

Disappointment beneath the Bows

a subpar **Superlative Story** from your teacher

Sebastian woke up on that snowy morning, and for a moment, he forgot there was a tree downstairs with presents underneath it.

After running downstairs, he tore into the first package he found with his name on it. The plastic toy within was an obvious re-gift, and he felt a small wave of disappointment.

Sebastian grabbed a second present. This one had a fancy bow on it, so his hopes were high, but his disappointment grew a bit deeper when he realized he'd been given a gift—a bicycle helmet—that he already owned.

The third present under the tree was the biggest, so Sebastian knew his luck was about to change as he sliced into the paper with a pair of scissors. The box was huge, but only the smell of musty clothes greeted his nose as the seal was broken. Disappointing presents often take the form of new clothes, but the most disappointing present of clothes is when they are hand-me-downs from one's own cousin.

Sebastian stared at the three disappointing gifts. At least his birthday was coming in three weeks. Maybe his luck would change then.

Work with a partner to find up to ten differences between the two versions of the same story found on this handout:

Story Differences:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

Disappointment beneath the Bows

a much better **Superlative Story** from your teacher

Sebastian woke up on that snowy morning, and for the briefest of moments, he forgot there was a decorated tree downstairs with presents sitting beneath it. The fall semester had practically ended on December 23 this year, and Sebastian had hardly caught up on his sleep before they sprung the big holiday on him. He'd seen some presents under the tree for him, but he just hadn't had the time or energy to care much. Until now. Suddenly, he realized a treasure trove might be awaiting him under that tree.

After dashing downstairs, Sebastian tore into the first package he found with his name on it, ignoring the fact that no one else in the drafty house was even up yet. His fingers were cold, but they took hold beneath the edge of the paper, and a fine rip of paper woke everyone else upstairs. Sebastian didn't care though; he could tell there was a toy in this type of packaging—wrapped or not.

The plastic toy revealed as his first gift was simply disappointing—the kind of toy you'd choose for a child if you'd never had a child, known a child, or perhaps been a child. From the safety of its packaging, Sebastian could see it was made of lacquered wood and brightly-colored plastic, and seemed to exist more for teaching geometrical shapes than acting as a toy that was amusing or fun. This felt like a re-gift—saved by a parent who also saw how lousy a toy it was so that it could be re-wrapped and gifted once more. Ugly and un-fun gifts, Sebastian had discovered, often became re-gifts.

Not pessimistic yet, Sebastian grabbed for a second present.

By this time, his parents had come downstairs, looking tired and disheveled. "Did you already start?" his mother asked without looking at him.

"Yes, but the first one was worth missing," the greedy boy mumbled as he examined the second gift. This one had a fancy silver bow on it, so his hopes were high. The shape and weight of the wrapped box also were promising; Sebastian suspected it would be a model of some sort. "What were they thinking?" he grumbled when he realized he'd been given a bicycle helmet from his grandparents the previous year, and here they were giving him the exact same helmet again.

"What did my parents give you this year?" Mom asked, looking for a place to sit.

"Same bike helmet as last year," Sebastian replied.

"At least they used a different bow on the package this year," Dad said. No one else laughed at this joke; Sebastian's Mom because she hadn't heard it, Sebastian because he was still fuming with more disappointment.

"The third present will be the good one," Sebastian said under his breath as he reached for the biggest present under the tree with his name on it. It was heavy. That had to be a good sign, right? Sebastian's Dad laughed as he watched his son have to slide the gift away from the tree since it was too heavy for him to lift.

"Careful, son," Sebastian's father said. "A present that large is probably going to be fragile. Not like clothes."

But it was a box full of clothes, and not even new ones. The box was packed with musty, used clothes: hand-me-downs from his twin cousins, Daniel and Dale. Never before were there a set of twins with worse taste in clothes than Sebastian's cousins. Going through this box was going to be excruciatingly painful.

"How nice," Sebastian's Mom said, "now you'll have some new clothes for the spring."

"New?" our disappointed present-opener almost said, but didn't. Instead, he sat there quietly, the most disappointed he'd felt in a long time. The yule log crackled, his mother was humming carols, and somewhere in the kitchen he could smell hot cocoa being poured into mugs. This was not the holiday he had been hoping for.

One optimistic thought entered Sebastian's brain as he sat there among his disappointing gifts: his birthday was coming in three weeks. Maybe someone would give him something meaningful or fun.