of buying secret Christmas gifts for each other despite having very little money. The author of the story was O. Henry and the story was published in 1905. Although the events of the story—its plot—are fairly easy to understand, the author tells this simple story in a complex way. Sometimes telling things in a more complex way gives those things layers of meaning, which is important because the more layers of meaning there are to dig into, the more we learn about ourselves and the world around us! And that’s the challenge for us as readers! Are you up for the challenge of learning more about yourself and the world around you?</p> <p>Great! Well, here’s how we’re going to do it. We’ll only read a couple of sentences at a time and then we’ll dig into the puzzle of seeing what the words mean and what the author is talking about. To help us with this, we will use a graphic organizer to track our notes. Here is what the graphic organizer looks like. [Show Slide 2.]</p> <p>You can see we have certain sections on the organizer that are labeled various people or things: characters, key details, plot, vocabulary/word choice, literary devices - which are tools like metaphors and images the author uses to convey meaning, and themes, or important messages. Go ahead and take a moment to draw a copy of this organizer on your paper. This will be an important tool for us as we work through the text. [Pause.]</p> <p>Thank you. As we read and discuss each of these elements of the text, we will pause and give you time to write your notes on your graphic organizer. We will actually be using this organizer for the next several lessons so please keep it handy</p>	<p>Students will read about the characters of Della and Jim Young and discover the beginning details of the plot that underlies the story, namely, that Della has been saving money for months to buy Jim a Christmas present but she has not succeeded in saving enough so far.</p> <p>Students use a graphic organizer to record their notes on each of the elements listed above. This graphic organizer will assist them in tracking the meaning of the story and with completing the independent assignments.</p>

throughout the lesson and in upcoming lessons. Ok, let's begin the text!

[Show Slide 3.] Let's take a look at the title first:

**"The Gift of the Magi"**

[Show Slide 4.] What in the world does "magi" mean? You will want to write down the definition of this word on your graphic organizer in the vocabulary section. [Pause.]

Magi is the plural form of the word "magus," which refers to what are known as "wise men," which are a type of religious leader in ancient times. Some of the more famous ones were known for their gift-giving. I'm not sure yet what wise men have to do with this story, but we'll see. Let's start reading.

[Show Slide 5.] **"ONE dollar and eighty-seven cents. That was all. And sixty cents of it was in pennies."**

Keep in mind that how a story begins is always important. What can we tell already from these short lines about what the story will be about? [Pause.]

[Show Slide 6.] **Money! From the title of the story to the first few lines, we already know that money and gifts will be a central part of this author's story. Let's make a note about this in the plot section.**

[Show Slide 7.] It will make more sense as we keep reading.

[Show Slide 8] [Pause.] **Ok, let's continue reading.**

[Show Slide 9.] **"Pennies saved one and two at a time by bulldozing the grocer and the vegetable man and the butcher until one's cheeks burned with the silent imputation of parsimony that such close dealing implied. Three times Della counted it. One dollar and eighty-seven cents. And the next day would be Christmas."**

Ok, this section is a tough one. Let's break it down some.

[Show Slide 10.] It starts with **"pennies saved one and two at a time by bulldozing the grocer and the vegetable man and the butcher."**

[Show Slide 11.] From what we know so far, it's not likely the narrator is talking about a literal bulldozer, or a machine that clears land. The narrator is using the word "bulldozing"

figuratively, or non-literally. If that's so, what do you think the word "bulldozing" means here? [Pause.] It's probably being used in a similar sense in that Della is saving money by aggressively negotiating with the grocer, the vegetable man, and the butcher, the person who prepares meat. She does it to save money.

[Show Slide 12.] The text says she did this "until one's cheeks burned with the silent imputation of parsimony that such close dealing implied."

There's a couple of words here you may not know. As I tell them to you, write them down in the vocabulary section of your graphic organizer.

