

Name:

Date:

**"The Gift of the Magi" by O. Henry**  
**Before Reading**

Answer the following journal prompt in at least one full paragraph.

How would you define a "meaningful gift"? If someone could get you the most PERFECT, most meaningful gift, what would it be and why? How much would it cost—is that relevant, yes or no?

**PREVIEW**

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Name:

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"The Gift of the Magi" by O. Henry

Vocabulary Word	Part of Speech	Definition
imputation	noun	<b>PREVIEW</b>
parsimony	noun	<b>NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE</b>
predominating	adjective	
mendicancy	noun	<b>PREVIEW</b>
coax	verb	<b>NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE</b>
meretricious	adjective	
ornamentation	noun	
prudence	noun	<b>PREVIEW</b>
patent	adjective	<b>NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE</b>
discreet	adjective	
scrutiny	noun	<b>PREVIEW</b>
coveted	adjective	<b>NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE</b>

Name:

### “The Gift of the Magi” by O. Henry – 1

ONE DOLLAR AND eighty-seven cents. That was all. And sixty cents of it was in pennies. Pennies saved one and two at a time 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. Three times Della counted it. One dollar and eighty-seven cents. And the next day would be Christmas. There was clearly nothing to do but flop down on the shabby little couch and howl. So Della did it. Which instigates the moral reflection that life is made up of sobs, sniffles, and smiles, with sniffles predominating.

While the mistress of the home is gradually subsiding from the first stage to the second, take a look at the home. A furnished flat at \$8 per week. It did not exactly beggar description, but it certainly had that word on the lookout for

the mendicancy squad.\*

In the vestibule below was a letter-box into which no letter would go, and an electric button from which no mortal finger could coax a ring. Also appertaining thereunto was a card bearing the name “Mr. James Dillingham Young.” The “Dillingham” had been flung to the breeze during a former period of prosperity when its possessor was being paid \$30 per week. Now, when the income was shrunk to \$20, the letters of “Dillingham” looked blurred, as though they were thinking seriously of contracting to a modest and unassuming D. But whenever Mr. James Dillingham Young came home and reached his flat above he was called “Jim” and greatly hugged by Mrs. James Dillingham Young, already introduced to you as Della. Which is all very good.

Della finished her cry and attended to her cheeks with the powder rag. She stood by the window and looked out dully at a grey cat walking a grey fence in a grey backyard. Tomorrow would be Christmas Day, and she had only \$1.87 with which to buy Jim a present. She had been saving every penny she could for months, with this result. Twenty dollars a week doesn't go far. Expenses had been greater than she had calculated. They always are. Only \$1.87 to buy a present for Jim. Her Jim. Many a happy hour she had spent planning for something nice for him. Something fine and rare and sterling—something just a little bit near to being worthy of the honor of being owned by Jim.

There was a pier-glass between the windows of the room. Perhaps you have seen a pier-glass in an \$8 flat. A very thin and very agile person may, by observing his reflection in a rapid sequence of longitudinal strips, obtain a fairly accurate conception of his looks. Della, being slender, had mastered the art.

1. What does it mean that Della was “bulldozing” the grocer, vegetable man, and butcher?

2. What evidence is there that Jim and Della are living in a lower-middle class apartment?

3. Why are the letters blurry on the Dillingham's card for their mailbox?

4. What is the mood of the story so far? Provide evidence to support your answer.

5. What day is it? How does it contribute to the conflict?

## "The Gift of the Magi" by O. Henry – 2

Suddenly she whirled from the window and stood before the glass. Her eyes were shining brilliantly, but her face had lost its color within twenty seconds. Rapidly she pulled down her hair and let it fall to its full length.

Now, there were two possessions of the James Dillingham Youngs in which they both took a mighty pride. One was Jim's gold watch that had been his father's and his grandfather's. The other was Della's hair. Had the *\*Queen of Sheba* lived in the flat across the airshaft, Della would have let her hair hang out the window some day to dry just to depreciate Her Majesty's jewels and gifts.

Had *\*King Solomon* 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.

So now Della's beautiful hair fell about her, rippling and shining like a cascade of brown waters. It reached below her knee and made itself almost a garment for her. And then she did it up again nervously and quickly. Once she faltered for a minute and stood still while a tear or two splashed on the worn red carpet.

