

Projects 1 & 2: Twice-Told Tale

The Gift of the Magi

Overview of Twice-Told Tale

I. TOPIC OF ASSIGNMENT

This Creative Writing assignment is one in which you will create a story. However, it will not be difficult because you will write what LAL* calls a Twice-Told Tale. This is one in which you use a model to create your tale. You are using someone else's story to tell a second tale from.

In this assignment, you will use a rewrite of the famous "The Gift of the Magi" story as a model to design a story of your own. However, instead of using a comb and a watch chain as the gifts that the couple exchanged, you will choose another pair of gifts (and a different couple, time period, location, etc.). You may choose ones from the list below or come up with something different altogether:

- A. Watch chain and hair combs but in a **different country and a different time period**
- B. **Saddle for the husband's prized horse and a chain for a locket that the wife had passed down from her grandmother--in an old west location**
- C. **Wedding anniversary--Millennium Falcon needs new power cord; Leia's all duranium crown's jewels--Han sells Falcon for Jewels / Leia sells empty tiara for cord**
- D. **Other**

II. NUMBER OF SCENES* IN THE BODY OF YOUR STORY

- A. **Basic** students will write **25-50** scenes for the body (P'soB**).
- B. **Extension** students will write **40-60** scenes for the body (P'soB).

*Note: You will be assigned quotations in the form of dialogue (spoken words between characters). Thus, you will have many short paragraphs--some as short as one or two sentences in length. Therefore, do not follow the paragraph parameters above as much as the sentence parameters given below in Sentences vs. Paragraph Counts.

*LAL=Language Arts Lady

**P'soB= Paragraphs of Body

*Basic students are newer to story writing or they are younger writers. Extension students are more experienced writers.

Note: This Overview Box, which is provided at the beginning of each project, is here to give students (and teachers) an at-a-glance look at the entire composition assignment. Each step of each lesson is assigned and detailed throughout the week(s).

III. SENTENCES VS. PARAGRAPH COUNTS

Since you will include dialogue, do **not** worry about the number of sentences in each paragraph. Some paragraphs with dialogue may contain one or two sentences while other paragraphs with more narration may contain up to ten sentences. **Count total sentences for this assignment.**

- A. **Basic:** 120 to 150 sentences
- B. **Extension:** 140 to 200 sentences

IV. OPENING PARAGRAPH

You will **not** write a separate **Opening Paragraph** for your story. You will **set the stage/scene right from the beginning, just like the model does.**

V. CLOSING PARAGRAPH

You will **not** write a separate **Closing Paragraph** for your story. You will **close your story as you write the entire piece so that it flows better.**

VI. SOURCES

Students are **not** required to have **sources** for this story. If you need to research for your story (to discover some things about your time period, government, dress, etc.), you may do so from any source that helps you find the needed information.

VII. QUOTATIONS WITHIN YOUR STORY

You are required to have dialogue in your story.

VIII. WRITE ON/ADDITIONAL SKILLS

You will learn/further develop the following additional skills:

- A. **Word Associations**
- B. **Strong Verbs**
- C. **Creating Emotion With Color**
- D. **Emphasizing With Repeating Words and Phrases**
- E. **Breaking the Rules**
- F. **Character and Hindrances**
- G. **Directed Brainstorming**

Lesson A. Word Associations With Strong Verbs

<> **A-1.** Read the model "The Gift of the Magi" (Box E-1 following Lesson E).

Beginning writers are able to convey *facts* such as *I am hungry*. **More advanced writers are able to explain *concepts*.**

But **only great writers are able to convey *emotion***. They are able to make the reader feel something, be it *fear, happiness, tiredness, hunger*, or anything else, **just by the words on a page.**

If you have ever teared up (or cried) at the death of Beth or felt that thrill of wonderment in your spine as you read about a lamppost in a magical world or breathlessly turned pages as Scout and Jem are attacked, you know how **writers can make readers feel strong emotion.**

This is a skill that takes great writers years, if not decades, to master. But the first step in conveying emotion is to **write with verbs that are not just clear, but also carry an emotional impact.** These are words that are strongly associated with an emotion.

Some words are often associated with a particular emotion. The word *scream* is often used in a context of pain or fear. So when we see that word, we start to think along those lines. The word *smile* is warm and comforting. The word *fled* implies danger and so on.

One step, though by no means the only step, **to convey emotion to your reader is to use words that are commonly associated with the emotion you want to convey.**

Verbs are the most important since verbs are the action and life of your sentence.

Let's take a look at a couple of sentences from the model "The Gift of the Magi."

Note: Since this story was written in 1905, some of the words are no longer common; therefore, modern readers won't always have the same reaction as the original intended audience.

<> **A-2.** In Scene 1 found below, highlight the words *bulldozing* and *burned*.