[Show Slide 13.] "Imputation" here means something is being attributed to or assigned to someone. Here is an example of it being used in a sentence – the gold medal that the runner cheated to win was an imputation of shame and dishonesty. [Pause.]

[Show Slide 14.] "Parsimony" means stingy, or not wanting to spend money. [Pause.]

[Show Slide 15.] Ok, knowing the meanings of those words, let's read the sentence again.

[Show Slide 16.] "Pennies saved one and two at a time by bulldozing the grocer and the vegetable man and the butcher until one's cheeks burned with the silent imputation of parsimony that such close dealing implied. Three times Della counted it. One dollar and eighty-seven cents. And the next day would be Christmas."

[Show Slide 17.] What do you think the author means by the phrase "one's cheeks burned"? What causes your cheeks to flush? [Pause.] You're embarrassed! So let's review what we know. We know Della was saving money by being aggressive with the people who sold food in town. But why is she embarrassed? It says her "cheeks burned with the silent imputation of parsimony that such close dealing implied." Using the definitions you wrote down for "imputation" and "parsimony," what do you think the sentence means? [Pause.]

[Show Slide 18.] Here is what I have written down in my notes. I have that she got embarrassed because, in her mind, they were accusing her of being stingy. Is this what you

have? If not, jot down a few notes so that it will be clearer.  
[Pause.] Let's also pause a moment and add character details for Della to your graphic organizer. [Pause.]

[Show Slide 19.] What did you add? I have in my notes that what we've learned so far is Della is really dedicated to saving money,—that she is a tough negotiator and she is frustrated with her current situation.

[Show Slide 20.] If you need to add anything to your notes, take a moment to do so. [Pause.]

Ok, let's reread the last portion of that section again.

[Show Slide 21.] "Three times Della counted it. One dollar and eighty-seven cents. And the next day would be Christmas."

So we know that Della is saving money and that the next day is Christmas so my guess is she is saving up for a Christmas gift for someone. Let's keep reading.

[Show Slide 22.] "There was clearly nothing to do but flop down on the shabby little couch and howl. So Della did it. Which instigates the moral reflection that life is made up of sobs, sniffles, and smiles, with sniffles predominating."

Ok, let's unpack this a bit. It says Della flopped down on the shabby little couch and howled, or cried. Why do you think she is so frustrated? [Pause.]

Right. My guess is she's only been able to save one dollar and eighty-seven cents and her wants to buy a nice gift for someone. Let's look at the next sentence again because it's a bit tougher to understand.

[Show Slide 23.] "Which instigates the moral reflection that life is made up of sobs, sniffles, and smiles, with sniffles predominating."

Let's add a few words and phrases to your vocabulary list.

[Show Slide 24.] The word "instigates" means "to make something happen." [Pause.]

[Show Slide 25.] A "moral reflection" is a moment of deep thought about an important issue. [Pause.]

[Show Slide 26.] The word “predominating” means “greater in amount.” If I say that a class was predominantly girls, for example, it means that it was mostly girls. [Pause.]

Ok, with your vocabulary words and definitions written down, let’s revisit the sentence again to see if we can determine its meaning.

[Show Slide 27.] “Which instigates the moral reflection that life is made up of sobs, sniffles, and smiles, with sniffles predominating.” Using your vocabulary words and definitions, write down what you think the author is saying. [Pause.]

[Show Slide 28.] Here’s what I have in my notes. I think Della is having a deeper thought about life - it is made up of deep cries, or sobs; light cries, or sniffles; and happiness, or smiles- -but maybe light cries most of all. That’s not a very cheerful description of life, is it?

So Della is clearly down on her luck and not feeling very positive about life right now. Ok, let’s keep reading. In this next paragraph, you will learn a bit more about where she lives.

[Show Slide 29.] “While the mistress, or the woman, of the home is gradually subsiding, or going down, from the first stage to the second, take a look at the home. A furnished flat at \$8 per week.”

