

Before You Read

After Twenty Years

Connect to the Short Story

Loyalty means being faithful. If you are loyal to a friend, you support him or her no matter what the situation. How important do you think loyalty is in a friendship?

Quickwrite Freewrite for a few minutes about whether or not you think a person should always expect loyalty from a friend. Support your opinion with examples.

Build Background

This story takes place in New York City in 1890. One of the main characters left New York around 1870 to go West to make his fortune.

- The first discovery of gold caused a gold rush in California, in 1848.
- In 1869 the railroad that joined the East and the West was completed. Many people in the United States moved from the East to the West to find new jobs.

Vocabulary

habitual (hə bich' ə ō əl) *adj.* regular; usual; done out of habit (p. 196). *It was habitual for my father to lock the doors each night before going to bed.*

intricate (in' tri kit) *adj.* complicated (p. 196). *The throne was covered with intricate carving.*

vicinity (vi sin' ə tē) *n.* the area around a certain place (p. 196). *The number of bus stops increases in the vicinity of downtown.*

majority (mə jōr' ə tē) *n.* the most of a group (p. 196). *The person with the majority of the votes will be class president.*

moderately (mod' ər it lē) *adv.* to a limited degree (p. 200). *I'm moderately happy with my performance, though I wish I hadn't made any mistakes.*

Meet O. Henry



An Adventurous Life William Sydney Porter, who used the pen name O. Henry, led a varied but difficult life. He first worked in a drugstore in North Carolina and then as a sheepherder in Texas. He was also a bank teller, a fugitive in Honduras, a prisoner, a magazine editor, and a journalist before he began writing the stories that made him famous.

Surprise! Many of O. Henry's stories contain a surprise ending or an ironic twist. "The Gift of the Magi" is one of the most famous of his short stories with a twist. William Sydney Porter was born in 1862 and died in 1910.



Literature Online

Author Search For more about O. Henry, go to glencoe.com and enter QuickPass code GL29763u2.

Set Purposes for Reading

BQ BIG Question

Authors use various techniques, such as suspense, to maintain readers' interest. As you read this story, ask yourself, what details does the author include to keep me involved?

Literary Element Mood

Mood is the emotional quality or atmosphere of a literary work. Descriptive words, setting, dialogue, and characters' actions or gestures can all contribute to mood.

Mood is important because it affects a reader's feelings and expectations. As you read this story, pay attention to how O. Henry creates mood through dialogue and through descriptions of the characters and setting.

Reading Strategy Make Predictions About Plot

When you **make predictions**, you make guesses about what will happen next in a story. You base your predictions on the events and details you've read about so far, as well as on what you already know from your own experience.

Making predictions helps you become a more involved reader. It's okay if your predictions turn out to be incorrect. You predict to get involved in a story and to follow the story's twists.

To make predictions about plot,

- pay attention to descriptions of the characters and what the characters say and do.
- look for details about the time and place in which the story occurs.
- think about what you already know about the subject of the story, and guess what will happen next.

As you read this story, note details about setting, characters, and dialogue. Then, based on these details, write predictions about what will happen next. Use a chart like the one below.

Plot Detail	Prediction

Learning Objectives

For pages 194–201

In studying this text, you will focus on the following objectives:

Literary Study: Analyzing mood.

Reading: Making predictions about plot.