One dollar and eighty-seven cents. That was all. And sixty cents of it was in pennies. Pennies saved one and two at a time by bulldozing the grocer and the vegetable man and the butcher until one's cheeks burned with the silent imputation of parsimony that such close dealing implied. Three times Della counted it. One dollar and eighty-seven cents. And the next day would be Christmas. [Scene 1]

In Scene One, the author, O. Henry, is describing Della's attempts to save pennies by negotiating with vegetable and meat salesmen. Instead of saying she negotiated a hard bargain, **the author says she was "bulldozing" them.** Why in the world would O. Henry use a word like bulldozing? **The answer is word association.**

When you think of a bulldozer, what do you think of? **A powerful machine, unstoppable. When Della is negotiating, she is like a bulldozer.**

Lesson B: Creating Emotion With Color

Remember in an earlier lesson when you learned about using words that are often associated with a particular emotion? **Another great use of word association is by using color.**

From the earliest ages, we are trained to associate certain colors with their meanings. Red means _____. You couldn't help yourself, could you? Your brain automatically filled in *stop*. Green means go. Yellow means happy. The list goes on and on.

In addition to the obvious ones, many other colors have associations as well. **By recognizing these associations and using them in your writing, you can help your readers feel the emotions you want them to feel.**

You don't always have to be obvious either. Sure you can describe flashing red lights all around (signifying danger). But **you can also weave red objects into the scene**--a shirt, a cup, and so on--**to give the reader the uneasy feeling that there is danger in the air.**

In "The Gift of the Magi," O. Henry uses colors repeatedly to convey emotion. Imagine the circumstance: It is Christmas Eve, and Della doesn't have enough money to buy her Jim a present. What is she feeling? *Sad, depressed, just plain awful.*

<> **B-1.** On the line provided, write the color you would choose to describe this situation.

Alright, you have your choice written down. Now let's see what O. Henry chose.

<> **B-2.** In the sentences provided below, highlight color words O. Henry used. (Note: He used the same word three times in a paragraph.)

"She stood by the window and looked out dully at a gray cat walking a gray fence in a gray backyard."

Isn't gray a depressing color? Lots of parents paint their baby's room happy colors like yellow, blue, and pink--how many paint a baby's room gray?

Notice how O. Henry does it. **He doesn't say Della felt gray** (though he could have). Instead, **he describes objects, a cat, a fence, and a yard.** He also **uses a sentence containing "happy" colors to contrast with the sadness of the gray--yellow, blue, and pink.**

<> **B-3.** Think of emotions, events, objects, or actions you associated with the following colors. Remember, many colors have more than one association. For instance, green may denote *growth*, *envy*, and many other emotions/thoughts. Try to think of at least three for each.

Note: For extra help on this assignment, see Help Box for B-3 a couple of pages over.

Example: Red --- Stop, danger, blood, fire truck, love

Gray

Yellow

Pink

Blue

Black

White

Purple

Green

Gold

SAMPLE

Lesson C: Emphasizing With Repeating Words and Phrases

Sometimes you, as a writer, will want to emphasize something to make sure the reader gets it. Poor writers will sometimes put this information in all caps. (Really poor writers put everything in caps!)

So how does a good writer call attention to something within his or her paper as really important? Surprisingly, there are actually dozens of ways to emphasize or de-emphasize something.

One of the most obvious ways to emphasize something is to use repeating words.

Most of the time in LAL books, you are taught **not** to use the same word over and over again. In the Checklist Challenge, we have you find repetitive words and come up with synonyms (the Avoid Redundancy task). This makes your writing more interesting.

Because a good writer doesn't usually use the same word repeatedly, when he does, the reader notices and pays closer attention to that part of the text.

This means **repeating words act kind of like a highlighter**. They highlight the important information so the reader knows it is important. **This is also why you don't want to use repetitive words without a reason** or just because you can't think of a synonym. The reader will think the repeated word is important, even when it isn't.

O. Henry uses this technique often in "The Gift of the Magi."

<> **C-1.** In the paragraph provided below, highlight the word "something" the three times it is used.

Only \$1.87 to buy a present for Jim. Her Jim. Many a happy hour she had spent planning for something nice for him. Something fine and rare and sterling--something just a little bit near to being worthy of the honor of being owned by Jim.

"Something" is an unusual choice for a repeating word. **Most repeating words are concrete and specific.** How can "something" be so important? After all, we don't know what "something" is.

But that is precisely the point. **What is being emphasized by the word something is Della's flailing desperation. "Something" isn't a specific word—but Della has no specific ideas. "Something" isn't a concrete word—but Della has no concrete plans.** She can't think of anything for her Jim. She doesn't know what to do. **She needs...something.**

Something is such a generic word that we would gloss over it if it were only there once, but by repeating it, O. Henry tells us it is important.

Let's look at one more example.

↔ **C-2.** In the paragraph provided below, highlight the word O. Henry uses repeatedly.

