

THE GIFT OF THE MAGI Explanation:

"The Gift of the Magi" begins at the small and meager flat of James (Jim) and Della Dillingham Young on the day before Christmas. Della has just finished paying the bills and finds that all she has left to spend on a present for Jim is \$1.87. At first, she bemoans her situation as the narrator takes note on the broken mail chute and doorbell, the small pier glass mirror, and the "grey cat walking across the grey fence in the grey backyard".

Della struggles to find a solution to her predicament: she wants to get Jim a present that he will treasure and rightly deserves for all of his hard work, but she only has \$1.87 to spend. Then she gets an idea. The most valuable thing she has is her hair. Her hair is long and beautiful and she compares it to the beauty of the Queen of Sheba. She quickly puts on her "old brown coat and her old brown hat" and hurries off to a hairdresser named Madame Sofronie. Sofronie cuts off Della's hair and gives her \$20 for it.

Della then begins to search for the perfect present for Jim. After being disappointed by the gifts she sees because they just aren't good enough, she remembers Jim's most treasured possession: his grandfather's gold watch. She also remembers that Jim had to tie a leather strap to the watch after the original chain broke, and that was precisely the type of gift she wanted to buy for him. She goes from shop to shop looking for just the right watch chain until she at last finds a handsome, platinum chain that is perfect. It costs \$21. Della buys it, returning home with \$0.87 leftover.

Upon reaching their flat, Della begins to worry that Jim might not find her attractive without her hair, so she spends the rest of the evening trying to make it as presentable as possible. She then begins preparing dinner. Jim comes home right on schedule and, as soon as sees Della without her long, beautiful hair, he stops in shock. Della doesn't know what to make of his reaction; he isn't angry, or sad, or disgusted - just sort of surprised and confused. When she questions him, he hands her a gift and tells her that it is his Christmas present to her and that she will understand his reaction once she sees it. She opens it and sees that it contains a set of combs that she had been yearning forever since she had seen them in a Broadway window. He had bought her a gift to go with her beautiful hair, and now she had no hair to put them in.

Then Della remembers her gift for Jim and gives it to him to cheer him up. But it doesn't. Jim tells her that in order to get enough money to buy the combs, he had to sell his watch. Then Jim smiles and says that they should keep the gifts to remind themselves just how much they love one another.

The story ends with the storyteller comparing Jim and Della's gifts to the gifts of the Magi: the three wise men who are said to have brought the first Christmas gifts to the baby Jesus. We are told that, even though the main characters would seem to be very foolish, as they gave up their most valuable possessions and were left with completely useless items, because Jim and Della had to sacrifice their most precious belongings in order to obtain these gifts they showed that their love was far more valuable to them than any possession could ever possibly be.

Questions and Answers:

Part A

1. Why was Della saving up her money for?

Ans. Della was saving up her money to buy a nice Christmas gift for her beloved husband, Jim.

2. Where did Della look at her reflection?

Ans. Della looked at her reflection in the mirror.

3. Who would the queen of Sheba be jealous of?

Ans. The queen of Sheba would be jealous of Della's long hair.

4. Where did Della run to after looking at her reflection in the pier-glass?

Ans. After looking at her reflection in the pier-glass, Della ran into the kitchen to prepare dinner.

5. How much money did Madame offer Della for her hair?

Ans. Madame offered twenty dollars to Della for her hair.

6. What was the present that Della chose for Jim?

Ans. Della chose a platinum job chain for Jim's watch.

7. How did she look after the 'repair' of her hair?

Ans. She looked like a Coney Island chorus girl after the 'repair' of her hair.

8. How old was Jim and how did he look?

Ans. Jim was twenty-two years old. He looked poor, thin and very serious.

Part B

1. Who were the Magi?

Ans. The Magi were the three wise men who travelled from the East to Jerusalem. They were guided by a star to see the infant, Jesus. They carried precious gifts for Christ.

2. Why was Della worried?

Ans. Della was worried because it was Christmas Eve the next day and she had not the adequate money to buy a gift for her beloved husband Jim.

3. What did Jim do to get a gift for Della?

Ans. Jim sold his most treasured watch, a family heirloom which even King Solomon might have been envious of. And with that money, he bought a gift for Della.