On went her old brown jacket; on went her old brown hat. With a whirl of skirts and with the brilliant sparkle still in her eyes, she fluttered out the door and down the stairs to the street.

Where she stopped the sign read: "Mme. Sofronie. Hair Goods of All Kinds." One flight up Della ran, and collected herself, panting. Madame, large, too white, chilly, hardly looked the "Sofronie."

"Will you buy my hair?" asked Della.

"I buy hair," said Madame. "Take yer hat off and let's have a sight at the looks of it."

Down rippled the brown cascade. "Twenty dollars," said Madame, lifting the mass with a practised hand.

"Give it to me quick," said Della.

Oh, and the next two hours tripped by on rosy wings. Forget the hashed metaphor. She was ransacking the stores for Jim's present.

She found it at last. It surely had been made for Jim and no one else. There was no other like it in any of the stores, and she had turned all of them inside out. It was a platinum fob chain simple and chaste in design, properly proclaiming its value by substance alone and not by **meretricious**

**ornamentation**—as all good things should do. It was even worthy of The Watch. As soon as she saw it she knew that it must be Jim's. It was like him. Quietness and value—the description applied to both. Twenty-one dollars they took from her for it, and she hurried home with the 87 cents. With that chain on his watch Jim might be properly anxious about the time in any company.

6. Which possessions do Della and Jim value most?

\*The Queen of Sheba is a wealthy queen from the Old Testament. She ruled an ancient kingdom in the region of modern-day Ethiopia. This allusion is also a hyperbole, as the narrator claims Della's hair is more precious than all the Queen of Sheba's jewels.

\*King Solomon of Israel is a rich king from the Old Testament. He was visited by the Queen of Sheba because she wanted to test his wisdom to which he earned many treasures by impressing her. This is another allusion and hyperbole used to say that Jim's gold watch is more precious than all the treasures of King Solomon.

7. What was Della's hair worth to Madame Sofronie?

8. Does Della hesitate to sell her hair? What does this say about her?

9. What Christmas gift does Della purchase for Jim? Why is it perfect for him?

### “The Gift of the Magi” by O. Henry – 3

Grand as the watch was, he sometimes looked at it on the sly on account of the old leather strap that he used in place of a chain.

When Della reached home her intoxication gave way a little to prudence and reason. She got out her curling irons and lighted the gas and went to work repairing the ravages made by generosity added to love. Which is always a tremendous task, dear friends—a mammoth task.

Within forty minutes her head was covered with tiny, close-lying curls that made her look wonderfully like a truant schoolboy. She looked at her reflection in the mirror long, carefully, and critically.

“If Jim doesn’t kill me,” she said to herself, “before he takes a second look at me, he’ll say I look like a Coney Island chorus girl. But what could I do—oh! what could I do with a dollar and eighty-seven cents?”

At 7 o’clock the coffee was made and the frying-pan was on the back of the stove hot and ready to cook the chops.

Jim was never late. Della doubled the fob chain in her hand and sat on the corner of the table near the door that he always entered. Then she heard his step on the stair away down on the first flight, and she turned white for just a moment. She had a habit for saying little silent prayers about the simplest everyday things, and now she whispered: “Please God, make him think I am still pretty.”

The door opened and Jim stepped in and closed it. He looked thin and very serious. Poor fellow, he was only twenty-two—and to be burdened with a family! He needed a new overcoat and he was without gloves.

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. It was not anger, nor surprise, nor disapproval, nor horror, nor any of the sentiments that she had been prepared for. He simply stared at her fixedly with that peculiar expression on his face.

Della wriggled off the table and went for him.

“Jim, darling,” she cried, “don’t look at me that way. I had my hair cut off and sold it because I couldn’t have lived through Christmas without giving you a present. It’ll grow out again—you won’t mind, will you? I just had to do it. My hair grows awfully fast. Say ‘Merry Christmas!’ Jim, and let’s be happy. You don’t know what a nice—what a beautiful, nice gift I’ve got for you.”

“You’ve cut off your hair?” asked Jim, laboriously, as if he had not arrived at that patent fact yet even after the hardest mental labor.