The magi, as you know, were wise men--wonderfully wise men--who brought gifts to the Babe in the manger. They invented the art of giving Christmas presents. Being wise, their gifts were no doubt wise ones, possibly bearing the privilege of exchange in case of duplication. And here I have lamely related to you the uneventful chronicle of two foolish children in a flat who most unwisely sacrificed 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 gave gifts these two were the wisest. O all who give and receive gifts, such as they are wisest. Everywhere they are wisest. They are the magi.

Did you find it? **O. Henry uses wise, wisest, or unwisely nine times in one paragraph!** That is so important I think I'll repeat it. Nine times!

He doesn't do it just to hammer home "be wise" into his reader. In fact, **as he repeats the word over and over again, he questions the very meaning of wisdom. By using it so much, he emphasizes how little we understand the word.**

He concludes by telling us that even though these were "foolish children" and they "unwisely sacrificed," they were the wisest. **The gifts were foolish, but giving is wisdom.**

Help Box for B-3.

Possible answers:

Gray: sad, dreary, dirty, wise, old, boring, loneliness

Yellow: sunny, bright, happy, optimism, life, cowardice, original ideas

Pink: embarrassed, cheery, love, breast cancer awareness, feminine, innocent

Blue: flowery/happy, sky/bright, bright (as in eyes), sad, baby, boy, water, cleanliness

Black: dark, death, lack of life, dirty, despair, evil, aggression

White: bright, clean, plain, spotless, winter, low-fat, purity

Purple: royalty, majestic, mountainous, beautiful, magic

Green: growth, envy, nausea/illness, monstrous, reptilian, money, the military, life, nature

Gold: royalty, wealth, antique, winning (gold medal), confidence

Lesson D: Breaking the Rules

Most of you have been learning grammar rules for many years. You have probably gotten tired of hearing them time and time again. You have to put a comma there. You can't put a comma here. What is the difference between a coordinating conjunction and a conjunctive adverb?

Believe it or not, the rules are important. **They help us to communicate.** By having sentences with the proper use of nouns and verbs **we are able to understand each other.** By putting a comma in the sentence "Let's eat, Grandma," rather than "Let's eat Grandma," we know we should eat with grandma rather than...something else.

By following the rules, we avoid distractions in our writing. **By putting commas in the right places, readers can focus on what we are trying to communicate rather than wondering if we just have a really twitchy finger on the comma button.** (Or as co-author Joshua's mom [co-author Donna] always said to Joshua when he was in junior high, "Don't just 'shake' commas out of your 'comma shaker'" [like a salt shaker]!)

Despite the importance of the rules, we should remember **that the goal of writing is to communicate to another person.** We should communicate facts, concepts, and emotions. **Sometimes, breaking the rules can help communicate better than following the rules. When that is the case, it's time to break the rules.**

<> **D-1.** In the "The Gift of the Magi" excerpt below, highlight the first sentence of the first scene.

"One dollar and eighty-seven cents."

O. Henry begins his story by breaking the rules. His first sentence does not contain a verb, and, therefore, isn't a complete sentence at all.

However, in this case, breaking the rules helps him to communicate his point. In fact, there are many reasons why an author might want to use incomplete sentences. In this case, **the incomplete sentence is being used to emphasize the bleakness of Della's situation.**

Because we are so used to seeing complete sentences (since most sentences are complete), **it stands out when someone breaks this rule.**

But O. Henry isn't done.

<> **D-2.** Highlight "Cut it off and sold it," in the excerpt below.

"Cut it off and sold it," said Della. "Don't you like me just as well, anyhow? I'm me without my hair, ain't I?"

Here there is no subject (though it has an understood subject). **Many times, when we speak, we don't use complete sentences. So writers will often mirror that in their character's dialogue.** This is what is being done here.

<> **D-3.** Highlight “Her Jim” in the excerpt below.

Only \$1.87 to buy a present for Jim. Her Jim. Many a happy hour she had spent planning for something nice for him. Something fine and rare and sterling--something just a little bit near to being worthy of the honor of being owned by Jim.

Here, **O. Henry is again using the short incomplete sentence for emphasis.** He could have put “Her Jim” in the previous sentence as an appositive. But **by breaking the rules and making it a sentence by itself, he emphasizes how important Jim is to Della.**

Lesson E. Study Skills and Prewriting: Choose Your Characters and Brainstorm for Possible Hindrances/Problems

<> **E-1.** Read the Student Sample Story provided at the end of this project (Box E-1). You will enjoy the cleverness of this student sample--and it will let you see the unlimited possibilities for telling a second tale based on O. Henry's story.

<> **E-2.** You have been given a list of topics from which to choose for your story. The first step in writing a story is to choose the topic you will be writing about. Read the model “The Gift of the Magi” given (Box E-1) and think about what you think would make a creative “The Gift of the Magi” story spin-off.

