Collaborative School of the Arts

at theREP

2026-27 SEASON • ATTHEREP.ORG

STUDY GUIDE



INSPIRED BY THE STORY BY O. HENRY

THE MAGI

A PLAY BY HELEN R. MURRAY WITH
MUSIC AND LYRICS BY ELI PAFUMI

THE MAGI

at theREP★

NOV. 27 - DEC. 24

SYNOPSIS

Judevine and Nixon are partners in life and in music, touring together as a band and chasing the creative life they've always dreamed of. But as they grow older, the realities of adulthood begin to press in. Judevine longs to keep moving — the road, the music, and the freedom of performing are where she feels most alive. Nixon, meanwhile, yearns for stability — a home, a place to land, maybe even a family someday.

When a major touring opportunity arrives at the same time they are finally able to afford a house. the couple faces an impossible choice. Each wants to support the other's dream, and each secretly sacrifices their own desire in the hope of giving the other what they want most. Their well intentioned choices collide in an unexpected twist of irony, revealing that their love — not the house or the tour — is the true center of their lives.

"The Magi" reimagines the classic tale of selfless giving through a modern lens, blending humor, heart, and music to explore how love shapes the biggest decisions we make.

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHTS

Helen R. Murray — Book and Lyrics

Helen R. Murray is a playwright, lyricist, and theatre artist known for creating emotionally resonant, character driven work. Her writing often explores relationships, identity, and the choices that shape who we become. With extensive experience as a director and artistic leader, Murray blends theatricality with grounded, human storytelling. In "The Magi," she brings a contemporary voice to a timeless theme: the sacrifices we make for the people we love. This production is also a unique family collaboration, as Murray worked alongside her son in developing the musical.

Eli Pafumi — Music and Lyrics

Eli Pafumi is a composer, musician, and theatre maker whose work spans folk, rock, and contemporary musical theatre. His compositions are known for their warmth, intimacy, and melodic storytelling. In "The Magi," Pafumi's music reflects the emotional landscape of the characters — the freedom of the open road, the comfort of home, and the tension between ambition and stability. Some of the songs in the show were originally written when Pafumi was a teenager, giving parts of the score an authentic, youthful emotional perspective.

CENTRAL THEMES IN THE PLAY



SACRIFICE

Characters give up something meaningful for someone they love — echoing the Biblical Magi and O. Henry's story.

AMBITION VS. STABILITY

The tension between pursuing a dream and building a stable life drives the central conflict.

LOVE AND PARTNERSHIP

The play explores how relationships require compromise, communication, and vulnerability.

IDENTITY AND LIFE CHOICES

Judevine and Nixon must decide who they want to be and what kind of life they want to build.

ADAPTATION AND STORYTELLING

The play reimagines a classic tale for a modern audience, showing how timeless themes evolve.

BUY A HOUSE OR GO ON TOUR?

BIG LIFE DECISIONS

In Helen R. Murray and Eli Pafumi's "The Magi," we meet two characters, Judevine and Nixon, who are at a crossroads in their lives: should they settle down and buy a house, or continue touring as a band? If they continue touring, they'll get to keep pursuing their passion for music. But if they buy a house, they get to go home to the same place every day and maybe have a family in the future.

Does buying a house mean settling *down*? Or settling *for* a different life than they want?

BUYING A HOUSE ENTAILS:

- Having enough money for a down payment (a small portion of the house's price that buyers have to pay upfront).
- Getting a mortgage, which is a loan that has to be repaid in small installments over a period of time, usually 15 or 30 years. If you stop making payments on your mortgage, the bank can repossess your house.
- Some level of commitment to staying in one place, and the possibility of providing a stable life.

CONTINUING TO TOUR ENTAILS:

- Obtaining touring contracts (binding agreements between musicians, their managers, and the venues where they play). These contracts detail the logistics, payment, and obligations for all involved. Most touring contracts only last weeks or months, so many musicians don't have a "settled" life.
- Being on the road most of the time, not having a "home" to go to every night, not having furniture or a garden, and not having a stable environment.

