

# Learning English

**American Stories**

***A Gift of the Magi***

***Based on the story by O. Henry***

Lesson Plan  
*by Jill Robbins, Ph.D.*

# Introduction

This lesson plan is to accompany the American Stories series episode, *A Gift of the Magi*, by O. Henry.

A transcript of the story is included at the end of this lesson to print so students can read as they listen. Teachers who cannot play the audio from the website can read the story aloud or have students read it.

This lesson plan is based on the CALLA Approach. See the end of the lesson for more information and resources on teaching with the CALLA approach. The following slide shows the five parts of this lesson plan.

# Lesson Elements

**Prepare**

**Present**

**Practice**

**Self-Evaluate**

**Expand**

# Prepare

Introduce the theme of the story. “This story is about giving gifts. One of the times people in America give gifts is at Christmas time. What do you know about the tradition of giving Christmas gifts?”

Listen to students’ comments on what they know about giving Christmas gifts.

Explain the class focus: “Today we will learn about a famous story of Christmas gifts with a kind of funny ending. Let’s learn some of the new words first.”

# Vocabulary

**negotiate** - *v.* to discuss something formally in order to make an agreement

**immovable** - *adj.* not able to be moved : firmly fixed in place

**expression** - *n.* the way someone's face looks that shows emotions and feelings

**magi** - *n.* the wise men, generally assumed to be three in number, who paid homage to the infant Jesus (from the Bible: Matt. 2:1–12)

# Present

Introduce the story: “This story is about a young couple in love. We learn about what is most important in their lives. Before we begin reading, please take a minute to think about what is most important in your life. Tell your neighbor what you decide.”

Give students time to think and talk about the most important things in their lives.

Ask students “Was your most important thing something you can see? Or was it something you can’t see?”

Discuss the idea of abstract concepts, like love, being more important than physical possessions.

Explain the strategy: “Today we are going to use the strategy, **focus**. As we read this story, we can *focus* on how we learn about the characters, Jim and Della. I’ll show you with the first part. I’m going to *focus* as I listen to find out about the characters in the story.”

Play or read the story to ‘And the next day would be Christmas.’

Re-read the lines, “*Negotiating until one's face burned with the silent knowledge of being poor.*” Say, “When I read this, I know something about Della. She tries hard to save money, but she is poor.”

# Practice

“Now it’s your turn. As we read the next part of the story, *focus* on anything else you can learn about Della.”

Play the story to “She had been saving every penny she could for months, with this result.”

“What did you learn? Why is Della sad? Why is she saving money?”

Ask students to turn to their neighbor and share what they learned about Della. Have several share with the class as a whole.

“Let’s read a little more of the story now. Remember to *focus* on what you can learn about Jim and Della.”



Play to ‘She stood still while a few tears fell on the floor.’

Ask, “What else did you learn? Do you know more about Jim now?”

Ask students to turn to their neighbor and share what they learned about Della and Jim. Have several share with the class as a whole.

“Let’s read a the rest of the story now.”

Play to the end of the story. Ask students to make a list together with their neighbor of the things they learned about the characters in the story.

# Self-Evaluate

Ask students to stay with their neighbor and turn to join another pair of students. “I’d like you to do something a little different today as we evaluate the strategy, *focus*. In your group of four, talk about the end of the story. Was it a surprise to you? Did you guess that this might happen, based on what you learned about Jim and Della?”

**Give students time to talk about the surprise ending.**

Ask, “Now I’d like to ask you what you think about using this strategy, *focus*, when you read. If you think it helps you, put your right thumb up. If you’re not sure, put your right thumb sideways. If you don’t think it helped, put your right thumb down.”

# Expand

Ask students, “Are there other times when you can *focus* on what you learn by reading?”

**Listen to students’ ideas.**

Continue, “This strategy is helpful if you need to pay attention to specific information. For example, when you are listening to a voice message to get a phone number, you use this strategy. If your teacher starts talking about what’s going to be on a test, you will probably *focus* on the information that will help you prepare for the test.

Try using this strategy tonight when you do your homework, or in your next class. Let me know how it goes!”

## The Gift of the Magi by O. Henry

One dollar and eighty-seven cents. That was all. And sixty cents of it in the smallest pieces of money - pennies. Pennies saved one and two at a time by **negotiating** with the men at the market who sold vegetables and meat. Negotiating until one's face burned with the silent knowledge of being poor. Three times Della counted it. One dollar and eighty-seven cents. And the next day would be Christmas.

There was clearly nothing to do but sit down and cry. So Della cried. Which led to the thought that life is made up of little cries and smiles, with more little cries than smiles.

Della finished her crying and dried her face. She stood by the window and looked out unhappily at a gray cat walking along a gray fence in a gray back yard. Tomorrow would be Christmas Day, and she had only one dollar and eighty-seven cents to buy her husband Jim a gift. She had been saving every penny she could for months, with this result.

