



Motivations in "The Gift of the Magi"

Motivation in Characters



Margaret Salesky, Daniel Schwarz

Published by K20 Center

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

Grade Level	8th – 10th Grade	Time Frame	150 minutes
Subject	English/Language Arts	Duration	2-3 class periods
Course	American Literature		

Essential Question

What motivates people to take action? How do we determine selfless actions?

Summary

Students will evaluate what motivates people, especially as it relates to the main characters in "The Gift of the Magi." As they read and listen to the story, students will identify thoughts and feelings that relate to the motivations and actions of the main characters. Students will also look for and create their own examples of selfless acts and altruism in our 21st-century world.

Snapshot

Engage

Students view slideshow images of people to consider their emotions and motivations, then complete the first part of an "I Used to Think... But Now I Know" activity.

Explore

Students generate words or phrases that relate to different feelings and motivations people could have regarding their own actions.

Explain

Students listen to and follow along with the short story "The Gift of the Magi" by O. Henry and highlight words and phrases that relate to the emotions and motivations exhibited by the husband and wife in the story.

Extend

Students write an approximately one-page, modern version of the story.

Evaluate

Students submit their stories for evaluation and then revisit the slideshow images to consider how their initial thoughts about motivation have changed.

Standards

Oklahoma Academic Standards for English Language Arts (Grade 9)

9.2.W.1: Students will apply components of a recursive writing process for multiple purposes to create a focused, organized, and coherent piece of writing.

9.3.R.3: Students will analyze how authors use key literary elements to contribute to meaning and interpret how themes are connected across texts:

- setting
- plot
- characters (i.e., protagonist, antagonist)
- character development
- theme
- conflict (i.e., internal and external)
- archetypes

Attachments

- [I Used To Think, But Now I Know—Motivations in The Gift of the Magi - Spanish.docx](#)
- [I Used To Think, But Now I Know—Motivations in The Gift of the Magi - Spanish.pdf](#)
- [I Used To Think, But Now I Know—Motivations in The Gift of the Magi.docx](#)
- [I Used To Think, But Now I Know—Motivations in The Gift of the Magi.pdf](#)
- [Lesson Slides—Motivations in the Gift of the Magi.pptx](#)
- [Story Writing Rubric—Motivations in The Gift of the Magi - Spanish.docx](#)
- [Story Writing Rubric—Motivations in The Gift of the Magi - Spanish.pdf](#)
- [Story Writing Rubric—Motivations in The Gift of the Magi.docx](#)
- [Story Writing Rubric—Motivations in The Gift of the Magi.pdf](#)
- [The Gift of the Magi—Motivations in The Gift of the Magi - Spanish.docx](#)
- [The Gift of the Magi—Motivations in The Gift of the Magi - Spanish.pdf](#)
- [The Gift of the Magi—Motivations in The Gift of the Magi.docx](#)
- [The Gift of the Magi—Motivations in The Gift of the Magi.pdf](#)

Materials

- Lesson Slides (attached)
- "The Gift of the Magi" by O. Henry (attached; one per student)
- I Used to Think... But Now I Know handout (attached; one per student)
- ABC Graffiti posters (one per group of 3-4) and colored markers (one color per group)
- Pens/pencils
- Student devices
- Highlighters
- Sticky easel pad
- Markers
- Permanent markers

Engage

Teacher's Note: Lesson Preparation

Before beginning the lesson, prepare the posters for the ABC Graffiti activity. For each group of 3–4 students, create a poster paper that lists the alphabet in two columns (one letter per row in each column).

Use the attached **Lesson Slides** to guide the instruction. Begin the lesson by displaying **slide 2** and presenting the essential question to students.

Display **slide 3**, introduce the [I Used to Think... But Now I Know](#) activity, and pass out copies of the attached **I Used to Think, But Now I Know** handout. Proceed to show the students the images on **slides 4–9**. After each image, pause to give students time to write down an emotion or motivation they think influences the actions of the people in the image. They should write these in the "I Used to Think" column of their handouts. Once you have shown all of the images, display them a second time, pausing for the students to share out what they wrote down.

Explore

Display **slide 10**. Tell students they will now participate in an [ABC Graffiti](#) activity. Organize students into small groups, and present the following question to students: *What are different thoughts and feelings that motivate people?*

Provide each group with a different color of marker and a poster paper that lists the alphabet in two columns (one letter per row in each column). Make sure to provide room for students to write.

Display **slide 11**. Ask groups to write down words/phrases for as many letters on their posters as they can in the time provided using their prior knowledge of different motivations people could have for their actions. Give students an allotted amount of time, ideally 2–3 minutes. After time has expired, groups should rotate to the next poster and take their marker with them. They pick up where the last group left off in trying to fill out words and phrases for each letter. If they want, they can also add words and phrases to letters that were previously used. Once again, after the allotted time is up, invite groups to rotate again. After the third rotation, have students return to their seats.

Engage the whole class in a discussion about what they wrote or saw on the posters and what they identified about the nature of human motivation.

Explain

Display **slide 12**. Hand out copies of the attached story, "**The Gift of the Magi**" by O. Henry. Have students listen to the story. You can either read it aloud to them or play a read-aloud version of the story found on [CommonLit](#).

As they listen, have students follow along in the text and use the [Why-Lighting](#) strategy to highlight and annotate instances when the main characters demonstrate their emotions and the factors that motivate them to take certain actions.

Teacher's Note: Differentiation

For a more in-depth highlighting strategy, consider using [Categorical Highlighting](#), which is described on **slide 13**.

Optional Technology Integration

As an alternative to students' highlighting and annotating the text on paper, you can share the text with them via Google Classroom/Google Docs so that they can include their highlights and comments in a single document. If students are learning from home or need scaffolded access to the story, consider using [CommonLit](#). This site houses a number of seminal ELA texts as well as cross-curricular paired texts. Access to some features does require account registration, but the site is free. There is an option for students to highlight in a variety of colors, and the site also supports the assignment of readings through Google Classroom.

Extend

Display **slide 14**. Tell students they are going to use what they learned in the story and reflect on what it means to be selfless by putting the story into a real-world context for themselves. Instruct students to compose a short, one-page version of the story updated for the present day. Their writing can be a work of fiction, or it can be non-fiction based on a personal anecdote or a news story they have seen.

Evaluate

Ask students to submit their stories for evaluation. If time permits give students an option to read their stories out loud to the class or share through Google Classroom in order to get feedback from peers. You can use the attached **Story Writing Rubric** to evaluate students' writing.

Display **slide 15**. As a whole class, have students view the images they viewed at the start of the lesson. Display **slides 16–21**. Have students take out their I Used to Think... But Now I Know handouts. They will reflect again on the images and add to any thoughts they initially had. At this time, they can check to make sure the whole task is complete and submit their templates as a formative evaluation.

Resources

- Henry, O. (1902). *The Gift of the Magi*. CommonLit. <https://www.commonlit.org/en/texts/the-gift-of-the-magi>
- K20 Center. (n.d.). ABC Graffiti. Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/96>
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Categorical Highlighting. Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/192>
- K20 Center. (n.d.). CommonLit. Tech Tools. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/tech-tool/2170>
- K20 Center. (n.d.). *I Used to think...But now I know*. Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/137>
- K20 Center. (n.d.). *Why-lighting*. Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/128>