4. What was Jim's reaction when he returned home?

Ans. When Jim returned home, he stopped inside the door, as immovable as a setter at the scent of quail. His eyes were fixed upon Della, and there was an expression in them that she could not read, and it terrified her.

5. Why did Della count her money three times?

Ans. Della counted her money three times to make sure that her savings were too small. She had expected that she could save more but when she found her savings was only \$1.87, she counted it again and again.

6. What did Della do after she realized she had very little money with her?

Ans. When Della realized that she had very little money with her, she decided to cut her hair and sell them in order to get some money and buy a nice gift for her Jim.

7. How did Della succeed in saving one dollar and eighty-seven cents?

Ans. Della succeeded in saving 1.87 dollars by bulldozing the grocer and the vegetable man and the butcher until one's cheeks burned with the silent imputation of parsimony that such close dealing implied.

8. What makes the author come to the conclusion that life is made up of sobs, sniffles, and smiles, with sniffles predominating"?

Ans. The author concludes that 'life is made up of sobs, sniffles, predominating'. It is because life is full of mixed incidents and according to that varied feelings and emotions. At times one is happy, the other time one cries, At times one gains, the other time one loses. Hence, all the sobs, smiles and sniffles.

9. Describe Della's flat? Ans. Della's was a furnished flat that cost \$8 per week. It did not exactly look like that of a beggar's house, but it certainly had that word on the first look. The flat had a card bearing its owner's name. There was a letter-box where no letter ever dropped. There was also an electric button from which no mortal finger coaxed a ring.

10. Why did everything look grey to Della that morning?

Ans. That morning everything looked grey to Della. It was because she was sad to find out that she could save only 1.87 dollars with which she was in no way able to buy any gift for her Jim. This thought made her so sad that everything became colourless and dull to her.

11. What had Della planned all along?

Ans. Della had been planning all along to buy a nice gift for her Jim on the occasion of Christmas Eve. She even saved every single penny that she could to work her plan on.

12. What idea came to Della's mind as she stood looking at her reflection in the pier-glass?

Ans. As Della stood looking at her reflection in the pier-glass she thought that Jim would say that with her short hair, she now looked like a Coney Island chorus girl.

13. What were the two possessions of the James Dillingham Young of which they both were very proud?

Ans. There were two possessions of James Dillingham Young. One was Jim's gold watch that had been his father's and his grandfather's. The other was Della's hair.

14. What was enough for Jim to do to make King Solomon envious?

Ans. Jim had a gold watch that had been his forefathers'. Jim would have pulled out his watch every time he passed, just to see him pluck at his beard from envy.

Part C

1. Bring out the relation between Della and the queen of Sheba

Ans. O' Henry presents a very ironical yet pleasing contrast between Della and Queen Sheba. Della is young and very beautiful. Though she is poor she lives happily with her husband. Her beautiful hair fell about her rippling and they shine like a cascade of brown waters. Her hair reached below her knee and made itself almost a garment of her. On the other hand, the Queen of Sheba is a biblical character. She was a very rich and powerful queen. She came to King Solomon with a wealth of spices, gold, and jewels to test for herself whether King Solomon was truly wise or not. In the story, the writer tells that if Queen Sheba had lived in the flat across the airshaft, Della would have let her hair hang out the window someday just to depreciate Her Majesty's jewels and gifts. And queen Sheba would have been jealous of Della for not being able to beautiful hair. possess such

2. Bring out the relation between Jim and King Solomon.

Ans. O' Henry presents a very ironical yet pleasing contrast between Jim and King Solomon. Jim is the husband of Della. They are very poor. Jim could not earn enough money to buy even a Christmas gift for his wife. Hence he sold his most treasured possession, a watch, and then he bought a gift for Della. On the other hand, King Solomon is a biblical character. Queen of Sheba

came to King Solomon with a wealth of spices, gold, and jewels to test herself whether King Solomon was wise or not.

In the story, the writer tells that if King Solomon had been the janitor, with all his treasures piled up in the basement, Jim would have pulled out his watch every time he passed, just to see him pluck at his beard from envy.

