

THE GIFT OF THE MAGI — STRUCTURE & EFFECT

R.L.9-10.5 Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing and flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.

Directions: As you read, pay attention not only to what happens, but to when and how O. Henry chooses to reveal it. Your job is to explain how those choices affect the reader.

PART 1 — What does the reader know?

1. Identify one important piece of information that O. Henry keeps from the reader until later. Why might he delay it?

2. How does the difference between what the reader knows and what a character knows create surprise or anticipation?

PART 2 — Order of Events

Number these events in the order O. Henry reveals them. Then consider why he chose this order.

Event	Order
Della counts her money and worries about buying Jim a gift.	
The reader learns that Della has sold her hair.	
Jim comes home and reacts to Della.	
The reader learns what Jim has bought for Della.	
Jim and Della discover that their gifts cannot immediately be used.	

Why doesn't O. Henry simply reveal everything in chronological order? What effect does his chosen order create?

PART 3 — PACING: WHEN DOES THE STORY SLOW DOWN OR SPEED UP?

Pacing is the rate at which a story moves through events. O. Henry uses different amounts of detail and dialogue at different moments. Analyze how the pacing affects the reader.

1. Which moment do you think O. Henry slows down most deliberately? What is the effect of slowing down there?

2. How does the pacing as Jim arrives home affect the tension of the scene?

3. How does the parallel structure of Jim's and Della's sacrifices prepare the reader for the surprise at the end?

Checklist:

- ☐ I discussed a structural choice.
- ☐ I used specific evidence.
- ☐ I explained the effect on the reader.
- ☐ I connected the structure to surprise, tension, or anticipation.