

Annotated Bibliography of O. Henry's Texas Stories for Middle Grades (4-8) Students

O. Henry's delightful Texas stories can be used to create interest in a topic. This bibliography is intended to help you determine which story might be an appropriate interest stimulator to read aloud at the beginning of a unit of study or as a "reward" at the end. Annotations below include print collections in widespread use and Internet sources, a story summary, read-aloud time, grade recommendation, themes, and topical curriculum applications for students in the middle grades. Sources include the original publication in which the story appeared, followed by more recent collections. Bibliographic information at end.

"Art and the Bronco" (*Roads of Destiny, O. Henry's Texas Stories*)

<http://www.unityspot.com/arthurs/ohenry/rdstn10.xml>

Summary: The legislature meeting in Austin was poised to appropriate \$2,000 to purchase a painting by Lonny Briscoe from the San Saba country. The painting, standing in the lobby, attracted generous critiques about its representational realism from Lonny's coterie of cowboys, who knew little of art, and enthusiastic support from representatives who wished to honor Lonny's grand father, a pioneering frontiersman and patriot. Lonny recognized that none of the acclaim was directed toward his skill as an artist, and when that fact was affirmed by a legitimate art critic, Lonny put an end to the debacle in fine rodeo style.

Read-aloud time: 25 minutes

Recommended for: Grade 6 and up

Themes: Government and legislation; the nature of art; integrity.

Curriculum applications: Social Studies: set in Austin after the completion of the new capitol (1888), this tale is eye-opening in a gently cynical way about the wheeling and dealing of lawmakers and brings to mind some of the "asides" that the legislature deals with, as, in this case, supporting the arts. Consider also the *stereotypes* people have about Texans, and how we Texans perpetuate those stereotypes to our financial or cultural advantage (as in attracting tourists).

"Buried Treasure" (*Options*)

<http://www.classicreader.com/read.php/sid.6/bookid.973/>

The plainspoken narrator and a certain college-educated fellow named Goodloe Banks vied for the hand of May Martha Mangum, daughter of an eccentric entomologist living in a Texas prairie town. The Mangums moved away, leaving the narrator and Banks suddenly distraught. When an 1863 map for buried treasure came his way, the narrator decided that such a fortune would enable him to find May Martha no matter where she had gone, but his treasure hunt was unsuccessful. Banks recognized that his failure was in not knowing the difference between true north and magnetic north and agreed to accompany him on a second quest. Studying the map again in the wilderness, Banks noticed the watermark on the paper, dated 1898, much later than the alleged date of the map. Banks declared the map a fraud and stormed away, leaving our narrator to discover the *real* treasure to which the hoax map led.

Read-aloud time: 20 minutes

Recommended for: Grade 6 and up

Themes: Knowledge vs. sense; knowledge vs. luck.

Curriculum applications: Science: A fun read-aloud for a unit on insects with allusions to taxonomy or for a unit on magnetism. Language arts: O. Henry plays one of his standard word games early in this tale, using the word "etymologist" (a linguist interested in the history and origin of words) instead of "entomologist." Have students look up the two terms. Do students think O. Henry himself misspoke, or was he telling us something about the character who misspoke?

“The Caballero’s Way” (*Heart of the West, O. Henry’s Texas Stories, 41 Stories by O. Henry*)
[http://thenostalgialeague.com/olmag/ciscoO. Html](http://thenostalgialeague.com/olmag/ciscoO.Html)

Summary: Ranger Lieutenant Sandidge set out to find the Cisco Kid at the *jacal* of his known girlfriend, Tonia Perez, but in his visits he began to fall in love with her himself, and she seemed to return his feelings, though neither realized that the Kid had seen them together. One day Sandidge received a letter signed “Thine own Tonia” saying that the Kid planned to disguise himself in her clothing to escape being trapped; the message admonished Sandidge to come before daybreak and shoot to kill. The letter had not been written by Tonia at all, but by the Cisco Kid himself, and it was Tonia who left the house just before dawn wearing, of course, her own clothing.

Read-aloud time: 28 minutes

Recommended for: Grades 7 and 8, enriched classes.

Themes: Revenge.

Curriculum applications: Social Studies: This is one of O. Henry’s darkest tales, both in terms of the revenge sought by the Cisco Kid and the views of life in the Nueces Strip. The Kid, a small and wiry Anglo, was said to shoot Mexicans “to see them kick.” Tonia, his sweetheart, is identified as half Madonna, half Carmen, a virgin prostitute character who lives with her father, a drunken Mexican goatherd. Sandidge, “blond as a Viking, quiet as a deacon, dangerous as a machine gun,” is made to be the hero, “the newly lighted sun-god” in Tonia’s eyes. This story reveals strongly the stereotypes and archetypes which played themselves out in Anglo newspaper reports of Ranger “accomplishments” and Mexican corridos about border incidents with the “rinches” (rangers). Read Phyllis McKenzie’s “The Political Landscape” on our Web site and other recent research by Borderlands historians. Difficult material suggested for mature students only.

