

# Teacher Guide

## “Christmas is a Sad Season for the Poor”

By John Cheever

### Suggested Lesson Procedure: ~3 Days

**1) Anticipation Guide:** Have students complete the anticipation guide by reading each statement and indicating whether they agree or disagree, and then answer the questions that follow. They can do this in pairs or independently. (~10 minutes) Have a class discussion about the statements and questions on the worksheet. (~10 minutes)

**2) Before Reading:** Teach students the 10 vocabulary words using the “Introduction Lesson” Powerpoint presentation. Students should copy down definitions using the graphic organizer. Review the introduction slides: Meet the Author, Meet the Protagonist, and Setting. (~15 minutes)

**3) Read Story:** Read the short story by John Cheever. The whole story takes about 30 minutes to read without stopping. I suggest taking breaks to discuss and answer the reading questions as you go. (~45 minutes)

**4) Questions:** Make sure students have answered all of the reading questions and you have reviewed the answers as a class. Assign students the after reading questions. Let students work in groups of 2-3. Facilitate a discussion after 20 minutes. (~25 minutes)

**5) Creative Writing Options:** Ask students to complete one of the writing options independently. (15 minutes)

**5) Greeting Card:** Give students the opportunity to create and decorate a holiday card and write a meaningful message of gratitude. (30+ minutes) Provide the materials necessary.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Anticipation Guide

Mark whether or not you agree or disagree with each statement.



	Agree	Disagree
1. People are more generous during the holidays.		
2. Guilt is a stronger motivator than kindness.		
3. The more gifts you receive, the happier you are.		
4. The holidays are the loneliest time of year.		
5. People only appreciate what they earn through their own efforts.		
6. There is no such thing as a selfless good deed.		
7. It's better to pretend to be happy during the holidays, even if you don't feel that		
8. The wealthy are responsible for helping those less fortunate.		
9. Telling others about your problems will make you feel better.		
10. The holidays highlight economic inequality more than any other time of year.		

### Discussion Questions

1) What do you think the following phrase means? "Charity begins at home." Do you agree?

2) What does it mean to be financially secure? How important is it?

3) What's the difference between sympathy and pity? How does it make you feel when someone pities you?

4) Are acts of generosity more for the giver or for the receiver?

5) Pick one of the statements from the anticipation guide above. Explain in a few sentences why you agree or disagree.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

*"Christmas is a Sad Season for the Poor" Vocabulary*



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amorphous	adj		
immoral	adj	PREVIEW	
petulance	noun		
condemn	verb		
reverie	noun	PREVIEW	
majesty	noun		
jubilantly	adverb		
precipitated	verb	PREVIEW	
paroxysm	noun		
licentious	adj		

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Name:

Date:

**"Christmas is a Sad Season for the Poor"**

**Reading Questions**

1) Why does Charlie feel bitter on Christmas Day?



2) Describe Charlie's interaction with Mrs. Hewing.

3) Why does Charlie feel like a prisoner?

4) Describe Charlie's interaction with Mrs. DePaul.

5) Why is Mrs. Gadshill lonely during the holidays? Why doesn't Charlie believe her?

6) What lie does Charlie say to Mrs. Fuller?

7) What do you think Charlie expects from people as he continuously complains about his tough life? What is his motivation?

8) Why does Mrs. Weston say she knows how Charlie feels?

9) Why do all the tenants believe Charlie as worthy of their charity?

10) What does Charlie receive?

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11) How does Charlie scare Mrs. Gadshill? What happens as a result?

12) How does Charlie feel about all the charity he received?

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13) What does Charlie decide to do with all the gifts he was given?

14) What does the landlady do after Charlie leaves? Why must she hurry?

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15) How does the tone change throughout the story?

#### After Reading

1) What themes does the author explore about charity, alienation, and lying?

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2) Why does Charlie say Santa Claus only visits the rich?

3) What is the main conflict in the story?

4) Why is it that the vast amount of sympathy Charlie receives does not actually make him feel any better?

5) How do you feel about Charlie? Is he a good person?

6) Is comparison the thief of joy?

7) Is Christmas a sad season for the poor, as the title suggests?

8) In what ways can "Christmas is a Sad Season for the Poor" be seen as a mirror or window to modern society?

9) What do you think the author John Cheever truly thinks about the Christmas season?

10) Is there a day of the year you feel out of sync with the rest of society? Why do you feel differently about it?

11) Did Charlie deserve to be fired? Why or why not?

## Creative Writing Options

Pick one of the following.

Each option must be a minimum of 8 sentences in length.

Option A) Write a friendly letter to Charlie responding to his complaints on Christmas Day. Offer him support and guidance as he searches for a new job and a new direction in life. Share some advice to help him gain perspective. What lessons can he learn from his situation? What might he have done differently? Encourage him and provide ideas for moving forward.

Option B) Write a letter from Charlie to his boss, asking for a second chance. Use a reflective and apologetic tone to explain what Charlie has learned and how he has grown from the experience. The letter should be written in the first person and emphasize Charlie's positive qualities and gratitude for the opportunities he's been given.

