

APPENDIX 6.4 Sample Short Story Discussion Guide: “The Last Leaf” by O. Henry

1. Why do you think O. Henry called the story “The Last Leaf?”
2. The author uses lots of figurative language, descriptive detail, and imagery in the story. What do you think are the strongest examples?
3. Why do you think O. Henry chooses to personify pneumonia? Was this an effective use of figurative language? Explain.
4. How would you describe the mood of the story after Johnsy becomes sick? What actions, dialogue, and language help convey the mood?
5. How would you describe the relationship between Johnsy and Sue? How is their relationship important to the story?
6. Do you think Johnsy really believes that she will pass away with the last leaf? Why or why not? Cite evidence from the text to support your thinking.
7. This story was published in 1907 and takes place around that time. Does the time period have an impact on the story? If the story took place today, would anything be different or not? Explain.
8. How does Johnsy’s point of view change across the story? How is this important to the central idea(s)?
9. O. Henry is famous for writing stories with a “twist,” or surprise at the end. What was the twist in this story? Were you surprised? Explain?
10. The author describes Behrman as a failed artist. Why is this significant to the story? Do you agree?
11. One of the central ideas of the story is hope. How is hope an important theme? What do you think O. Henry message is about hope? What other central ideas may be found in this story?
12. What is your overall opinion of the story? What other comments do you have to share?