“A Chaparral Christmas Gift” (*Heart of the West*)

<http://www.classicreader.com/read.php/sid.6/bookid.1277/>

Summary: When Johnny McRoy lost his bid for the hand of Rosita McMullen to Madison Lane, he was bitten by jealousy. At their Christmas wedding, at which cattleman and sheepman guests have put aside their traditional differences to celebrate, McRoy disrupted the festivities with gunfire and set himself upon the path to becoming an outlaw, the Frio Kid, feared and despised for his cruelty. After five years, he had a moment of profound remembering of his loss and determined to kill Madison Lane on Christmas Day. Going to the Lane’s Christmas doings, where the nearby ranchers had gathered, he overheard Rosita comment to a guest that she believed there is a spot of good in everyone, and she reflected that even the Frio Kid had not always been cruel. On returning to her guests, she bumped into “Santa Claus,” who told her he had overheard her, and, though he was going to give her husband a present, he had left one for her instead. What gift did she find when she went to the room Santa indicated?

Read-aloud time : 12 minutes.

Recommended for: Grade 4 and up; something for all, but be forewarned about inappropriate language (“greaser”).

Themes: Ethnicity issues; the power of kindness.

Curriculum applications : Social Studies: views of sheepmen/cattlemen toward each other; issues of race and class, c. 1880s; political landscape of the borderlands; or, change the language in a read-aloud for a more simple, heartwarming holiday story.

“A Chaparral Prince” (*Heart of the West, 41 Stories by O. Henry*)

<http://www.classicreader.com/read.php/sid.6/bookid.652/>

Summary: Eleven-year-old Lena had been sent away to work long, hard hours as a kitchen maid in a hotel and send her earnings of \$3 a week back to her father in Fredericksburg. When the innkeepers at last took away her copy of Grimm’s Fairy Tales, she could find no consolation and wrote home to her mother of her sorrow and despair. The mail was intercepted by Hondo Bill’s gang, and when they read the letter, they were determined to correct the injustice of her plight. They tied the postal carrier to a tree, then awakened him a few hours later to return his wagon and bid him continue his journey, which now had one additional delivery, Lena herself, the little lover of fairy tales. On her return to her parents, Lena sincerely reported that she had been rescued by a prince.

Read-aloud time: 19 minutes

Recommended for: Grade 4 and up

Themes: Ethnicity issues; child labor; the role of fantasy in happiness.

Curriculum applications: Social Studies: This tale could be used to examine “racist” or degrading language in a setting less incendiary than some because the group disparaged in this story is German—and Germans, as a group, have been reinstated among the unoppressed—and because the disparagers are outlaws, whose language might be expected to fall short of social standards. Have students find names, assumptions, and passages which a German American might find offensive. Does the fact that such passages seem humorous prevent them from being offensive? (Consider that racist “jokes” can be highly offensive and incendiary.) Note that the prevalent disparaging attitude toward Germans led to more radical and hateful behavior toward German Americans in the next few decades leading into World War I. How did German Americans respond to the dangers of being a hated group? (Consciously began speaking English; some German newspapers quit publishing; some personal names were Anglicized; and even town names changed, as in the case of “Brandenburg,” settled by German Americans in the 1880s, which became “Old Glory” in 1918.) Also note the use of “snoozer,” meaning shepherd, in many of O. Henry’s sheep ranch stories.

“Hearts and Crosses” (*Heart of the West, O. Henry’s Texas Stories*)

<http://www.classicreader.com/read.php/sid.6/bookid.632/>

Summary: Santa McCallister Yeager managed the business of the Nopalito ranch, which she inherited from her father. Her husband, Webb Yeager, worked as ranch foreman until another cowpuncher’s taunts made him question submitting to his wife’s authority instead of being the cattle “king” himself. When Santa and Webb came to a confrontation about it, they dug in their respective heels. Santa proved loving and resourceful; Webb did not fail to respond to the chance to regain their loving relationship. “Hearts and Crosses” is a satisfying romance in which both partners learn that they care more for each other than they do for the social expectations of the day.