Let’s unpack this a bit. The first sentence is a transition sentence from the last paragraph. It says “While the mistress, or the woman, of the home is gradually subsiding, or going down, from the first stage to the second, take a look at the home.” So remember that the mistress of the house, Della, is lying on the couch, crying, and having deep, sad thoughts. It seems like the narrator is saying to us readers, “while she is doing that, let’s take a look at the house.” He says it was “a furnished flat at \$8 per week.” Do you know what a “furnished flat” is? [Pause.]

It’s basically a rented apartment that has all of the furniture in it. But still, 8 dollars! That’s cheap! Remember though this story was written in 1905 so prices were different back then. That being said, \$8 a week was still cheap, even back then, and indicates that this family was poor. Let’s keep reading and see what was in the place.

[Show Slide 30.] **"In the vestibule, or hallway, below was a letter-box into which no letter would go, and an electric button from which no mortal, or human, finger could coax, or cause, a ring. Also appertaining thereunto was a card bearing the name "Mr. James Dillingham Young."**

**So based on this description, what can you tell about the apartment in which they live?** [Pause.]

[Show Slide 31.] **The text says there was a letter-box in the hallway "into which no letter would go," which means it wasn't even a good mailbox as it was too small or broken to hold letters.**

[Show Slide 32.] **It also says the doorbell wasn't working - the "electric button from which no mortal, or human, finger could coax, or cause, a ring." It sounds to me like they could not afford nice things.**

[Show Slide 33.] **This passage finishes by saying "appertaining thereunto was a card bearing the name "Mr. James Dillingham Young." This means there was a card above the doorbell with Della's husband's name on it. This is the first time we have heard about him but we have a lot more to learn!**

[Show Slide 34.] **Let's take a moment to add notes to our graphic organizer. We have just learned some key details about Della and James' apartment. These details help us to understand why Della is struggling to afford a gift. It will also explain some upcoming events. But, for now, let's add what you have learned to the "key details" section on your graphic organizer.** [Pause.]

[Show Slide 35.] **Thank you. Here are the key details I added: they rent an apartment with furniture already in it called a furnished flat; they rent it at a really cheap price, and it is not a very nice apartment. Take a moment to add anything to your notes you may have missed.** [Pause.] **Ok, let's read on about Della's husband, James Dillingham Young.**

[Show Slide 36.] **"The "Dillingham" had been flung to the breeze during a former period of prosperity, or wealth, when its possessor was being paid \$30 per week. Now, when the income was shrunk to \$20, though, they were thinking seriously of contracting, or shrinking, to a modest and unassuming D."**

This section is a little tricky to understand, too.

[Show Slide 37.] When the passage says, “the Dillingham’ had been flung to the breeze during a former period of prosperity, or wealth, when its possessor was being paid \$30 per week,” we might think that “flung to the breeze” means he got rid of the name. It actually means the opposite here. It means that he openly used that name in public because it sounded fancy and he was proud of it. Now, though, his income has shrunk and he was thinking of just shrinking his middle name down to “a modest and unassuming D.”

[Show Slide 38.] What do you think is the meaning of that phrase? What does the narrator mean by “a modest and unassuming D”? [Pause.]

Well, “modest” and “unassuming” both mean “humble” or “shy” so he was likely embarrassed about his lack of wealth and wanted to shrink a fancy name like Dillingham down just to the initial, “D.” Let’s add the word “unassuming” to our vocabulary section on the graphic organizer. Beside that word, add the definition “humble.” [Pause.]

Ok, now that we’ve learned some things about Jim, let’s add some details to our notes on our graphic organizers. Take a few moments to add Jim and some details about him. [Pause.]

Here’s what I have in my notes: Jim once lived in prosperity, or got along financially. He now makes a lot less money than he once did and he is somewhat ashamed by it. If you didn’t have all of this in your notes, take a moment to add to them. [Pause.] Great, let’s keep reading about James to learn more about him.