<> **E-3.** Now that you have read the model story, choose who or what you would like to write your “The Gift of the Magi” story about.

<> **E-4.** Brainstorm (and list) any of the following aspects of your story that you can think of in the Directed Brainstorming Box provided, including any of the following:

1. **Characters** you might include
2. **Problems and hindrances** that your character might encounter
3. What you are selling/buying and circumstances of the sale and purchase
4. **Other details** that come to mind

"The Gift of the Magi" Model

One dollar and eighty-seven cents. That was all. And sixty cents of it was in pennies. Pennies saved one and two at a time by bulldozing the grocer and the vegetable man and the butcher until one's cheeks burned with the silent imputation of parsimony that such close dealing implied. Three times Della counted it. One dollar and eighty-seven cents. And the next day would be Christmas. **[Scene 1: Della counting her money--\$1.87]**

There was clearly nothing to do but flop down on the shabby little couch and howl. So Della did it. Which instigates the moral reflection that life is made up of sobs, sniffles, and smiles, with sniffles predominating. **[Scene 2: Plopped on couch crying]**

While the mistress of the home is gradually subsiding from the first stage to the second, take a look at the home. A furnished flat at \$8 per week. It did not exactly beggar description, but it certainly had that word on the lookout for the mendicancy squad. **[Scene 3: Looking into home]**

In the vestibule below was a letter-box into which no letter would go, and an electric button from which no mortal finger could coax a ring. Also appertaining thereunto was a card bearing the name "Mr. James Dillingham Young." **[Scene 4: Mailbox--James Dillingham Young]**

The "Dillingham" had been flung to the breeze during a former period of prosperity when its possessor was being paid \$30 per week. Now, when the income was shrunk to \$20, though, they were thinking seriously of contracting to a modest and unassuming D. But whenever Mr. James Dillingham Young came home and reached his flat above he was called "Jim" and greatly hugged by Mrs. James Dillingham Young, already introduced to you as Della. Which is all very good. **[Scene 5: Income shrunk/Mr. Young called James by Della]**

Box E-1 (continued on next page)

Della finished her cry and attended to her cheeks with the powder rag. She stood by the window and looked out dully at a gray cat walking a gray fence in a gray backyard. Tomorrow would be Christmas Day, and she had only \$1.87 with which to buy Jim a present. She had been saving every penny she could for months, with this result. Twenty dollars a week doesn't go far. Expenses had been greater than she had calculated. They always are. Only \$1.87 to buy a present for Jim. Her Jim. Many a happy hour she had spent planning for something nice for him. Something fine and rare and sterling--something just a little bit near to being worthy of the honor of being owned by Jim.

[Scene 6: Christmas Day/only \$1.87 to buy Jim's present]

There was a pier glass between the windows of the room. Perhaps you have seen a pier glass in an \$8 flat. A very thin and very agile person may, by observing his reflection in a rapid sequence of longitudinal strips, obtain a fairly accurate conception of his looks. Della, being slender, had mastered the art. **[Scene 7: Pier glass in room/looking at reflection]**

Suddenly she whirled from the window and stood before the glass. her eyes were shining brilliantly, but her face had lost its color within twenty seconds. Rapidly, she pulled down her hair and let it fall to its full length. **[Scene 8: She pulled her hair down as she stood in front of the glass]**

Now, there were two possessions of the James Dillingham Youngs in which they both took a mighty pride. One was Jim's gold watch that had been his father's and his grandfather's. The other was Della's hair. Had the queen of Sheba lived in the flat across the airshaft, Della would have let her hair hang out the window some day to dry just to depreciate Her Majesty's jewels and gifts. Had King Solomon been the janitor, with all his treasures piled up in the basement, Jim would have pulled out his watch every time he passed, just to see him pluck at his beard from envy. **[Scene 9: 2 treasures--Jim's gold watch and Della's hair]**

Box E-1 (continued from previous page)

So now Della's beautiful hair fell about her rippling and shining like a cascade of brown waters. It reached below her knee and made itself almost a garment for her. And then she did it up again nervously and quickly. Once she faltered for a minute and stood still while a tear or two splashed on the worn red carpet. **[Scene 10: As she put her hair up, a tear or two fell]**

On went her old brown jacket; on went her old brown hat. With a whirl of skirts and with the brilliant sparkle still in her eyes, she fluttered out the door and down the stairs to the street. **[Scene 11: She fluttered out door to the street]**

Where she stopped the sign read: "Mne. Sofronie. Hair Goods of All Kinds." One flight up Della ran, and collected herself, panting. Madame, large, too white, chilly, hardly looked the "Sofronie." **[Scene 12: Della ran upstairs to Mne. Sofronie]**

"Will you buy my hair?" asked Della.

"I buy hair," said Madame. "Take yer hat off and let's have a sight at the looks of it."

Down rippled the brown cascade.