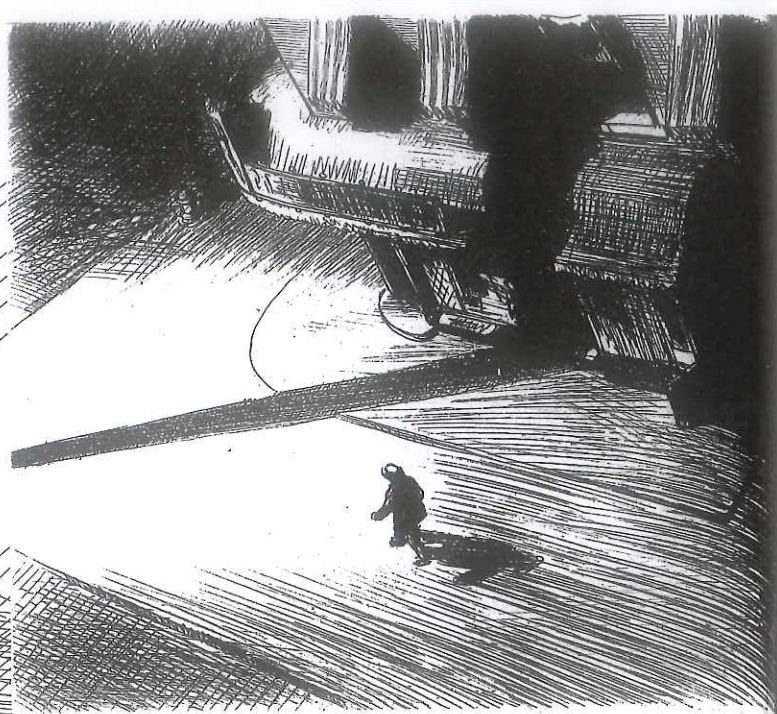
TRY IT

Make Predictions Imagine the following scene and make a prediction. Today is Carrie's first day at your school. You notice during math class that she seems friendly toward everyone, including you. Later at lunch, there is an empty seat next to you. Carrie makes eye contact with you and smiles as she walks toward your table. What do you predict will happen next?

Night Shadows, 1921. Edward Hopper. Etching, Whitney Museum of American Art, NY. Josephine N. Hopper bequest.

After Twenty Years

O. Henry



The policeman on the beat moved up the avenue impressively. The impressiveness was **habitual** and not for show, for spectators were few. The time was barely 10 o'clock at night, but chilly gusts of wind with a taste of rain in them had well nigh depeopled¹ the streets.

Trying doors as he went, twirling his club with many **intricate** and artful² movements, turning now and then to cast his watchful eye down the **pacific thoroughfare**,³ the officer, with his stalwart⁴ form and slight swagger, made a fine picture of a guardian of the peace. The **vicinity** was one that kept early hours. Now and then you might see the lights of a cigar store or of an all-night lunch counter; but the **majority** of the doors belonged to business places that had long since been closed.

1 The chilly winds make people stay indoors, leaving the streets **depeopled**, or without people.

2 The policeman twirls the club with an **artful**, or skillful, movement.

3 A **pacific thoroughfare** is a peaceful street.

4 **Stalwart** is another word for *strong*.

Vocabulary

habitual (hə bich'ōō əl) *adj.* regular; usual; done out of habit

intricate (in'tri kit) *adj.* complicated

vicinity (vi sin'ə tē) *n.* the area around a certain place

majority (mə jôr'ə tē) *n.* the most of a group

#1

Mood In what way do details about the setting help set the mood of the story?

When about midway of a certain block the policeman suddenly slowed his walk. In the doorway of a darkened hardware store a man leaned, with an unlighted cigar in his mouth. As the policeman walked up to him the man spoke up quickly.

"It's all right, officer," he said, reassuringly. "I'm just waiting for a friend. It's an appointment made twenty years ago. Sounds a little funny to you, doesn't it? Well, I'll explain if you'd like to make certain it's all straight. About that long ago there used to be a restaurant where this store stands—'Big Joe' Brady's restaurant."

"Until five years ago," said the policeman. "It was torn down then."

The man in the doorway struck a match and lit his cigar. The light showed a pale, square-jawed face with keen eyes, and a little white scar near his right eyebrow. His scarfpin was a large diamond, oddly set.

"Twenty years ago tonight," said the man, "I dined here at 'Big Joe' Brady's with Jimmy Wells, my best chum, and the finest chap⁵ in the world. He and I were raised here in New York, just like two brothers, together. I was eighteen and Jimmy was twenty. The next morning I was to start for the West to make my fortune. You couldn't have dragged Jimmy out of New York; he thought it was the only place on earth. Well, we agreed that night that we would meet here again exactly twenty years from that date and time, no matter what our conditions might be or from what distance we might have to come. We figured that in twenty years each of us ought to have our destiny⁶ worked out and our fortunes made, whatever they were going to be."