ADAPTATION: WHEN ONE WORK BORROWS FROM ANOTHER

It's possible that you recognize some elements in "The Magi," including the idea that people who love each other often sacrifice what they want for the other person's happiness. The themes in this musical actually go back thousands of years.

- **In the New Testament of the Christian Bible, the Book of Matthew contains a story about three Magi (sometimes known as three kings or three wise men) who come to visit Jesus Christ directly after his birth and bring gold, frankincense, and myrrh. They travel very far from the East to arrive there, so their journey and gifts involve self-sacrifice and devotion.**

- **The word "magi" (singular "magus") originally meant "priests" in ancient Iranian religions, referring to men skilled in astrology and dream interpretation.**



The Biblical Magi as depicted in stained glass at the Otley Parish Church in Otley, England.



O. Henry, also known as William Sidney Porter.

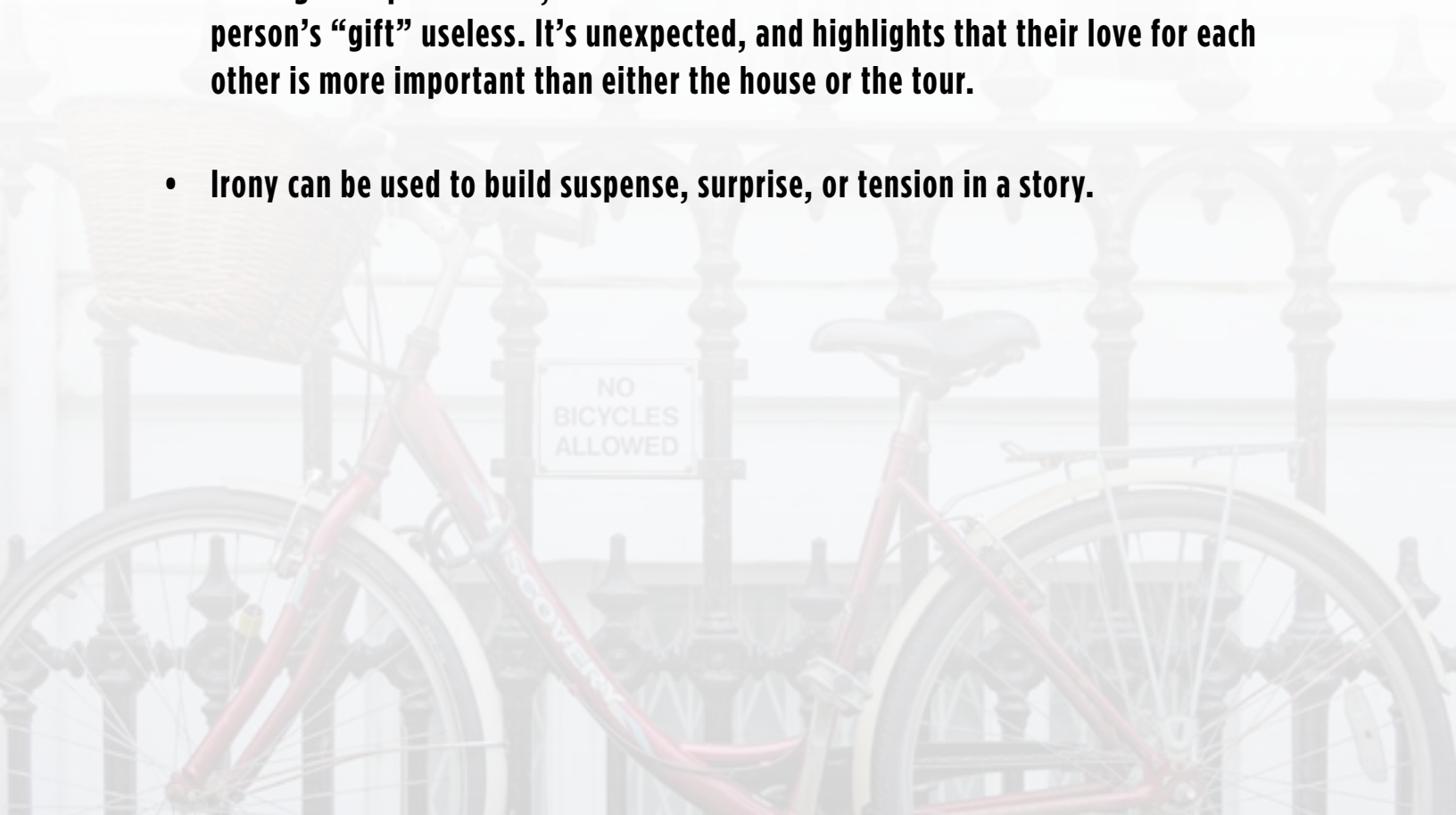
- **In 1905, American writer O. Henry published a short story called "The Gift of the Magi." In that story, a young wife named Della has only $1.87 to buy a Christmas gift for her husband, Jim. The couple don't have much money, but they do have two valuable things: Della's beautiful long hair and Jim's pocket watch. They also have their love for each other. Looking to obtain more money so she can buy Jim a better gift, Della sells her hair and uses the money to buy a chain for Jim's watch. Jim, meanwhile, sells his watch to buy a set of combs for Della's hair. Now, neither of them are able to use the gifts they bought each other, but they still have their love for each other. The story ends when the narrator opines that people who sacrifice for each other this way are as wise as the magi in the old Bible story.**