[Show Slide 39.] “But whenever Mr. James Dillingham Young came home and reached his flat above he was called “Jim” and greatly hugged by Mrs. James Dillingham Young, already introduced to you as Della. Which is all very good.”

Finally we have an easy section! Let’s reread this again. As I read, write in your notes what you learn about both James and Della.

“But whenever Mr. James Dillingham Young came home and reached his flat above he was called “Jim” and greatly hugged by Mrs. James Dillingham Young, already introduced to you as Della. Which is all very good.”



**Ok, finish writing in your notes what you learned and then we'll talk about it. [Show Slide 40.] [Pause.]**

**[Show Slide 41.] Here's what I learned from reading that section. I learned James was married to Della and she calls him "Jim" instead of the more formal name "James." I can also infer from this section that both Jim and Della are happy with each other. These are some important details about both characters. Take a moment and add these details to your "Characters" section on your graphic organizer. [Pause.] [Show Slide 42.]**

**Great. So Jim and Della are happily married, even if Della is sad about other things. Let's keep reading.**

**[Show Slide 43.] "Della finished her cry and attended to, or patted, her cheeks with the powder rag. She stood by the window and looked out dully at a gray cat walking a gray fence in a gray backyard."**

**So now that we've learned a bit about Della's apartment and husband and marriage, we're back to the plot itself and Della being upset about not being able to buy Jim a gift. She finishes crying and wipes her face with a cloth.**

**The text then says she "stood by the window and looked out dully at a gray cat walking a gray fence in a gray backyard." Why do you think the author would choose to add this sentence to the text? [Pause.] So here's what I'm thinking. At first, it seems like a really random thing to include. What does a cat in the yard have to do with Della's problems? But one of the key parts of storytelling is to create a mood, or an emotional atmosphere, for the reader. What kind of mood do you think the author is creating here? How does this sentence make you feel? [Pause.]**

**[Show Slide 44.] Well, I see that the author uses the word "gray" three times in one sentence. We all associate the word "gray" with gloomy or depressed. I think the author is making Della's situation sound pretty bleak, or depressing, right now. Let's read on to see what happens?**

**[Show Slide 45.] "Tomorrow would be Christmas Day, and she had only \$1.87 with which to buy Jim a present. She had been saving every penny she could for months, with this result."**

Ok, so we now know for sure it's her husband Jim that she wants to buy the present for. She has been working hard to save money for months and one dollar and eighty-seven cents is all she has to show for it. But why wasn't she able to save more? Let's read on to see.

[Show Slide 46.] "Twenty dollars a week doesn't go far. Expenses had been greater than she had calculated. They always are. Only \$1.87 to buy a present for Jim. Her Jim."

So we kind of already knew that twenty dollars a week isn't much but it also sounds like she had not anticipated her bills being as high as they are. Let's keep reading.

[Show Slide 47.] "Many a happy hour she had spent planning for something nice for him. Something fine and rare and sterling, or fancy-something just a little bit near to being worthy of the honor of being owned by Jim."

It seems clear that Della did not want to buy Jim any ordinary present. Her one dollar and eighty-seven cents was not even close to the amount she needed to buy the kind of gift she thought was worthy of being given to Jim.

Ok, we've learned a little bit more about Della in this paragraph so take a moment and add some notes about her to the Characters section in your graphic organizer. [Show Slide 48.] [Pause.]

[Show Slide 49.] I added to my notes that Della has been trying for months to save enough money but she has nowhere near enough money to buy the gift that she wants to buy. I also added that she really loves and admires Jim! That makes it sadder for her that she can't get him a nice gift, but happier overall because at least they have each other.

Ok, excellent. Well, we're going to pause here in the text as we have run out of time for today. We will pick up where we left off in the story tomorrow.

[Show Slide 50.] But let's make sure we have some notes in the plot section of the graphic organizer. Take a few moments and write in your notes what you know about the plot, or the sequence of events, of the story so far. [Pause.]