"Twenty dollars," said Madame, lifting the mass with a practiced hand.

"Give it to me quick," said Della.

Oh, and the next two hours tripped by on rosy wings. Forget the hashed metaphor. She was ransacking the stores for Jim's present. **[Scene 13: Della sells hair]**

Box E-1 (continued on next page)

She found it at last. It surely had been made for Jim and no one else. There was no other like it in any of the stores, and she had turned all of them inside out. It was a platinum fob chain simple and chaste in design, properly proclaiming its value by substance alone and not by meretricious ornamentation--as all good things should do. It was even worthy of The Watch. As soon as she saw it, she knew that it must be Jim's. It was like him. Quietness and value--the description applied to both. Twenty-one dollars they took from her for it, and she hurried home with the 87 cents. With that chain on his watch Jim might be properly anxious about the time in any company. Grand as the watch was, he sometimes looked at it on the sly on account of the old leather strap that he used in place of a chain. **[Scene 14: Bought the perfect chain for \$21.87]**

When Della reached home her intoxication gave way a little to prudence and reason. She got out her curling irons and lighted the gas and went to work repairing the ravages made by generosity added to love. Which is always a tremendous task, dear friends--a mammoth task. **[Scene 15: Della got home and fixed her hair]**

Within forty minutes her head was covered with tiny, close-lying curls that made her look wonderfully like a truant schoolboy. She looked at her reflection in the mirror long, carefully, and critically. **[Scene 16: After forty minutes, her head was filled with curls]**

"If Jim doesn't kill me," she said to herself, "before he takes a second look at me, he'll say I look like a Coney Island chorus girl. But what could I do--oh! what could I do with a dollar and eighty-seven cents?" **[Scene 17: What will Jim say?]**

At 7 o'clock the coffee was made and the frying-pan was on the back of the stove hot and ready to cook the chops. **[Scene 18: Coffee done and pan ready for cooking]**

Box E-1 (continued from previous page)

Jim was never late. Della doubled the fob chain in her hand and sat on the corner of the table near the door that he always entered. Then she heard his step on the stair away down on the first flight, and she turned white for just a moment. She had a habit for saying little silent prayer about the simplest everyday things, and now she whispered: "Please God, make him think I am still pretty." **[Scene 19: Della heard Jim coming]**

The door opened and Jim stepped in and closed it. He looked thin and very serious. Poor fellow, he was only twenty-two--and to be burdened with a family! He needed a new overcoat, and he was without gloves. **[Scene 20: Jim stepped in]**

Jim stopped inside the door, as immovable as a setter at the scent of quail. His eyes were fixed upon Della, and there was an expression in them that she could not read, and it terrified her. It was not anger, nor surprise, nor disapproval, nor horror, nor any of the sentiments that she had been prepared for. He simply stared at her fixedly with that peculiar expression on his face. **[Scene 21: Jim stopped and stared at Della]**

Della wriggled off the table and went for him.

"Jim, darling," she cried, "don't look at me that way. I had my hair cut off and sold because I couldn't have lived through Christmas without giving you a present. It'll grow out again--you won't mind, will you? I just had to do it. My hair grows awfully fast. Say 'Merry Christmas!' Jim, and let's be happy. You don't know what a nice-- what a beautiful, nice gift I've got for you."

"You've cut off your hair?" asked Jim, laboriously, as if he had not arrived at that patent fact yet even after the hardest mental labor.

"Cut it off and sold it," said Della. "Don't you like me just as well, anyhow? I'm me without my hair, ain't I?"

Jim looked about the room curiously.

"You say your hair is gone?" he said, with an air almost of idiocy.

Box E-1 (continued on next page)

"You needn't look for it," said Della. "It's sold, I tell you--sold and gone, too. It's Christmas Eve, boy. Be good to me, for it went 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 chops on, Jim?"

Out of his trance Jim seemed quickly to wake. He enfolded his Della. For ten seconds let us regard with discreet scrutiny some inconsequential object in the other direction. Eight dollars a week or a million a year--what is the difference? A mathematician or a wit would give you the wrong answer. The magi brought valuable gifts, but that was not among them. This dark assertion will be illuminated later on.

Jim drew a package from his overcoat pocket and threw it upon the table.

"Don't make any mistake, Dell," he said, "about me. I don't think there's anything in the way of a hair-cut or a shave or a shampoo that could make me like my girl any less. But if you'll unwrap that package you may see why you had me going a while at first." **[Scene 22: Della explains her haircut/Jim gives her his gift]**

White fingers and nimble tore at the string and paper. And then an ecstatic scream of joy; and then, alas! a quick feminine change to hysterical tears and wails, necessitating the immediate employment of all the comforting powers of the lord of the flat.