Read-aloud time: 24 minutes

Recommended for: Grade 4 and up

Themes: The place of men and women in society, the role of women, the role of men, being in relationship vs. being right; cattle ranching, branding and blacksmith equipment, cattle breed improvement.

Curriculum applications: Social Studies: Cultural blending of Irish and Mexican heritages in South Texas by marriage (San Patricio Colony); cattle ranching vocabulary; geography and landscape of lower Rio Grande region.

“Hygeia at the Solito” (*Heart of the West, O. Henry’s Texas Stories, 41 Stories by O. Henry*)

http://www.online-literature.com/o_henry/1023/

Summary: In San Antonio, cattleman Curtis Raidler encountered “Cricket” McGuire, a featherweight ex-prizefighter and gambler, broke and sick with a rattling cough, likely tuberculosis. Despite McGuire’s rudeness, Raidler bought him a ticket and took him back to his own ranch,

believing the clean, rural air would cure him, as had happened with others. Suspicious, resistant, obnoxious, demanding, and always coughing and gasping, McGuire was nonetheless treated like a guest for months until a visiting doctor was sent into his room to examine “the man in there.” McGuire had climbed out the window, leaving his caretaker alone, and the doctor truthfully reported that “the man in there” was perfectly healthy. Feeling tricked and betrayed, Raidler angrily threw McGuire out of the house and into the hard work of branding. That night the rancher heard of a death in the family and returned to his old home for two months, returning with anxious regrets about having sent McGuire out to die. He did find McGuire in a different condition from when he left—but how?

Read-aloud time: 29 minutes

Recommended for: Grade 6-8.

Themes: The nature of goodness, adhering to one’s own beliefs.

Curriculum applications: Social Studies: Progress in science and medicine; repercussions of the limited views of medicine at a given time in history. For example, many people, like McGuire and O. Henry himself, came to Texas for their health. Note the medical discoveries made in O. Henry’s lifetime as identified in the Timeline activity.

“Jimmy Hayes and Muriel” (*Sixes and Sevens, O. Henry’s Texas Stories*)

<http://www.utexas.edu/depts/grg/ustudent/gcraft/fall96/canright/projects/story.html>

Summary: The small company of Texas rangers patrolling the border were unsure about the newest addition to their group, Jimmy Hayes. He was agreeable, he had a great sense of humor, and he certainly demonstrated affection and loyalty for his pet horny toad, Muriel, but those attributes offered no assurance that his trustworthiness and courage in a real scrape could be relied upon. Indeed, after the first encounter with bandits, it appeared that Jimmy had fled and abandoned the troops, for he was nowhere to be found. A year later, back in the area again, the ranger company came upon the skeletons of the bandits they had skirmished with and another skeleton, posed to indicate he had “put up a dandy scrap” and defeated the bandit gang. Who was this skeleton, and how did the rangers identify him? The answer to that is O. Henry’s classic “twist at the end.”

Read-aloud time: 14 minutes

Recommended for: Grade 4 and up

Themes: Ethnicity issues; loyalty; premature judgment.

Curriculum applications: Social Studies: This story offers a fine opening into lessons about the Nueces Strip and the Border disputes of the 1870s-1920s and the atmosphere of cultural or racial mistrust which still maintains in the Borderlands to this day. See the resource list for background on “rangers or rinches?” with examples of both genuine misunderstandings and intentional offences committed in true feuding style.

Science: Changing Landscape—The Texas horned lizard is our state reptile, but how many students have actually seen one? Why have “horny toads” disappeared from our land? Use the excellent lesson plan designed by Georgia Newman to study the survival needs of horned lizards and/or to prepare a PowerPoint presentation on horny toad environmental needs.

“The Missing Chord” (*Heart of the West*)

<http://www.classicreader.com/read.php/sid.6/bookid.647/>

Our narrator listens to the sounds of a piano coming from inside the house as his ranchman host recalls the days before he and his wife, Marilla, were married. Seems Marilla had longed for a piano, and Old Cal, her sheepman father, was determined to buy her one. Always speaking knowledgeably on every topic, Old Cal now boasted of his great knowledge of musical instruments, and Marilla agreed that he could certainly select the best instrument for her when he took his wool

clips to San Antonio to sell. As soon as he returned and unloaded the piano, Old Cal immediately fell ill. Marilla nursed him lovingly, granting his every need or request except for one: whenever he asked her to play the piano, she found some way to gently decline. After the old man died of his pneumonia, Marilla showed her beloved the instrument her father had bought for her.

Read-aloud time: 17 minutes

Recommended for: Grade 4 and up.

Themes: Truthfulness and love; boasting.