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## After Reading Project

Money isn't the only precious commodity we can offer to those in need—we can give our time, expertise, love, or even just a smile. A smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring can cost us nothing but have the potential to turn a life around.



“Service to others  
is the rent you pay  
for your room  
here on earth.”  
Mohammed Ali

### Directions: Create a Holiday Card with a Gratitude Message

1. Design Your Card
  - Use any paper or materials provided to create a visually appealing holiday card.
  - Include festive decorations such as drawings, colors, or creative patterns.
2. Write Your Message
  - Inside the card, write a heartfelt message of gratitude.
  - Address it to someone who has made a positive impact on you (a friend, family member, teacher, or even a stranger).
  - Explain why you're thankful for them and how they've made a difference in your life.
3. Sign Your Card

### Grading Rubric

Design & Creativity	Card is visually appealing, festive, and unique. Your card is colored, detailed, and aesthetically pleasing.	10 Points
Message Content	Message is thoughtful, detailed, and sincere. Your message should be at least 5 fully developed sentences. You should have a greeting and a salutation.	10 Points
Neatness & Effort	Card is neatly done with clear effort shown. Little to no errors. If there are any mistakes, they do not detract from the overall appearance and message of the card.	10 Points



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**CHRISTMAS IS A SAD  
SEASON FOR THE POOR**  
*by John Cheever*



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AMORPHOUS

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**Part of Speech:** adjective

**Definition:** lacking a clear structure or focus

**Synonym:** undefined

**Example Sentence:** The artist's amorphous sculpture sparked endless interpretations among the viewers.



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# IMMORAL

**Part of Speech:** adjective

**Definition:** describes not moral or not conforming to accepted standards of morality or ethics

**Synonym:** sinful

**Example Sentence:** The company's decision to pay its workers half of what was promised was widely regarded as immoral.



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# PETULANCE

**Part of Speech:** noun

**Definition:** the quality of being childishly sulky or bad-tempered

**Synonym:** crankiness

**Example Sentence:** His petulance was evident when he refused to speak to anyone after losing the spelling bee.



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# CONDEMN

**Part of Speech:** verb

**Definition:** to express strong disapproval of something or someone, typically in public

**Synonym:** criticize

**Example Sentence:** The mayor was quick to condemn the act of vandalism at the city park.



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# REVERIE

**Part of Speech:** noun

**Definition:** a state of being lost in one's thoughts

**Synonym:** daydream

**Example Sentence:** She was jolted out of her reverie by the loud crash outside the window.



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# MAJESTY

**Part of Speech:** noun

**Definition:** impressiveness in scale or proportion

**Synonym:** grandeur

**Example Sentence:** The majesty of the mountain range left Jacob speechless.



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# JUBILANTLY

**Part of Speech:** adverb

**Definition:** in a manner expressing great joy and triumph

**Synonym:** ecstatically

**Example Sentence:** The team jubilantly celebrated their excellent grade on the group project.



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PRECIPITATED

**Part of Speech:** verb (past tense of "precipitate")

**Definition:** to cause an event or situation to happen suddenly or unexpectedly

**Synonym:** provoke

**Example Sentence:** The icy road precipitated a multi-vehicle car accident, with cars sliding into one another on the highway.



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# PAROXYSM

**Part of Speech:** noun

**Definition:** a sudden and uncontrollable burst of emotion or activity

**Synonym:** outburst

**Example Sentence:** They were overcome by a paroxysm of laughter that echoed through the hall.



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# LICENTIOUS

**Part of Speech:** adjective

**Definition:** describes lacking restraint or disregarding rules; without boundaries

**Synonym:** reckless

**Example Sentence:** Her licentious texting during work hours showed she cared more about her social life than anything else.



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# Meet the Author

- John Cheever (1912–1982) was a highly acclaimed American writer known for his poignant short stories and novels that often explored themes of suburban life, human frailty, and social dynamics.
- Cheever often writes about the lives of ordinary people, focusing on their emotional struggles.
- "The Stories of John Cheever" (A Short Story Collection) won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1979.
- Cheever's name was closely associated with *The New Yorker*, a periodical that published many of his stories.
- "Christmas is a Sad Season for the Poor" was published in *The New Yorker* on December 24, 1949.



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# *Meet the Protagonist*

- Charlie Leary works as an elevator operator at a rich apartment building.
- An elevator operator was a job that was common in large urban buildings before automated systems were available.
- Operators controlled the elevator by regulating its speed and coordinating the timing of its movements. They also assisted passengers with entering and exiting, as well as opening and closing the doors.
- Historical Context: The role was prominent in the early to mid-20th century, especially in high-rise office buildings, hotels, and luxury apartment complexes.
- Charlie's job clearly highlights the divide between working-class employees and the affluent tenants.



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# *Setting*

- New York City (Upper East Side)
- Christmas Day, 1940s-1950s
- The wealthy lived in luxury apartments and brownstones in areas like the Upper East Side, while the poor resided in crowded, under-resourced neighborhoods in the Bronx, Brooklyn, and other boroughs.
- The economy was marked by a strong divide between sectors; white-collar and professional jobs were predominantly filled by the educated upper-middle class, while working-class and service sector jobs were filled by immigrants and lower-income residents.



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