For there lay The Combs--the set of combs, side and back, that Della had worshipped long in a Broadway window. Beautiful combs, pure tortoise shell, with jewelled rims--just the shade to wear in the beautiful vanished hair. They were expensive combs, she knew, and her heart had simply craved and yearned over them without the least hope of possession. And now, they were hers, but the tresses that should have adorned the coveted adornments were gone.

But she hugged them to her bosom, and at length she was able to look up with dim eyes and a smile and say: "My hair grows so fast, Jim!"

And then Della leaped up like a little singed cat and cried, "Oh, oh!" **[Scene 23: Della opens gift]**

Jim had not yet seen his beautiful present. She held it out to him eagerly upon her open palm. The dull precious metal seemed to flash with a reflection of her bright and ardent spirit.

"Isn't it a dandy, Jim? I hunted all over town to find it. You'll 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 tumbled down on the couch and put his hands under the back of his head and smiled.

"Dell," said he, "let's put our Christmas presents away and keep 'em a while. They're too nice to use just at present. I sold the watch to get the money to buy your combs. And now suppose you put the chops on." **[Scene 24: Della gives Jim his gift]**

The magi, as you know, were wise men--wonderfully wise men--who brought gifts to the Babe in the manger. They invented the art of giving Christmas presents. Being wise, their gifts were no doubt wise ones, possibly bearing the privilege of exchange in case of duplication. And here I have lamely related to you the uneventful chronicle of two foolish children in a flat who most unwisely sacrificed 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 gave gifts these two were the wisest. O all who give and receive gifts, such as they are wisest. Everywhere they are wisest. They are the magi. **[Scene 25: The Magi also gave wise and treasured gifts]**

by O. Henry

Lesson F. Introducing Dialogue Writing

You probably remember that a paragraph should have at least three sentences in order to be a paragraph, yet you have probably also noticed instances in which a paragraph only contained a sentence or two—or even just a word or two.

Whenever you are using dialogue (the written conversation of two or more people) or whenever you are quoting many people in your writing, **begin a new paragraph each time the speaker changes.**

When you write dialogue, unlike other writing you do, you should **focus on sentences more than paragraphs:**

1. **Dialogue is comprised of sentences.**
2. The paragraph breaks in dialogue are **not** there to show a unit of thought like most paragraphs are.
3. The **paragraphs in dialogue are there to show when a new speaker speaks (in addition to showing scene changes and changes in action).**
4. Plan for a **new paragraph each time the speaker changes**, just like the sample did, as well as for any time you change scenes or action sequences.

If you have ever written quotes in an essay or report, you probably remember the two first quote rules for writing in the US:

1. **Periods always go inside closing quotation marks--never on the outside.**
2. **Commas always go inside closing quotation marks--never on the outside.**

<> **F-1.** In the Dialogue Box (Box F-1), highlight the name of each person who is speaking.

Dialogue Box

"Will you buy my hair?" a determined Della inquired. **(Paragraph 1)**

"I buy hair," replied Madame Sofronie. **(Paragraph 2)**

"How much would you give me for mine?" **(Paragraph 3)**

Lifting the mass with a practiced hand, Madame Sofronie answered,
"Twenty dollars." **(Paragraph 4)**

"Give it me quick," exclaimed Della. **(Paragraph 5)**

Box F-1

Did you find the following:

1. In **Paragraph 1**, the speaker is a determined Della.
2. In **Paragraph 2**, the speaker is Madame Sofronie.
3. In **Paragraph 3**, no name is given (though we know it is Della, don't we?).
4. In **Paragraph 4**, the speaker is Madame Sofronie.
5. In **Paragraph 5**, the speaker is Della.

The words that tell who is speaking are called the speech tag.

The speech tags in the paragraphs you studied above include the following:

Paragraph 1: a determined Della inquired.

Paragraph 2: replied Madame Sofronie.

Paragraph 4: Lifting the mass with a practiced hand, Madame Sofronie answered,

Paragraph 5: exclaimed Della.

Do you see how the **speech tag tells who is speaking in each one?**

Do you see how you can skip the speech tag sometimes if there are only two speakers and you can clearly see who is talking?

You will be using dialogue sometime soon!

To begin with, you should learn just a few dialogue rules:

1. **Each time the speaker changes, a new paragraph is started.**
 - a. This means that the person switched.
 - b. Do not change paragraphs if the same person is saying more than one sentence.
 - c. **All of one person's words at that given movement go in one paragraph** (until another person begins speaking).
 - d. When a different speaker talks, a new paragraph is started (even if the "new speaker" spoke earlier).
2. **When a speech tag comes at the beginning of the sentence**, do the following:
 - a. **Start the speech tag with a capital letter** since it is the first word of your sentence.
 - b. **Put a comma after it**, then begin your quote with a quotation mark-capital letter:
Lifting the mass with a practiced hand, Madame Sofronie answered,
3. **When a speech tag comes at the end of the sentence** (following the words that were spoken), do the following:
 - a. **If your quote is a statement, put a comma then quotation mark** at the end of it:
"I buy hair," replied Madame Sofronie.
 - b. **If your quote is a question or exclamation sentence, put that end mark (? !)** inside the **quotation mark** (since it is part of your sentence): "Will you buy my hair?" a determined Della inquired.
 - c. **Start the speech tag with a lower case letter** (since it is not a new sentence but part of the sentence you are now writing): exclaimed Della.

