

Author Focus: O. Henry

Creative
Writing II



The Beginning

- O. Henry is not his real name
- Real name: William Sydney Porter
- Born in Greenboro, North Carolina in 1862

Porter's Crimes?

- In 1894, Porter was accused of stealing money from a bank he worked at.
- Scared, he fled the country (ended up in Honduras)
- He returned in 1897, because he heard his wife was dying.
- He was arrested, charged, and convicted of embezzling money from the bank—there has been much debate on whether or not he was guilty.
- He entered a penitentiary (prison) in Columbus, Ohio in 1898

The Writing Career Begins

- Porter started writing stories while in prison in order to support his daughter.
- His first story, published in 1899, was “Whistling Dick’s Christmas Stocking.”
- He ended up serving three years of his five-year sentence.
- When released from prison in 1901, he kept the name O. Henry and continued writing for a living.

Prolific Writer

- From Dec. 1903-Jan. 1906, he wrote a story a week for the *New York World* (while writing other stories for other magazines).
- His second collection of published short stories, *The Four Million* (1906), contained his most famous story: “The Gift of the Magi.”
- He continued to write up until he died of cirrhosis of the liver (he was an alcoholic) on 5 June 1910

His Mighty Output and his Legacy

- During his short career as a writer (just over a decade), O. Henry was very prolific:
 - He published 10 collections of short stories
 - He published over 600 short stories
- In 1918, the O. Henry Memorial Awards were established to honour the year's best magazine stories.