Jim earned twenty dollars a week, which does not go far. Expenses had been greater than she had expected. They always are. Many a happy hour she had spent planning to buy something nice for him. Something fine and rare -- something close to being worthy of the honor of belonging to Jim.



**Their two most valuable possessions**

There was a tall glass mirror between the windows of the room. Suddenly Della turned from the window and stood before the glass mirror and looked at herself. Her eyes were shining, but her face had lost its color within twenty seconds. Quickly she pulled down her hair

and let it fall to its full length.

Now, Mr. and Mrs. James Dillingham Young had two possessions which they valued. One was Jim's gold time piece, the watch that had been his father's and his grandfather's. The other was Della's hair.

The Gift of the Magi by O. Henry | VOA Learning English | American Stories  
<http://learningenglish.voanews.com/>

Had the Queen of Sheba lived in their building, Della would have let her hair hang out the window to dry just to reduce the value of the queen's jewels.

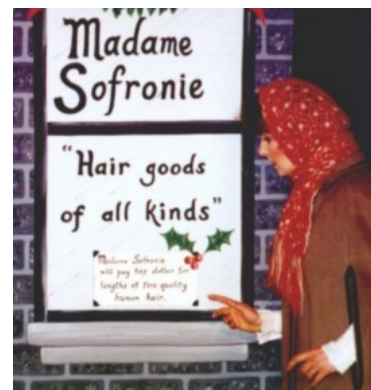
So now Della's beautiful hair fell about her, shining like a brown waterfall. It reached below her knees and made itself almost like a covering for her. And then quickly she put it up again. She stood still while a few tears fell on the floor.

She put on her coat and her old brown hat. With a quick motion and brightness still in her eyes, she danced out the door and down the street.

Where she stopped the sign read: "Madame Sofronie. Hair Goods of All Kinds." Della ran up the steps to the shop, out of breath.

"Will you buy my hair?" asked Della.

"I buy hair," said Madame. "Take your hat off and let us have a look at it."



Della at Madame Sofronie's shop

Down came the beautiful brown waterfall of hair.

"Twenty dollars," said Madame, lifting the hair with an experienced hand.

"Give it to me quick," said Della.

The next two hours went by as if they had wings. Della looked in all the stores to choose a gift for Jim.

She found it at last. It surely had been made for Jim and no one else. It was a chain -- simple round rings of silver. It was perfect for Jim's gold watch. As soon as she saw it she knew that it must be for him. It was like him. Quiet and with great value. She gave the shopkeeper twenty-one dollars and she hurried home with the eighty-seven cents that was left.

When Della arrived home she began to repair what was left of her hair. The hair had been ruined by her love and her desire to give a special gift. Repairing the damage was a very big job.

Within forty minutes her head was covered with tiny round curls of hair that made her look wonderfully like a schoolboy. She looked at herself in the glass mirror long and carefully.



Della looking at her short hair

"If Jim does not kill me before he takes a second look at me," she said to herself, "he'll say I look like a song girl. But what could I do--oh! what could I do with a dollar and eighty-seven cents?"

At seven o'clock that night the coffee was made and the pan on the back of the stove was hot and ready to cook the meat.

Jim was never late coming home from work. Della held the silver chain in her hand and sat near the door. Then she heard his step and she turned white for just a minute. She had a way of saying a little silent prayer about the simplest everyday things, and now she whispered: "Please God, make him think I am still pretty."

The door opened and Jim stepped in. He looked thin and very serious. Poor man, he was only twenty-two and he had to care for a wife. He needed a new coat and gloves to keep his hands warm.

Jim stopped inside the door, as **immovable** as a dog smelling a bird. His eyes were fixed upon Della. There was an **expression** in them that she could not read, and it frightened her. It was not anger, nor surprise, nor fear, nor any of the feelings that she had been prepared for. He simply looked at her with a strange expression on his face. Della went to him.

"Jim, my love," she cried, "do not look at me that way. I had my hair cut and sold because I could not have lived through Christmas without giving you a gift. My hair will grow out

again. I just had to do it. My hair grows very fast. Say 'Merry Christmas!' Jim, and let us be happy. You do not know what a nice-- what a beautiful, nice gift I have for you."

"You have cut off your hair?" asked Jim, slowly, as if he had not accepted the information even after his mind worked very hard.

"Cut it off and sold it," said Della. "Do you not like me just as well? I am the same person without my hair, right?"

Jim looked about the room as if he were looking for something.

"You say your hair is gone?" he asked.

