

ELA GEE 21 FOCUSED LEARNING LESSON 14: **Analyzing Irony and Symbolism in a Short Story**

Assessment Component: Reading and Responding

Note: Concepts from this lesson may be combined in a writing sample in lesson 15.

STANDARD ONE: Students read, comprehend and respond to a range of materials using a variety of strategies for different purposes.

STANDARD SIX: Students read, analyze, and respond to literature as a record of life experiences.

PRIMARY BENCHMARKS ADDRESSED:

ELA-1-H2 analyzing the effects of complex literary devices (e.g., figurative language, flashback, foreshadowing, dialogue, irony) and complex elements (e.g., setting, plot, character, theme, mood, style) on a selection

ELA-6-H2 analyzing distinctive elements (e.g., recurrent themes, historical significance, literary techniques) of ancient, American, British world literature

ELA-6-H3 identifying, analyzing, and responding to a variety of classic and contemporary literature from many genres (e.g., folktales, legends, myths, poetry, fiction, biography, autobiography, nonfiction, novels, drama, epic)

GRADE 9 GLEs ADDRESSED:

- 3. Identify and explain the significance of literary devices, including:**
 - mixed metaphors
 - imagery
 - symbolism
 - flashback
 - foreshadowing
 - sarcasm/irony
 - implied metaphors
 - oxymoron (ELA-1-H2)
- 8. Identify and explain recurrent themes in world literature (ELA-6-H2)**
- 9. Analyze in oral and written responses distinctive elements (including theme, structure, characterization) of a variety of literary forms and types, including:**

- essays by early and modern writers
- epic poetry such as *The Odyssey*
- forms of lyric and narrative poetry such as ballads and sonnets
- drama, including ancient, Renaissance, and modern
- short stories and novels
- biographies and autobiographies (ELA-6-H3)

LESSON FOCUS: Students will analyze the use of symbolism in a short story.

I. Translating Standards Into Instruction

- Have students write a journal entry describing the possession that means the most to them. They should include an explanation of the reasons for its importance and what it would take for them to part with this possession.
- Tell students they will now read a story about a couple who have little money, but precious possessions. Have students read silently “Gift of the Magi” by O’Henry.
- Use the following topics to discuss the story:
 - Describe Jim’s age and appearance. [thin, serious, poor]
 - Discuss what Della has done and why.[cut her hair, sold it to get enough money to buy Jim a Christmas gift]
 - How does the reader know that Della is nervous? [silent prayers that Jim still thinks she is pretty]
 - What is Jim’s reaction when he first sees Della? [eyes fixed on her, staring, peculiar, speechless]
 - What is Della’s reaction? [thinks her short hair makes her unattractive]
 - Who are the Magi and what did they do?[the three wise men who visited the Baby Jesus bringing gifts]
 - What is Jim’s gift to Della? [expensive tortoise hair combs for long hair]
 - Why is the name of Della’s gift capitalized? [She worshiped the combs; owning them would be an impossible dream]
 - Why had Jim been unable to speak when he entered the room? [Della would now have no use for the combs]
 - What is Della’s gift for Jim? [watch fob; Jim needed a proper chain for his pocket watch]
 - Why can’t he use it? [He sold his watch for the combs]
 - What makes these gifts so valuable? [each sacrificed something of great value for the other]
 - Why are these like the gifts of the Magi? [gifts of love and sacrifice]

- D. Define symbol as a concrete object, person, place or experience that represents something else, usually an abstract quality, such as a human emotion or quality.
 - 1. Ask students to discuss common symbols in our society today and what they stand for. Create a list on the board as symbols are mentioned. [Examples might be a heart symbolizes love; the flag patriotism; a lion courage]
 - 2. Ask students to identify the two symbols in the story and explain what they represent. [The watch chain and the hair combs might symbolize love, sacrifice, unselfish love.]
- E. Define the term *situational irony* [the actual outcome of a situation is the opposite of someone’s expectations] and have students explain in a short answer response of 25-50 words how the ending to the story is ironic.
- F. Discuss the author’s use of the surprise ending to convey the theme. In a short answer response of 50-75 words, students should discuss how this ending is ironic.

II. Sources of Evidence of Student Learning

- A. Students’ participation in the story discussion
- B. Students’ written description of symbols in the story
- C. Students’ written description of irony in the story

III. Attributes of Student Work at the “Got-It” Level

- A. The student displays an understanding of characters and events in the story in classroom discussion.
- B. The student can explain what the major symbols in the story represent.
- C. The student can identify an example of situational irony and explain its effect on the theme of the story.

IV. GEE 21 Connection

The “ELA Assessment Framework” for Grade 10 shows that students will be given fiction passages that may contain stories, folktales, legends, myths, or drama. Students will be required to answer a variety of questions, including multiple-choice, short-answer, and essay. For examples see “Sample Test Items,” pages H-12 to H-15.

V. Recommended Materials

- A. Copies of the story “The Gift of the Magi” by O’Henry.
- B. List of questions for classroom discussion
- C. Short answer response forms for discussion of symbolism and irony

References

Porter, William Sidney (O’Henry.) “Gift of the Magi,” Glencoe Literature, Course 4, p.7.