Curriculum applications: Social Studies: Progress and Invention—Before reading this story, have students use an Internet search engine to discover photographs and information about player pianos. Students have probably seen a player piano with music rolls in a case on the upright section of the instrument. This story is difficult to understand without knowing about the earlier version of this invention, popular around 1900-1930. First created in 1896, the original “Pianola” was almost as large as the piano it was intended to play! What do we now understand about Old Cal’s musical knowledge and intuition and about Marilla’s refusal to play for him?

“The Pimienta Pancakes” (*Heart of the West*)

<http://www.classicreader.com/read.php/sid.6/bookid.636/>

Summary: The narrator listens to the tale of Judson Odom, a cow camp cook, who had once vied for the attention of Miss Willella Learight with Jackson Bird, a sheep man. Bird had assured “Jud” that he was not interested in Miss Willella’s hand, only in her pancake recipe, so Jud agreed to help him get his recipe—then get out of the way! However, Jud had told a different tale to Miss Willella and her uncle, one which caused the two to behave strangely whenever Jud brought up the topic of pancakes. Jud fell victim to the trick and lost both the girl and his taste for pancakes!

Read-aloud time: 20 minutes

Recommended for: Grades 7 and 8

Themes: Cattleman/sheepman conflict

Curriculum applications: Competition between sheepmen and cattlemen; changing landscape (botany and zoology); colorful language; landscape vocabulary: Frio bottoms, pear flat, hackberry, mesquite, antelope (steak), water elm, roadrunner, tarantula...

“The Princess and the Puma” (*Heart of the West, 41 Stories by O. Henry, Selected Stories, O. Henry’s Texas Stories*)

<http://164.106.182.10:276/serfweb/phillips/common/stories/PrincessPuma.html>

Summary: Josefa O’Donnell was the “princess” daughter of a cattle king father, endowed with intelligence, loveliness, and keen frontier skills. Ripley Givens had been looking for a chance to gain her attention, and at last it came. He spied her alongside the river one afternoon, just standing up from taking a drink, and nearby but out of her view, was a crouching puma! His own gun was out of range, but, to save her, he yelled and dived between the cat and the girl. The puma came down on his head—dead! Shot by her gun! And further, she accused him of nearly spoiling her shot. To save face, Givens claimed to have been attempting to save the puma, a cow camp pet, who would now be sorely missed by all the boys. Suddenly softening, Josefa apologized intensely and beguiled Givens into seeing her safely home. Who was fooling whom? You be the judge in this madcap mix-up!

Read-aloud time: 13 minutes

Recommended for: Grades 7 and 8

Themes: The role of women then and now.

Curriculum applications: Science: Texas’s changing landscape, puma, antelope; flora and fauna vocabulary: mesquite grass, cat claw, sacuista, water elm. What is a puma? Mexican lion? Panther?

Mountain lion? Same or different? Where does each fit in feline taxonomy? Social Studies: Cultural blending of Irish and Mexican heritages in South Texas by marriage; the role of women.

“The Red Roses of Tonia” (*Waifs and Strays, O. Henry’s Texas Stories*)

<http://www.unityspot.com/arthurs/ohenry/1waif10.xml>

Summary: In this sad tale of vanity, Tonia tricks her two suitors, a cowman and a sheepman, into competing for the honor of bringing her an Easter hat, since the one she had ordered was lost in transit due to a burnt-out train trestle. Red roses, she specified, but when the riders reached the small community store which was their only hope, the storekeeper had only two hats, each with white roses. The rivals bought them anyway and began the last stretch of their race, so close that gunplay became a factor in determining the winner. After O. Henry’s two years on a sheep ranch, his sheepmen always win, if this ending could be called a victory. The wounded sheepman paints the white roses on his hat red with his blood, and we are left with the feeling that even that degree of sacrifice and effort may not pierce Tonia’s fashion frivolity.

Read-aloud time: 21 minutes

Recommended for: Grades 7 and 8

Themes: Cattleman/sheepman competition (in the microcosmic); vanity vs. true affection.

Curriculum applications: Social Studies: Tonia’s vanity and the pointlessness of the men’s race may have metaphorical applications which put into perspective the self-destructive nature of feuds and disputes, such as those between cattlemen and sheepmen, or of any vanity.