"You need not look for it," said Della. "It is sold, I tell you--sold and gone, too. It is Christmas Eve, boy. Be good to me, for it was cut for you. Maybe the hairs of my head were numbered," she went on with sudden serious sweetness, "but nobody could ever count my love for you. Shall I put the meat on, Jim?"

Jim seemed to awaken quickly and put his arms around Della. Then he took a package from his coat and threw it on the table.

"Do not make any mistake about me, Dell," he said. "I do not think there is any haircut that could make me like my girl any less. But if you will open that package you may see why you had me frightened at first."

White fingers quickly tore at the string and paper. There was a scream of joy; and then, alas! a change to tears and cries, requiring the man of the house to use all his skill to calm his wife.



Jim looking at the chain Della gave him

For there were the combs -- the special set of objects to hold her hair that Della had wanted ever since she saw them in a shop window. Beautiful combs, made of shells, with jewels at the edge --just the color to wear in the beautiful hair that was no longer hers. They cost a lot of money, she knew,

and her heart had wanted them without ever hoping to have them. And now, the beautiful combs were hers, but the hair that should have touched them was gone.

But she held the combs to herself, and soon she was able to look up with a smile and say, "My hair grows so fast, Jim!"

Then Della jumped up like a little burned cat and cried, "Oh, oh!"

Jim had not yet seen his beautiful gift. She happily held it out to him in her open hands. The silver chain seemed so bright.

"Isn't it wonderful, Jim? I looked all over town to find it. You will have to look at the time a hundred times a day now. Give me your watch. I want to see how it looks on it."

Instead of obeying, Jim fell on the couch and put his hands under the back of his head and smiled.

"Dell," said he, "let us put our Christmas gifts away and keep them a while. They are too nice to use just right now. I sold my gold watch to get the money to buy the set of combs for your hair. And now, why not put the meat on."

The **magi** were wise men--wonderfully wise men--who brought gifts to the Baby Jesus. They invented the art of giving Christmas gifts. Being wise, their gifts were wise ones. And here I have told you the story of two young people who most unwisely gave for each other the greatest treasures of their house. But in a last word to the wise of these days, let it be said that of all who give gifts, these two were the wisest. Everywhere they are wisest. They are the magi.

Karen Leggett wrote this story for VOA Learning English. Your storyteller was Shep O'Neal. The producer was Lawan Davis.



### **Words in This Story**

**negotiate** - *v.* to discuss something formally in order to make an agreement

**immovable** - *adj.* not able to be moved : firmly fixed in place

**expression** - *n.* the way someone's face looks that shows emotions and feelings

**magi** - *n.* the wise men, generally assumed to be three in number, who paid homage to the infant Jesus. Matt. 2:1-12.

*Now it's your turn. Write to us in the comments section about a very special gift you received.*

# About the CALLA Approach

The Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) is an instructional model for second and foreign language learners based on cognitive theory and research.

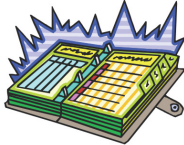



CALLA integrates instruction in priority topics from the content curriculum, development of the language skills needed for learning in school, and explicit instruction in using learning strategies for academic tasks.

The goals of CALLA are for students to learn essential academic content and language and to become independent and self-regulated learners through their increasing command over a variety of strategies for learning in school. CALLA can be used in ESL, EFL, bilingual, foreign language, and general education classrooms.






CALLA was developed by Anna Uhl Chamot and J. Michael O'Malley, and is being implemented in approximately 30 school districts in the United States as well as in several other countries.

See a list of language learning strategies below.







# Metacognitive Strategies

CALLA CONTENT AND LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES		
STRATEGY	DESCRIPTION	
<b>METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES</b>		
Plan / Organize	 <p>Planner</p>	<p>Before beginning a task:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Set goals.</li> <li>-Plan the task or content sequence.</li> <li>-Plan how to accomplish the task (choose strategies).</li> <li>-Preview a text.</li> </ul>
Monitor / Identify Problems	 <p>Check</p>	<p>While working on a task:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Check your progress on the task.</li> <li>-Check your comprehension as you use the language. Do you understand? If not, what is the problem?</li> <li>-Check your production as you use the language. Are you making sense? If not, what is the problem?</li> </ul>
Evaluate	 <p>I did it!</p>	<p>After completing a task:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Assess how well you have accomplished the learning task.</li> <li>-Assess how well you have used learning strategies.</li> <li>-Decide how effective the strategies were.</li> <li>-Identify changes you will make the next time you have a similar task to do.</li> </ul>
Manage Your Own Learning	 <p>Pace Yourself</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Determine how you learn best.</li> <li>-Arrange conditions that help you learn.</li> <li>-Seek opportunities for practice.</li> <li>-Focus your attention on the task.</li> </ul>