10. How does the mood change in this part of the story?

11. Do you picture Jim as 22 years old? Why or why not?

12. How does Jim react when he sees Della?

## “The Gift of the Magi” by O. Henry – 4

“Cut it off and sold it,” said Della.  
“Don’t you like me just as well, anyhow? I’m me without my hair, ain’t I?”  
Jim looked about the room curiously.  
“You say your hair is gone?” he said, with an air almost of idiocy.  
“You needn’t look for it,” said Della. “It’s sold, I tell you—sold and gone, too. It’s Christmas Eve, boy. Be good to me, for it went for you. Maybe the hairs of my head were numbered,” she went on with sudden serious sweetness, “but nobody could ever count my love for you. Shall I put the chops on, Jim?”

Out of his trance Jim seemed quickly to wake. He enfolded his Della. For ten seconds let us regard with discreet scrutiny some inconsequential object in the other direction. Eight dollars a week or a million a year—what is the difference? A mathematician or a wit would give you the wrong answer. The *\*magi* brought valuable gifts, but that was not among them. This dark assertion will be illuminated later on.

Jim drew a package from his overcoat pocket and threw it upon the table.

“Don’t make any mistake, Dell,” he said, “about me. I don’t think there’s anything in the way of a haircut or a shave or a shampoo that could make me like my girl any less. But if you’ll unwrap that package you may see why you had me going a while at first.” White fingers and nimble tore at the string and paper. And then an ecstatic scream of joy; and then, alas! a quick feminine change to hysterical tears and wails, necessitating the immediate employment of all the comforting powers of the lord of the flat. For there lay The Combs—the set of combs, side and back, that Della had worshipped long in a Broadway window. Beautiful combs, pure tortoise shell, with jewelled rims—just the shade to wear in the beautiful vanished hair. They were expensive combs, she knew, and her heart had simply craved and yearned over them without the least hope of possession. And now, they were hers, but the tresses that should have adorned the coveted adornments were gone.

But she hugged them to her bosom, and at length she was able to look up with dim eyes and a smile and say: “My hair grows so fast, Jim!” And then Della leaped up like a little singed cat and cried, “Oh, oh!”

Jim had not yet seen his beautiful present. She held it out to him eagerly upon her open palm. The dull precious metal seemed to flash with a reflection of her bright and ardent spirit.

“Isn’t it a dandy, Jim? I hunted all over town to find it.

\*The “Magi” is a reference to the biblical Magi who brought gifts to Jesus when he was born. The Magi are also known as the three wisemen. The Magi each brought a different gift for Jesus: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. These gifts established the Christian tradition of gift-giving on Christmas Day.

13. What can you gather about Jim’s character from the following quote?

“I don’t think there’s anything in the way of a haircut or a shave or a shampoo that could make me like my girl any less.”

14. What gift did Jim bring home for Della?

15. Explain the irony of the situation.

## “The Gift of the Magi” by O. Henry – 5

You'll have to look at the time a hundred times a day now. Give me your watch. I want to see how it looks on it."

Instead of obeying, Jim tumbled down on the couch and put his hands under the back of his head and smiled.

“Dell,” said he, “let's put our Christmas presents away and keep 'em a while. They're too nice to use just at present. I sold the watch to get the money to buy your combs. And now suppose you put the chops on.”

The magi, as you know, were wise men—wonderfully 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 exchange in case of duplication. And here I have lamely related to you the uneventful chronicle of two foolish children in a flat who most unwisely sacrificed for each other the greatest treasures of their house. But in a last word to the wise of these days let it be said that of all who give gifts these two were the wisest. Of all who give and receive gifts, such as they are wisest. Everywhere they are wisest. They are the magi.

16. What shocking news does Jim reveal about the watch?

17. Why does the narrator think that Jim and Della are wise?

18. What is the theme of this story?

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After Reading Questions

1. Why do you suppose the couple is still happy after they realize both of their gifts are useless?

**PREVIEW**

2. How would this story be different if we were to follow Jim's point of view rather than Della's?

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3. Although this story is written in 1905, it is considered timeless. Why do you think that is?