“Reformation of Calliope” (*Heart of the West, Selected Stories*)

<http://www.classicreader.com/read.php/sid.6/bookid.653/>

Summary: Calliope Gatesby, the town drunk, went on a binge and shot up all of Quicksand, and the city marshal and posse defended the town in kind. Calliope took up defense in the train station, and just before the train arrived offering Calliope a possible escape, the marshal stormed the stationhouse. A shot was heard, and in the aftermath, we find Calliope’s mother, arrived for a surprise weeklong visit, cleaning the wounds of the victim and urging him to give up alcohol. The man standing behind her wearing a marshal’s badge, is Calliope! He proclaims that if the places of the two men were reversed, he would swear off liquor forever! But wait a minute: they ARE reversed! How will the marshal respond?

Read-aloud time: 18 minutes

Recommended for: Grade 6 and up

Themes: Peacekeeping vs. law enforcement; alcoholism and co-dependency issues.

Curriculum applications: Social Studies or Health: The changing landscape of health and advancements in medical science. The nature of alcoholism is better understood today than it was a century ago—indeed, better than half a century ago. Will Calliope be able to live up to the standards he set—in words only—for the victim? Knowing that, for a person who is alcoholic, the only recourse is no alcohol at all, does today’s reader feel hopeful about Calliope or about the town’s prospects of retaining peace. Can this event become a “turning point” for Calliope?

Hints for reading stories aloud:

Reading fiction aloud in content classes can lock in the practical applications of science, history, and mathematics. Students hear the story as a pleasant change of pace, and since O. Henry’s stories always have “a twist at the end,” the incentive to listen closely is built in. Your expressive oral

reading can make up for the fact that O. Henry's extensive, colorful, and precise vocabulary is a bit out of reach of middle grades students (as well as some adults!).

1. Print out the story from the Internet or photocopy it from a book. Use your computer or the copier to enlarge the text to a comfortable size for reading. This will help you keep your place easily or find it again after an interruption.
2. Read with a touch of melodrama, taking each character's part as they speak. Students love to hear a male teacher speak a female part in falsetto or a female teacher take the role of a gruff outlaw. Often you can omit the "John said" and "Mary replied" in a conversation because your vocal traits are sufficient for students to keep track of who is speaking.
3. Racist language: Consider approaching the "Huck Finn" issue one reading at a time. Each occasion is different; you do not have to take a permanent stand. (1) If a story is being shared for illumination on racial issues and/or there will be time for discussion, certainly include the language and attitudes of the day. Reading a century-old story often clarifies even the outdated nature of racist thinking and language (and being "outdated" may be a greater fear of students than is harming others). In addition, students who have heard contemporary racist language on television may be eager to take a stand against it. Taking a position publicly is a simple but powerful step toward socially acceptable behavior and, furthermore, a classmate's stand affirms to others that such language is not acceptable in this class. (2) If the story is being shared to make another point strongly and the language would be troubling to students, alter inappropriate words as you read. (You can even tell students afterward that you changed some of the language in the story so that everyone, including you, could focus more clearly on other aspects of the tale.) For example, if you are reading "A Chaparral Christmas Gift" as a holiday heartwarmer, change the few words which would prevent its being that. Incendiary language is not heartwarming!
4. One good way to add fiction-reading to a busy class schedule is to finish out each period with five to seven minutes of oral reading. At bell time, stop at the end of a paragraph and mark the period number for your stopping point for each class. (If using a book, place a post-it note in the margin.) At the next class meeting, erase your note, and mark again (or move the post-it note) at the end of that day's reading.
5. Answer student questions, of course, but do not feel compelled to drill them on the story or ask too many questions to check their understanding. Have enjoyment as a goal.
6. O. Henry stories are excellent choices for group read-alouds. His high-interest tales reinforce simple values such as sportsmanship, courtesy, generosity, personal pride, compassion, sweetness in romantic relationships, trustworthiness, perseverance, and other traits of character. They give clear and colorful views of a different day and time.

41 Stories by O. Henry, Burton Raffel, ed. New American Library (Signet Classic) 1984.

O. Henry Selected Stories, Guy Davenport, ed. and intro. Viking Penguin, 1993.

Out of print but often found in Texas libraries:

McClintock, Marian, and Michael Simms, *O. Henry's Texas Stories*. Dallas: Still Point Press, 1986.

O. Henry's original volumes have been reprinted numerous times throughout the century, and many are available in school and public libraries: *Cabbages and Kings* (1904), *The Four Million* (1906), *The Trimmed Lamp* (1907), *The Voice of the City* (1908), *The Gentle Grafters* (1908), *Roads of*

Destiny (1909), *Options* (1909), *Strictly Business* (1910), *Whirligigs* (1910), *Sixes and Sevens* (1911). His best-known stories are in these collections; others were published posthumously. Many “Complete Works” as well as numerous incomplete collections have been published over the years and are available in libraries. Check the tables of contents if you are seeking a particular story.