[Show Slide 51.] Here is what I have in my notes. I wrote down that Della has been working for months to save money and all she has to show for it is one dollar and eighty-seven

<p><b>cents. It's Christmas eve and she does not have enough money to buy the gift for Jim that she wants to buy for him.</b></p>	
<p><b>Guided Practice</b> (10 min)          [Show Slide 52.] <b>Ok, before we close for today, let's review our notes for our graphic organizer. As I read what I have in my notes, please add anything that you don't already have to your notes. What do you have written down for Della?</b>          [Pause.]</p> <p>[Show Slide 53.] <b>I have this:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>dedicated to saving money</b></li> <li>• <b>a tough negotiator</b></li> <li>• <b>frustrated with her current situation</b></li> <li>• <b>happily married to James</b></li> <li>• <b>has been trying for months to save enough money for a gift for Jim but doesn't have enough</b></li> <li>• <b>really loves and admires Jim</b></li> </ul> <p>[Show Slide 54.] <b>For Jim, I have:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>He once lived in prosperity, or got along fine financially. He now makes a lot less money than he once did and he is somewhat ashamed by it.</b></li> <li>• <b>He is happily married to Della and they have a home together.</b> [Pause.]</li> </ul> <p>[Show Slide 55.] <b>For key details, here's what I have:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Della and Jim live in a furnished flat; that is, they rent an apartment with furniture supplied in it. It is not a very nice apartment though and they rent it for cheap.</b> [Pause.]</li> </ul> <p>[Show Slide 56.] <b>In the plot section, here's what I have written:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Della has been working for months to save money and that all that she has to show for it is one dollar and eighty-seven cents. It's Christmas Eve and she does not have enough money to buy the gift for Jim that she wants to buy for him.</b> [Pause.]</li> </ul> <p>[Show Slide 57.] <b>In the vocabulary section, here's what I have:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Magi, meaning "wise men, religious leaders known for gift giving"</b> [Pause.]</li> <li>• <b>Imputation, meaning something negative is being attributed to or assigned to something or someone</b> [Pause.]</li> </ul>	<p>Students review their notes and consolidate their understanding of the text in preparation for writing about the two characters, Della and Jim, for independent practice.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Parsimony</b>, meaning stingy, or not wanting to spend money [Pause.]</li> <li>• <b>Instigates</b>, meaning “to make something happen” [Pause.]</li> <li>• <b>Moral reflection</b>, meaning “a moment of deep thought about an important issue” [Pause.]</li> <li>• <b>Predominating</b>, which means to have the greater amount [Pause.]</li> <li>• <b>Unassuming</b>, which means humble [Pause.]</li> </ul> <p>Great, thank you. These notes will help you complete the independent assignment.</p>	
<p><b>Independent Work</b> (1 min)</p> <p>Let’s reflect on today’s lesson. Today we learned about Della and James and their living situation. We also learned a bit about why Della has been saving money for a Christmas gift. For your independent work today, please respond in writing to the following prompt.</p> <p>[Show Slide 58.] Students, please write the prompt down on your notebook paper so you will have it handy for when you are responding in writing.</p> <p>In your own words, describe Della and Jim. Be sure to use your notes and include specific details. Pretty simple, right? But here’s the catch: in your descriptions of the two characters, you need to use each of the following vocabulary words:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• imputation</li> <li>• parsimony</li> <li>• unassuming</li> </ul> <p>That will help you remember both what the story is about and what those words mean.</p>	<p>Students will respond to a writing prompt that synthesizes their knowledge from today’s lesson, with a focus on Della’s and Jim’s characters and newly introduced vocabulary words.</p>
<p><b>Closing</b> (1 min)</p> <p>Thank you. I enjoyed reading the short story, “The Gift of the Magi,” with you today! Thank you for inviting me into your home. I look forward to seeing you in our next lesson in Tennessee’s At Home Learning Series! Bye!</p>	