WHAT YOU EXPECT IS NOT WHAT YOU GET: IRONY

- Irony is a literary device that features a contradiction between what is expected and what actually occurs. Examples might include: a coffee shop where all the employees hate coffee, a person who says “oh great!” when something bad happens, or a firehouse burning down.

- In “The Magi,” irony occurs when Judevine gives up the touring contract and Nixon gives up the house, and their sacrifices for each other render the other person’s “gift” useless. It’s unexpected, and highlights that their love for each other is more important than either the house or the tour.

- Irony can be used to build suspense, surprise, or tension in a story.



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Would you rather settle down in a house or go on tour with a band? What do you lose or gain in each situation?

2. How are the three stories (the Biblical story, O. Henry's "The Gift of the Magi," and Helen R. Murray and Eli Pafumi's "The Magi") similar to each other?

3. How are the three stories different from each other?

4. Can you think of a time when someone made a big sacrifice for you?

5. Can you find the irony in the piece of graffiti pictured below, which was found on a wall in Paris?

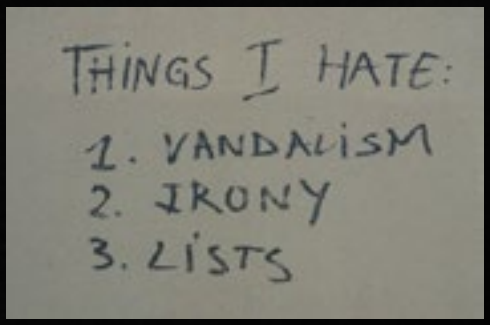


Image from: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Humoristic_grafitti_(cropped).jpg

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

1. Modern Magi Rewrite
Students rewrite "The Gift of the Magi" in a modern setting — social media influencers, athletes, students, etc.

2. Decision Mapping
Students create a visual map of Judevine and Nixon's choices, consequences, and motivations.

3. Irony Hunt
Students find examples of irony in books, films, or real life and present them.

4. Debate: House vs. Tour
Students argue for one choice, using evidence from the play.

5. Adaptation Workshop
Students adapt a short fable or personal story into a scene, exploring how meaning changes.

Writing Prompts

- Write a journal entry from Judevine or Nixon's perspective the night before their decision.
- Compare the sacrifices in "The Magi" to those in O. Henry's story.
- Explain how irony shapes the emotional impact of the play.
- Describe a major life decision you've faced or imagine one you might face in the future.

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