

A RETRIEVED REFORMATION



A CLASSIC SHORT STORY REMAINS AS RELEVANT AS EVER

Are the illustrations in this play fun, or what? We certainly had a great time “casting” the parts—although Senior Editor Jenny Dignan is still a little sad that we didn’t find a role for George Clooney. Anyway, what we really love about Tom Garrett’s illustrations is how they will draw your students right into Mack Lewis’s delightful adaptation of O. Henry’s classic short story “A Retrieved Reformation” (1909). And once they’re in, there’s a lot to chew on. The questions posed in the magazine and in the lesson plan below certainly gave *us* a lot to chew on—you should have heard us debating the meaning of the story’s title!

There is so much here to engage your students, from the illustrations to big questions about human nature. Get ready for a lively classroom discussion!



Annabel and gives up his life of crime; others may say that Jimmy gave up his life of crime only to get what he wanted—Annabel—and it is not until the very end, when Jimmy finally acts in a selfless way, that he is truly reformed.)

Finally, have students respond to the writing prompt on page 15.



ESSENTIAL QUESTION CAN PEOPLE CHANGE FOR THE BETTER?

Before students open their magazines, pose the essential question: *Can people change for the better?* As students discuss their thoughts, ask them to also consider (1) what might make a person want to change, and (2) what might make it hard for someone to change.

Then invite students to open their magazines to the play. Give them a moment to look at the illustrations, then briefly discuss the play’s title. Ask: What does *reformation* mean? (*a change for the better*) What does *retrieved* mean? (*brought back; regained*) Then call on a student to read aloud the red box on page 12.

Before students read the play, prepare to project the worksheet “Considering Jimmy.” Tell students that you will be pausing at several points during the play to discuss the questions on the worksheet. (Alternatively, distribute the worksheet and have students discuss the questions in small groups or respond to them in writing.)

After reading, return to the question of whether Jimmy is a dynamic character. Does anyone doubt that he has really changed? Then ask students at what point during the play Jimmy’s reformation occurs. (*Some may say that it occurs when he first sees*

PRINTABLE WORKSHEETS FOR THE ESSENTIAL QUESTION

CONSIDERING JIMMY: A discussion guide to use while reading the play

CONTEST ENTRY FORM: For use with the writing contest on page 15



Yes, you could spend precious time coming up with discussion questions, but why should you? We've got them right here—and the answers too! They're also available online as a worksheet (without the answers) to use for small-group discussion or as a writing activity.

- * **1 In Scene 1, the warden tells Jimmy, "You're not a bad fellow at heart." How can someone be good at heart but act in ways that don't reflect that goodness?** (critical thinking) Answers will vary. Students may say that someone can be good in some ways but bad in others, or that people have good intentions but fail to live up to them, or that people are good by nature but fall prey to temptation, etc. Or students may say that our actions reflect our hearts—so if someone is doing something really bad, he or she really doesn't have a good heart.
- * **2 What does Jimmy risk by saving Agatha? What would he have risked by *not* saving her?** (inference) By saving Agatha, Jimmy risks revealing himself as a criminal and going back to jail—and probably losing Annabel and his new life as Ralph Spencer. By not saving Agatha, Jimmy would have had to live with the knowledge that he let her die, and that he betrayed Annabel.
- * **3 In general, when does Jimmy wear a rose in his vest pocket? Why do you think Jimmy wears Annabel's rose when he cracks the safe to save Agatha?** (inference) In general, Jimmy wears a rose when he is living the criminal life. Students may say that he wears a rose in Scene 6 because he thinks it will help him crack the safe, because he's admitting his past identity as a criminal, or because he has decided that he cannot escape his past and is planning to return to a criminal life.
- 4 Why does Ben Price let Jimmy go?** (character motivation) Price doesn't want to punish Jimmy for saving a girl's life. Perhaps Price sees that Jimmy is gone—that now, Jimmy really is Ralph Spencer.
- 5 Explain the play's title. Why is Jimmy's reformation retrieved?** (interpreting text) Answers will vary, but perhaps Ben Price retrieves it for Jimmy by not sending him to jail. Why? Because by going back to jail, Jimmy would have lost his identity as Ralph Spencer. This might have meant a full return to the life of Jimmy Valentine—including robbing banks.

*supports the essential question

PRINTABLE SKILLS WORKSHEETS

WORDS AND DEFINITIONS:

Print or project vocab words from the article before students encounter them in context.

VOCABULARY PRACTICE:

Because reinforcement matters

QUIZ: A multiple-choice and short-answer reading-comprehension quiz, with questions based on state tests. The quiz comes in printable and interactive/digital versions.



What can we say? We've got a lot of ideas for you.

CAST CHANGE

Invite students to create an alternate "cast" for the play. Using Tom Garrett's illustrations as a model, they should gather pictures from magazines or Web sites to create a collage-style illustration of their cast. Have them present their finished collages and explain their choice of "actors" to the class.

BEFORE & AFTER

Have half the class work together to invent a brief story about what led Jimmy to a life of crime in the first place. Have the other half write down what happens to Jimmy after the play ends. A spokesperson from each group should then share the group's story.



Find all worksheets and other support materials at www.scholastic.com/scope.