"It sounds pretty interesting," said the policeman. "Rather a long time between meets, though, it seems to me. Haven't you heard from your friend since you left?"

"Well, yes, for a time we corresponded,"⁷ said the other. "But after a year or two we lost track of each other. You

⁵ A *chum* is a friend, and a *chap* is a man or boy.

⁶ *Destiny* is what the future holds for a person.

⁷ The two friends *corresponded*, or wrote letters to each other.

#2 Make Predictions About

Plot Based on what you have read and what you already know, make a prediction about the meeting.

#3 Make Predictions About

Plot After learning more about the characters, does your prediction about what will happen in the story change?

see, the West is a pretty big proposition,⁸ and I kept hustling around over it pretty lively. But I know Jimmy will meet me here if he's alive, for he always was the truest, staunchest⁹ old chap in the world. He'll never forget. I came a thousand miles to stand in this door tonight, and it's worth it if my old partner turns up."

The waiting man pulled out a handsome watch, the lids of it set with small diamonds.

"Three minutes to ten," he announced. "It was exactly ten o'clock when we parted here at the restaurant door."

"Did pretty well out West, didn't you?" asked the policeman.

"You bet! I hope Jimmy has done half as well. He was a kind of plodder,¹⁰ though, good fellow as he was. I've had to compete with some of the sharpest wits going to get my pile. A man gets in a groove in New York. It takes the West to put a razor-edge on him."

The policeman twirled his club and took a step or two.

"I'll be on my way. Hope your friend comes around all right. Going to call time on him sharp?"¹¹

"I should say not!" said the other. "I'll give him half an hour at least. If Jimmy is alive on earth he'll be here by that time. So long, officer."

"Good-night, sir," said the policeman, passing on along his beat, trying doors as he went.

There was now a fine, cold drizzle falling, and the wind had risen from its uncertain puffs into a steady blow. The few foot passengers astir in that quarter hurried dismally¹² and silently along with coat collars turned high and pocketed hands. And in the door of the hardware store the man who had come a thousand miles to fill an appointment, uncertain

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Mood In what way do the man's words change the mood of the story?



8 In this sentence, *proposition* means "a challenging opportunity."

9 *Staunchest* means "most loyal and dependable."

10 A *plodder* is someone who moves slowly, but the meaning here is that Jimmy is not a quick thinker.

11 To *call time on him sharp* means "to expect him to arrive exactly on time."

12 *Dismally* means "in a sad or gloomy way."



Rainy Night, 1929–30. Charles Burchfield. Watercolor over pencil, 30 x 42 in. San Diego Art Museum, CA.

View the Art What does the scene pictured here have in common with the one O. Henry describes in this story?

almost to absurdity,¹³ with the friend of his youth, smoked his cigar and waited.

About twenty minutes he waited, and then a tall man in a long overcoat, with collar turned up to his ears, hurried across from the opposite side of the street. He went directly to the waiting man.

"Is that you, Bob?" he asked, doubtfully.

"Is that you, Jimmy Wells?" cried the man in the door.

"Bless my heart!" exclaimed the new arrival, grasping both the other's hands with his own. "It's Bob, sure as fate.¹⁴ I was certain I'd find you here if you were still in existence. Well, well, well!—twenty years is a long time. The old restaurant's gone, Bob; I wish it had lasted, so we could have had another dinner there. How has the West treated you, old man?"

"Bully,¹⁵ it has given me everything I asked it for. You've changed lots, Jimmy. I never thought you were so tall by two or three inches."

"Oh, I grew a bit after I was twenty."

"Doing well in New York, Jimmy?"

¹³ **Absurdity** is the state of being ridiculous.

¹⁴ **Fate** is your fortune, or what the future holds for you.

