

- 1 Read the short introduction to O. Henry and answer the questions.



William Sydney Porter (1862–1910), whose pen name was O. Henry, was a world-famous American short story writer. In his stories, he often focused on the everyday life of ordinary people in New York City at that time. His stories are best known for their surprise endings.

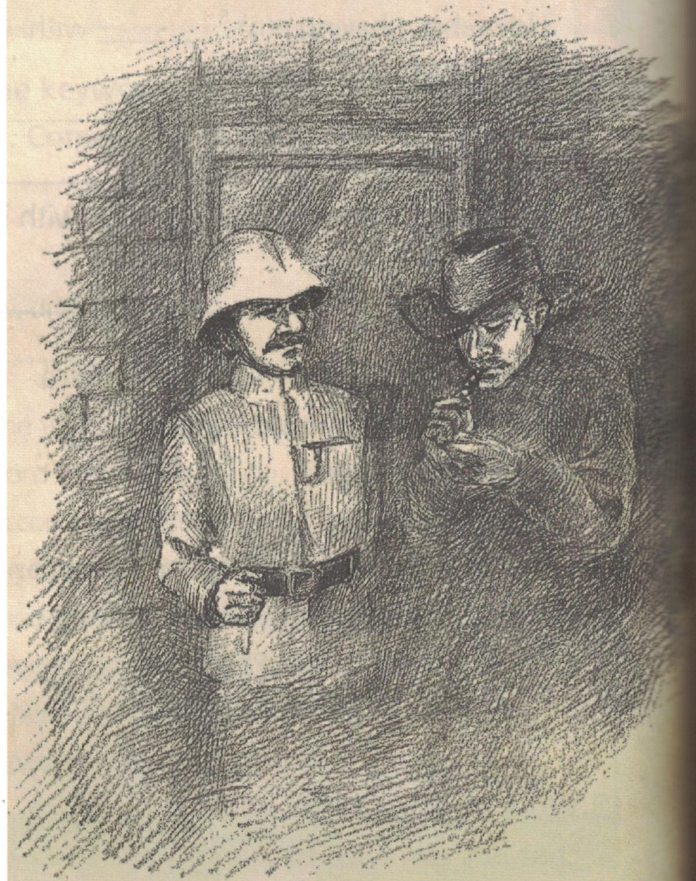
- 1 Have you read any stories by O. Henry? Share one with the class.
- 2 Do you like stories with surprise endings? Why or why not?

- 2 Read the passage and find out why the man is standing outside the shop.

Learning to learn

Read the complete short story “After Twenty Years” and other short stories by O. Henry, such as “The Gift of the Magi” and “The Last Leaf”. This way, you can get a deeper understanding of his works and the surprise endings to his stories.

The short story “After Twenty Years” is set in New York on a cold, dark night. Most people have left work to go home, and this part of the city is now quiet. A policeman who is checking the area sees a man outside a shop. He goes up to the man and finds he has a scar on his face. They have a chat and the man starts to tell his story.



AFTER TWENTY YEARS

BY O. HENRY

- 1 "Twenty years ago tonight," said the man, "I dined here at 'Big Joe' Brady's with Jimmy Wells, my best chum, and the finest chap 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 destiny worked out and our fortunes made, whatever they were going to be.”

- 2 “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?”
- 3 “Well, yes, for a time we corresponded,” said the other. “But after a year or two we lost track of each other. You see, the West is a pretty big proposition, 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, staunchest 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.”

(Excerpts from “After Twenty Years” by O. Henry)

- 3 Work in groups. Think of a possible ending to “After Twenty Years” and find evidence to support your ideas. Use the following questions to help you.

- 1 Did Jimmy come to meet his friend?
- 2 What has Jimmy experienced over the past twenty years?
- 3 What might happen between the policeman and the man?

Now read the note from the original ending and find out what actually happened.

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 man to do the job.

JIMMY

- 1 What does the note tell you about the ending of the story?
- 2 How do you think Bob would react when he read the note?
- 3 Do you think that Jimmy did the right thing? Why or why not?
- 4 Do you like this ending? Give your reasons.

Think & Share

4 Work in groups. Act out the whole story.

- 1 Think about what happened in each of the three scenes, using the information you have already read in the story. Retell the whole story.

Scene 1:

Bob dining with Jimmy at "Big Joe" Brady's twenty years ago

Scene 2:

Bob making his fortune in the West

Scene 3:

Bob and Jimmy meeting again after twenty years

The story is about two friends named Bob and Jimmy. Twenty years ago, ...

- 2 Choose a character to play and decide what you will say and do.
- 3 Act out the whole story.