<> **F-2.** Rewrite four (**Extension:** six) of the quoted sentences from the Dialogue Box (Box F-1) with speech tags in different positions with different wording, etc.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. **Extension--** _____
6. **Extension--** _____

Lesson G. Study Skills/Research: Design Scenes for Your Story

<> **G-1.** Read the "A Western Christmas" (Box G-1) student sample provided.

"A Western Christmas" Student Sample Twice-Told Tale Story

Jane searched in her purse to see if she could uncover any more money. She could not. All the money she could spare for her husband came to thirty cents. That money meant a tremendous amount to her. Negotiating lower prices with every shopkeeper required toughness. Yet, it would not be enough for a gift for her husband. **[Scene 1: Jane counting her money]**

At a loss for where to discover more money, Jane sat down. She put her elbows on the plain wooden table and her head in her hands. Then, she began crying. **[Scene 2: Jane crying]**

Box G-1 (continued on next page)

Box G-1 (continued from previous page)

Jane's home was an old ranch house. It showed the marks of Jane's and her husband's labor to turn it into a home. A vase on the table held some flowers, and brightly-colored curtains hung in the windows. Yet, it still remained the house of a rancher who could barely afford to feed his animals, much less build a beautiful house. **[Scene 3: Jane's house]**

The sign above the ranch's gate clung to two rickety posts. Several times the wind had carried it away, and then a new sign had been nailed once again to the wickets. Each time, the name "Samuel Alistair Cook Ranch" was painstakingly painted on it once more. **[Scene 4: Gate--Samuel Alistair Cook]**

Each time, the decision to paint the full name on the sign had caused the ranch's owner a little more hesitation. After all, the ranch's income was dropping, decreasing instead of increasing the ranch's significance. Also, no one used Samuel Alistair Cook to refer to the ranch's owner. His wife Jane always lovingly referred to him as her Sam. **[Scene 5: Now poor/Samuel called Sam by wife]**

Jane stopped crying and began pacing the room. It was Christmas Eve, and she could not buy a gift for Sam with only thirty cents. She reviewed her purchases over the past few weeks. She could not think of anything she should have abstained from buying. She had numerous ideas for a Christmas present for Sam, but she could afford none of them. Yet, Sam deserved a magnificent and lasting gift. **[Scene 6: Christmas Day/almost no money]**

Jane paused her pacing in front of the mantel over the fireplace. On the mantel sat several meager decorations. However, in the center, in the place of honor, sat an opened locket. It was a beautiful item, and its gold seemed to illuminate the other items on the mantel. Inside was a photograph of Jane and Sam on their wedding day. **[Scene 7: Looking at grandmother's locket]**

The locket's value stemmed from far more than its golden beauty. Jane's grandmother had first owned the locket. She had kept a photograph of her husband in it as she waited for him to return from buying the property on which this ranch now stood. Then, Jane's mother had used it. When she tragically died from a sudden illness, Jane received the object. **[Scene 8: Locket's story]**

Box G-1 (continued on next page)

Box G-1 (continued from previous page)

The locket was one of Sam's and Jane's two most treasured possessions. The other was Sam's beautiful black stallion Lightning. The couple considered themselves the luckiest people in the world to possess these two items. Without hesitation, they would have matched up their two treasures against any two offered up as rivals. They felt wealthy, despite their poverty, because they had these two assets. **[Scene 9: 2 treasures--Sam's horse and Jane's lockets]**

Jane carefully lifted the locket off the mantel. She gazed at it lovingly and then began crying. Then, she carried the locket over to her purse and carefully lowered it in. She glanced at it for a second and then closed the bag. She stood still, apparently still making up her mind. Then, she brushed her tears away and picked up her purse. **[Scene 10: Jane's emotion]**

With a determined energy, Jane bundled herself up for the cold. Then, she left the house and entered the stable. She hitched up a horse to one of the wagons and hopped onto the seat. Then, she headed through the gate and onto the road into town. **[Scene 11: Jane leaves house]**

When Jane reached the town, she tied up her horse outside a shop. The sign over its door read "Cartwright's Pawn." Once inside, Jane stepped up to a dingy counter. Behind it stood an eager-looking man rubbing his hands together. **[Scene 12: Jane goes to Mr. Cartwright's pawn shop]**

"Can I pawn a locket?" inquired Jane.

"Certainly," replied Mr. Cartwright. "Hand it over and let me have a look."

Jane pulled it out of her purse and hesitantly allowed Mr. Cartwright to take it.

