



# The Gift of the Magi

O. Henry



## About the author

William Sydney Porter was born in 1862 in North Carolina, the United States. He used the pen name of O. Henry to sign his stories from 1901 until he died at 48.

O. Henry became internationally famous for his witty short stories, most of them playful and optimistic, with surprising endings.

For more information, see the Introduction.

## Summary

### **The Gift of the Magi**

A young couple are short of money but want to buy each other amazing Christmas gifts. Della sells her beautiful hair to buy a gold chain for Jim's watch, while Jim sells his watch ... to buy expensive combs for Della's hair!

### **The Art Game**

Two swindlers, Andy Tucker and Jeff, move to Pittsburgh, which is full of new millionaires. Andy meets Mr. Scudder, who owns a rare gold horse and longs to possess its counterpart. Jeff poses as an art teacher and sells Mr. Scudder what he says in the desired horse.

### **The Troubadour**

Troubadour Sam Galloway learns that rancher Mr. Ellison is in debt. King James expels the old man's sheep but then gives them back in return for the kindness Mr. Ellison's sister once showed him. Mr. Ellison returns home, only to learn that Sam has killed King James to help him!

### **Money Talks**

Richard, rich Mr. Rockwall's son, loves Miss Ellen Lantry. While the young couple are being driven to the theatre by Mr. Rockwall's driver, they are caught in a traffic jam, and they have time to talk and discover their reciprocal love.

The following morning, Mr. Kelly, the driver, gets paid by Mr. Rockwall for organizing the "traffic jam".

### **Soapy's Winter Home**

Soapy is a New York City tramp who sets out to get arrested so he can spend the cold winter in the city jail. However, he fails. He sits down to consider finding a job, but then he is arrested for loitering.

## Background and themes

The characters are ordinary people living ordinary lives in ordinary circumstances, but life suddenly surprises them with an ironic touch. Can we really plan ahead?

## Discussion activities

### **The Gift of the Magi**

#### **While reading**

- 1 **Listen/Read:** Get students to listen to the story up to when Della leaves the hairdresser. Ask them to imagine the dialogue. The hairdresser doesn't want to cut Della's hair but Della persuades her to do it.

### **The Art Game**

#### **After reading**

- 2 **Discuss:** Divide the class into small groups. Ask them to discuss the following:
  - *Andy's idea to get money from Mr. Scudder is alright.*
  - *Mr. Scudder must be careful when choosing friends.*
  - *They can't tell lies forever.*

### **The Troubadour**

#### **After reading**

- 3 **Discuss:** Get students to discuss these views about the story:
  - *"This story can only happen in a film or book."*
  - *"I think the story is very strange."*

### **Money Talks**

#### **While reading**

- 4 **Listen/Read and guess:** Get students to listen to the story and follow the text from the beginning until Mr. Rockwall calls his son and Richard says: "Yes, father?" Have students improvise a dialogue between them, guessing what they are going to talk about.

### **Soapy's Winter Home**

#### **While reading**

- 5 **Artwork and writing:** Ask students to imagine and draw a map of the area where Soapy walks and pretend to walk with Soapy around New York. What will they find there? Ask them to make a list. They may need to do some research on New York first.

## Vocabulary activities

For the Word List and vocabulary activities, go to [www.penguinreaders.com](http://www.penguinreaders.com).