3. Show how the 'twist in the tale' makes the story of Jim and Della a moral lesson.

Ans. "The Gift of the Magi" is one of the best stories of O' Henry. It tells a story about Jim and Della who are very poor. They are so poor that they can not even afford gifts for each other. But they loved each other very much. So they sell off their most precious possessions to buy Christmas gifts for each other. And the sad part is none of them know about the sacrifice when they were being made. On the eve of Christmas, Della parts with her beautiful hair. For Jim, Della's long and lovely hair was beautiful enough to make the Queen of Sheba jealous. On the other hand, Jim parts with his watch, a family heirloom which even King Solomon might have been envious of. The ironic 'twist in the tale' is that both of them trade off the very treasures each of them possessed and for which the gifts were meant. And they had to wait one more year to use their gifts. The story ends with a moral lesson of what constitutes the true spirit of gifts giving on Christmas. Selflessness had a desire to see the loved ones who receive the gifts happily are the inherent themes of the story. Sacrifice complements the beauty of the story. What makes the story more beautiful is both the lovers made sacrifices to see and please the other.

4. Examine the significance and appropriateness of the title of the the story.

Ans. The title of the story "The Gift of the Magi" is appropriate enough in the sense that the story talks about sacrifices made by two wise people to buy and present gifts to their loved ones on Christmas Day. The Magi are the three wise people who came from the East to Jerusalem. They were guided by a star to see the infant, Jesus. They carried precious gifts for Christ. Likewise, Jim and Della are guided by their wisdom. They did not let the Christmas go without presenting gifts to each other, even though they lacked money. Like the Magi sacrificed a lot to complete their journey and to see the infant Jesus, Jim and Della to sacrificed their most treasured possessions just to make and see each other happy on Christmas Day.

5. Based on the events, attempt a justification of the story as an example of comic irony.

Ans. "The Gift of the Magi" is about Jim and Della who are very poor. They are so poor that they can not even afford gifts for each other. But they loved each other very much. So they sell off their most precious possessions to buy Christmas gifts for each other. And the comic irony is that none of them know about the sacrifice when they were being made. On the eve of Christmas, Della parts with her beautiful hair. On the other hand, Jim parts with his watch, a family heirloom which even King Solomon might have been envious of. The ironic 'twist in the tale' is that both of them trade off the very treasures each of them possessed and for which the gifts were meant. This is the ultimate comic irony of the story: Jim sold his gold watch but Della had bought him a chain, worthy of his watch. Similarly, Jim bought a set of combs for Della who sold her hair to buy him a gift. And comically they had to wait one more year to use their gifts.

6. How did the next two hours pass by for Della?

Ans. After reaching home, Della got out her curling irons and lighted the gas and went to work repairing the ravages made by generosity added to love. Then she said silent prayers about the simplest everyday things. When she heard Jim's steps on the stairs, she whispered: "Please God, make him think I am still pretty". After that, she went into the kitchen to prepare dinner and when she was done, she waited for Jim's arrival fearing and hoping that Jim doesn't get angry about her new look with short hair.

7. Why did Jim's expression terrify Della?

Ans. Jim's expression terrified Della because after reaching home, Jim stopped inside the door, as immovable as a setter at the scent of quail. His eyes were fixed upon Della, and there was an expression in them that she could not read, and it terrified her.

8. Why did Della quickly change from being joyous to crying hysterically?

Ans. Della was happy when she found out what Jim has brought her as a Christmas present. It was the Combs - the set of combs, side, and back, that Della had worshipped for long in a Broadway window. Beautiful combs, pure tortoise shell, with jeweled rims-just the shade to wear in the

beautiful vanished hair But then she cried hysterically because now she would have to wait for her hair to grow so that she could be able to wear those combs which she had desired a lot.

9. O' Henry calls Della and Jim 'Two foolish children'. Do you think they are really foolish? Why or why not?

Ans. Though Della and Jim's decision happens to be a foolish one, yet they cannot be regarded as fools for whatever they have done was out of their love for each other. Both of them loved each other so much that they wanted to keep each other happy and present some nice gifts on Christmas Eve. In doing so, they had to lose their most precious possessions.