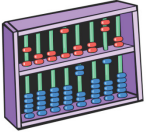
# Task-Based Strategies

CALLA CONTENT AND LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES		
STRATEGY	DESCRIPTION	
<b>TASK-BASED STRATEGIES</b>		
		
Use Background Knowledge	 I know.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Think about and use what you already know to help you do the task.</li> <li>- Make associations between new information and your prior knowledge.</li> <li>-Use new information to clarify or modify your prior knowledge.</li> </ul>
Make Inferences	 Use Clues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Use context and what you know to figure out meaning.</li> <li>-Read and listen between the lines.</li> <li>-Go beyond the text to understand its meaning.</li> </ul>
Make Predictions	 Crystal Ball	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Anticipate information to come.</li> <li>-Make logical guesses about what will happen in a written or oral text.</li> <li>-Make an estimate (math).</li> <li>-Make a hypothesis (science).</li> </ul>
Personalize	 Me	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Relate new concepts to your own life, to your experiences, knowledge, beliefs and feelings.</li> </ul>


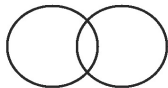


# Task-Based Strategies

CALLA CONTENT AND LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES		
STRATEGY	DESCRIPTION	
<b>TASK-BASED STRATEGIES</b>		
Transfer / Use Cognates	 Coffee/Café	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Apply your linguistic knowledge of other languages (including your native language) to the target language.</li> <li>-Recognize cognates.</li> </ul>
Substitute / Paraphrase	 Make it work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Use a synonym or descriptive phrase for unknown words or expressions.</li> </ul>
  <b>USE YOUR SENSES</b>		
Use Images	 See it in your mind	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Use or create an actual or mental image to understand and/or represent information.</li> <li>-Use or draw a picture or diagram.</li> </ul>
Use Sounds	 Sound Out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Say or read aloud a word, sentence, or paragraph to help your understanding.</li> <li>-Sound out/vocalize.</li> <li>- Use your "mental tape recorder" to remember sounds, words, phrases, and/or conversations.</li> </ul>


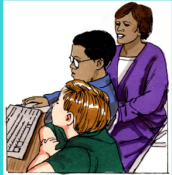
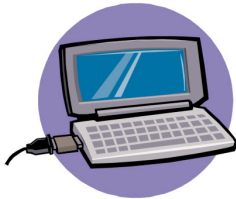


# Task-Based Strategies

CALLA CONTENT AND LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES		
STRATEGY	DESCRIPTION	
<b>TASK-BASED STRATEGIES</b>		
Use Your Kinesthetic Sense		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>--Act out a role, for example, in Readers' Theater, or imagine yourself in different roles in the target language.</li> <li>-Use real objects to help you remember words, sentences, or content information.</li> </ul>
  <b>USE YOUR ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS</b>		
Find/Apply Patterns	 abacus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Apply a rule.</li> <li>-Make a rule.</li> <li>-Recognize and apply letter/sound, grammar, discourse, or register rules.</li> <li>-Identify patterns in literature (genre).</li> <li>-Identify patterns in math, science, and social studies.</li> </ul>
Classify/Sequence	 Life cycle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Categorize words or ideas according to attributes.</li> <li>-Classify living things; identify natural cycles.</li> <li>-Identify order and sequences in math, science, and social studies.</li> <li>-Sequence events in history.</li> </ul>

# Task-Based Strategies

CALLA CONTENT AND LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES		
STRATEGY	DESCRIPTION	
<b>TASK-BASED STRATEGIES</b>		
Take Notes	 <p>PDA</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Write down important words and ideas while listening or reading.</li> <li>-List ideas or words to include in speaking or writing..</li> </ul>
Use Graphic Organizers	 <p>A Venn diagram</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Use or create visual representations (such as Venn diagrams, time lines, webs, and charts) of important relationships between concepts.</li> </ul>
Summarize	 <p>Main Idea</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Create a mental, oral, or written summary of information.</li> </ul>
Use Selective Attention	 <p>Focus</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Focus on specific information, structures, key words, phrases, or ideas.</li> </ul>

# Task-Based Strategies

CALLA CONTENT AND LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES		
STRATEGY	DESCRIPTION	
<b>TASK-BASED STRATEGIES</b>		
 		
<b>USE A VARIETY OF RESOURCES</b>		
Access Information Sources	 <p>Look it up!</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Use the dictionary, the internet, and other reference materials.</li> <li>-Seek out and use sources of information.</li> <li>-Follow a model</li> <li>-Ask questions</li> </ul>
Cooperate	 <p>Together</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Work with others to complete tasks, build confidence, and give and receive feedback.</li> </ul>
Talk Yourself Through It (Self-Talk)	 <p>I can do it!</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Use your inner resources. Reduce your anxiety by reminding yourself of your progress, the resources you have available, and your goals.</li> </ul>