¹⁵ Here, **bully** is slang for "excellent" or "in the best way."

Mood In what way does the arrival of the new character affect the mood of the story?

"Moderately. I have a position" in one of the city departments. Come on, Bob; we'll go around to a place I know of, and have a good long talk about old times."

The two men started up the street, arm in arm. The man from the West, his egotism¹⁶ enlarged by success, was beginning to outline the history of his career. The other, submerged in his overcoat, listened with interest.

At the corner stood a drug store, brilliant with electric lights. When they came into this glare each of them turned simultaneously to gaze upon the other's face.

The man from the West stopped suddenly and released his arm.

"You're not Jimmy Wells," he snapped. "Twenty years is a long time, but not long enough to change a man's nose from a Roman to a pug."¹⁷

"It sometimes changes a good man into a bad one," said the tall man. "You've been under arrest for ten minutes, 'Silky' Bob. Chicago thinks you may have dropped over our way and wires us she wants to have a chat with you. Going quietly, are you? That's sensible. Now, before we go on to the station here's a note I was asked to hand you. You may read it here at the window. It's from Patrolman Wells."

The man from the West unfolded the little piece of paper handed him. His hand was steady when he began to read, but it trembled a little by the time he had finished. The note was rather short.

BOB: I was at the appointed place on time. When you struck the match to light your cigar I saw it was the face of the man wanted in Chicago. Somehow I couldn't do it myself, so I went around and got a plain clothes man¹⁸ to do the job.

Jimmy

16 A person's *egotism* is a great sense of self-importance.

17 A *Roman* nose is long and bold. A *pug* nose is short and thick.

18 Jimmy met Bob in his police uniform. A *plain clothes* man is a police officer who is working but not wearing his uniform.

Vocabulary

moderately (mod'ər it lē) *adv.* to a limited degree

#6
Make Predictions About Plot Use the information from this sentence to predict what will happen next.

#7
BQ BIG Question

What happens at the end of the story? Are you surprised?

After You Read

Respond and Think Critically

1. What promise did Bob make twenty years ago? **[Recall]**
2. What does Bob's physical reaction to the note tell you about his emotional state? Explain. **[Interpret]**
3. How has Jimmy been both more successful and less successful than Bob? **[Compare]**
4. **Literary Element Mood** How does the mood change over the course of the story? Support your answer with examples. **[Analyze]**
5. **Reading Strategy Make Predictions About Plot** Review the predictions you made as you read. Which predictions were true? What did predicting add to your experience of reading the story? Explain. **[Evaluate]**
6. **BQ BIG Question** O. Henry is widely considered a great and entertaining storyteller. Do you agree? Explain. **[Evaluate]**

Vocabulary

On a separate sheet of paper, write the vocabulary word that correctly completes each sentence. If none of the words fits the sentence, write "none."

habitual vicinity intricate moderately majority

1. A _____ of the people enjoyed the television show.
2. We discovered bear tracks near our tent, so we knew that wild animals were in the _____ of the campground.
3. The _____ designs on the book's pages amazed us.
4. Felipe was very shy, so we were _____ when he sang in front of the class.
5. Maria encouraged us to walk to school along a new route, instead of our _____ one.
6. The clothes were neither costly nor inexpensive; we considered them _____ priced.



Writing

Write a Letter Write a letter that Bob might have written to Jimmy. Tell Jimmy about the arrest and how Bob feels about what Jimmy did. Include a date, a salutation, a closing, and a signature.

TIP

Interpreting

The author has included an important detail that helps you understand how Bob feels when he reads the note.

- Find the part of the story in which Bob reads Jimmy's note.
- Reread the description of Bob's physical reaction to reading the note.
- Think about what this reaction reveals about Bob's emotions.

FOLDABLES Study Organizer

Keep track of your ideas about the **BIG Question** in your unit Foldable.



Literature Online

Selection Resources

For Selection Quizzes, eFlashcards, and Reading-Writing Connection activities, go to glencoe.com and enter QuickPass code GL29763u2.