"Thirty dollars," Mr. Cartwright declared, having scrutinized the gold's quality.

"I'll take the money," Jane immediately answered.

Leaving the store, she began walking along the wooden sidewalk, gazing at the various storefronts. She went into several but failed to discover a gift worthy of her Sam. **[Scene 13: Jane sells locket]**

Box G-1 (continued on next page)

Box G-1 (continued from previous page)

Finally, Jane discovered the perfect gift. She located it in the third leather goods store she visited. It was the most beautifully crafted saddle she had ever laid eyes upon. It had few decorative flourishes on it, but its leather was of the finest quality. Jane promptly paid twenty-five dollars for it. With this saddle, Sam could ride Lightning fast and with pride. Right now, Sam's old saddle barely held together, and he often felt embarrassed enough that he left Lightning in the stable when he visited other ranches. **[Scene 14: Jane buys best saddle]**

As soon as Jane stepped back inside her house, she realized how empty the mantel now seemed. She could not replace the emotional or even the physical presence of the locket. However, she did at least attempt to shift the other decorations to cover up the gaping hole. **[Scene 15: Jane shifts decorations to replace locket]**

After several minutes of labor, Jane stepped back to observe her work. The locket's presence was still obviously missing. However, at least the mantel seemed slightly less empty. **[Scene 16: Observes work]**

Jane still felt distressed as she contemplated what Sam would think when he noticed the missing locket. Yet, she knew that with thirty cents she could not have discovered a suitable gift for Sam. Pawning the locket was the only option. **[Scene 17: Wonders what Sam will say]**

As the time when Sam stopped work approached, Jane began preparing dinner. With the limited food they possessed, she attempted to create the best meal she could. All the while she continued to wonder what he would say. **[Scene 18: Prepares dinner]**

Soon, Jane spotted Sam riding back on his work horse from the other side of the ranch. He then dismounted and entered the barn to finish his final tasks before dinner. Jane had not placed the saddle in the barn yet. Instead, it remained hidden under a rug in the corner of the room. Anxiously, Jane waited for Sam to take the final few steps to the door. **[Scene 19: Jane waits for Sam]**

Finally, Jane heard Sam's step on the porch and then the door opened. Sam seemed cold and weary. The constant misfortune which had caused their poverty was obvious in his face. He began removing his tattered coat and gloves. **[Scene 20: Sam comes inside]**

Box G-1 (continued on next page)

Sam stopped with his gloves halfway off. He stared at the spot on the mantel where the locket had been. He wore a blank expression. Jane gazed at him nervously, wondering what was wrong.

[Scene 21: Sam stunned by missing locket]

Jane broke Sam's reverie by running over to him. She hugged him and exclaimed, "Why are you so shocked? I pawned the locket to buy you a gift. We'll keep saving, and soon we'll have enough to buy it back."

"You pawned the locket?" Sam stated in a shocked voice which sounded like he was speaking more to himself than to his wife.

"Yes, but I know we'll be able to get it back."

"It's gone? You actually did pawn it?" Sam repeated, not wishing to believe the truth. Then, when he realized what Jane must be thinking, he corrected himself. "I don't mean to keep making you feel bad. We can be happy together without the locket. However," he pulled a package out from inside his coat, "this will explain my reaction." **[Scene 22: Jane explains why locket's gone/ Sam gives her his gift]**

Jane quickly opened the package. Then, when she saw the contents, she burst into tears. As she cried, Sam tried to comfort her.

The package contained the perfect golden chain for the locket. It perfectly matched the locket. Jane had frequently longed for the item, so she could carry the prized possession with her. Her dreams had been fulfilled, but the locket was gone.

Jane continued crying, but eventually she settled down. Then, she turned to Sam and declared, "We'll have the locket back in no time. I'll help you however I can. In the meantime, you need to see my present for you." **[Scene 23: Jane opens gift]**

Jane slid over to the corner of the room and pulled the rug off the saddle. With a glow of pride, she gazed at it. Then, she turned to her husband.

"How about this saddle, Sam? It's absolutely perfect for you and Lightning, isn't it? I visited almost all the shops in town before I discovered it. While dinner's cooking, let's go out to the barn and try it on Lightning."

Box G-1 (continued from previous page)

With a weary sigh, Sam sat down in a kitchen chair and leaned back. He placed his hands in his pockets. He smiled strangely.

"Jane," he quietly began, "let's enjoy our Christmas presents as they are. I don't wish us to use them yet. I sold Lightning today for money to buy the golden chain." **[Scene 24: Jane gives Sam his gift]**

Were Jane and Sam unwise? Perhaps they were in their lack of coordination in their gifts. Yet, they searched for, sacrificed for, and gave these gifts to each other out of love. No one can question the wisdom of that affection between husband and wife. **[Scene 25: The moral of the story]**

Box G-1