10. Is the title of the story 'The Gift of the Magi' appropriate? Justify. Ans. Yes, the title of the story 'The Gift of the Magi' is appropriate enough. The Magi were the wise men, who brought gifts to the Babe in the Manger. They invented the art of giving Christmas presents. Being wise, their gifts were no doubt wise ones, possibly bearing the privilege of exchanges in case of duplication. Likewise, the story too tells a chronicle of two foolish children in a flat who most unwisely sacrificed for each other the greatest treasures of their house. But, ironically their gifts were the wisest ones. Hence, the title of the story is apt enough for it to tell the story of wise gifts.

11. Show how the 'twist in the tale makes the story of Jim and Della a moral lesson.

Ans. The twist in the tale makes the story of Jim and Della a moral lesson. The narrator says that the story compares these two 'foolish children with the magi. The narrator tells us that the magi were wise men, who invented the art of giving Christmas presents. Since they were wise, their gifts must have been wise too. The narrator intones, 'Of all, those who give gifts, Jim and Della were the wisest, which means that they must be the magi. They unwisely sacrificed for each other the greatest treasures of their house.

12. What was condition of the financial What condition of the two young couples?

Ans. The financial condition of the two young couples was very bad. The couple has very little money and lives in a modest apartment. After paying all of the bills, all Della has left is \$1.87 to put toward Jim's Christmas present. In the same way, her husband Jim too had not enough money

to buy his wife a gift. The couple was going through a hard time. Once, James had been paid \$30 a week. But now he has been paid \$20 only a week.

14. How does the narrator express the pride of the couple for their possessions?

Ans. Della and Jim had two prized possessions. One was Jim's gold watch, passed on in his family since his grandfather. The other was Della's hair. Both of them were proud of their watch and hair. She even imagined depreciating the Queen of Sheba by showing her long hair to her. In the same way, Jim was also too much proud of his gold watch, which could not be even compared to the treasures of King Solomon.

16. What did Della say to Jim for cutting off her hair?

Ans.- Della began to explain the condition of her cutting the hair. She asked him not to be angry with her. He had her hair cut off and sold because she could not have lived the Christmas without giving him a gift. She assured him that the hair would grow again and requested him not to mind for that. She had no other option except her hair to buy him a good gift. She asked him to say 'Merry Christmas' and to be happy.

17. What moral lessons are stressed upon in 'The Gift of the Magi'?

Ans. "The Gift of the Magi" is one of the best stories of O' Henry. It tells a story about Jim and Della who are very poor. They are so poor that they can't even afford gifts for each other. But they loved each other very much. So they sell off their most precious possessions to buy Christmas gifts for each other. And the sad part is none of them know about the sacrifice when they were being made. On the eve of Christmas, Della parts with her beautiful hair. For Jim, Della's long and lovely hair was beautiful enough to make the Queen of Sheba jealous. On the other hand, Jim parts with his watch, a family heirloom which even

King Solomon might have been envious Solomon might have been envious of. The ironic 'twist in the tale' is that both of them trade off the very treasures each of them possessed and for which the gifts were meant. And they had to wait one more year to use their gifts. The story ends with a moral lesson of what constitutes the true spirit of gifts giving on Christmas. Selflessness and a desire to see the loved ones who receive the gifts happily are the inherent themes of the story.

Sacrifice complements the beauty of the story. What makes the story more beautiful is that both the lovers made a sacrifice to see and please the other.

18. Based on the events, attempt a justification of the story as an example of comic irony.

Ans: In 'The Gift of Magi' the author O' Henry uses the comic irony with a view to emphasizing the moral of the story. Jim and Della, two key characters of the story, had to sell off their precious possessions to buy gift for each other on Christmas. Della in order to a fine, rare and sterling gift for Jim sold her long and beautiful hair. Finally, she bought a platinum fob chain, simple and chaste in design, for Jim's gold watch. On the other hand, Jim sold his precious gold watch to buy an expensive tortoiseshell comb for Della's beautiful hair.

The ironic twist in the story is that both Della and Jim sold off the very treasures each possessed for which the gifts were meant. A faint smile spread across the lips of the reader with this ironic twist in the plot. But this irony makes the story of Jim and Della a moral lesson that the selflessness, a desire to add the happiness of the one who receives the gift and the spirit of sacrifice are the essence of gift-giving on Christmas.