4. Though both characters gave up their most prized possession, were their sacrifices equal? Why or why not?

**PREVIEW**

5. How does Jim and Della's class/financial situation contribute to the story's plot and themes?

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6. Do you agree that the couple is *wise*? If no, explain. If so, why might someone say they are foolish?

Write a brief summary of the short story. You must use all the words in the box below.

sacrifice

love

value

beauty

money

**PREVIEW**

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**PREVIEW**

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After Reading Project  
“The Gift of the Magi” by O. Henry

PREVIEW  
What is your most prized possession?

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Directions: Pick three things you currently value the most in life. Illustrate these three items on a blank piece of 8.5 x 11 paper. Under each item, you must include a description of what it is as well as an explanation of why it is so important to you. Each explanation should be 2-5 sentences in length.

Write your name somewhere on your paper.

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**ANSWERS**  
**"The Gift of the Magi" by O. Henry**

<b>Vocabulary Word</b>	<b>Part of Speech</b>	<b>Definition</b>
imputation	noun	an accusation
parsimony	noun	extreme unwillingness to spend money
predominating	adjective	describes something that is the strongest or most important element
mendicancy	noun	the practice of begging for money or food
coax	verb	obtain something by persistent persuasion
meretricious	adjective	Describes being obviously attractive or flashy without having integrity
ornamentation	noun	the action of decorating something or making it more elaborate
prudence	noun	cautiousness
patent	adjective	easily recognizable and obvious
discreet	adjective	describes speaking carefully in order to avoid causing offense or gain advantage
scrutiny	noun	careful observation or examination
coveted	adjective	greatly desired or envied

Name:

### “The Gift of the Magi” by O. Henry – 1

ONE DOLLAR AND eighty-seven cents. That was all. And sixty cents of it was in pennies. Pennies saved one and two at a time 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. Three times Della counted it. One dollar and eighty-seven cents. And the next day would be Christmas.

There was clearly nothing to do but flop down on the shabby little couch and howl. So Della did it. Which instigates the moral reflection that life is made up of sobs, sniffles, and smiles, with sniffles predominating.

While the mistress of the home is gradually subsiding from the first stage to the second, take a look at the home. A furnished flat at \$8 per week. It did not exactly beggar description, but it certainly had that word on the lookout for the mendicancy squad.

In the vestibule below was a letter-box into which no letter would go, and an electric button from which no mortal finger could coax a ring. Also appertaining thereunto was a card bearing the name “Mr. James Dillingham Young.” The “Dillingham” had been flung to the breeze during a former period of prosperity when its possessor was being paid \$30 per week. Now, when the income was shrunk to \$20, the letters of “Dillingham” looked blurred, as though they were thinking seriously of contracting to a modest and unassuming D. But whenever Mr. James Dillingham Young came home and reached his flat above he was called “Jim” and greatly hugged by Mrs. James Dillingham Young, already introduced to you as Della. Which is all very good.

Della finished her cry and attended to her cheeks with the powder rag. She stood by the window and looked out dully at a grey cat walking a grey fence in a grey backyard. Tomorrow would be Christmas Day, and she had only \$1.87 with which to buy Jim a present. She had been saving every penny she could for months, with this result. Twenty dollars a week doesn't go far. Expenses had been greater than she had calculated. They always are. Only \$1.87 to buy a present for Jim. Her Jim. Many a happy hour she had spent planning for something nice for him. Something fine and rare and sterling—something just a little bit near to being worthy of the honor of being owned by Jim.

There was a pier-glass between the windows of the room. Perhaps you have seen a pier-glass in an \$8 flat. A very thin and very agile person may, by observing his reflection in a rapid sequence of longitudinal strips, obtain a fairly accurate conception of his looks. Della, being slender, had mastered the art.

1. What does it mean that Della was “bulldozing” the grocer, vegetable man, and butcher?

Della was bargaining with them to get a good price so she could save money. She was a tough bargainer and haggled with them until she got the price she wanted.

2. What evidence is there that Jim and Della are living in a lower-middle class apartment?

Della was saving pennies. The couch was shabby. The mendicancy squad were police forces who arrested homeless people and beggars which tells readers that the conditions are near the poverty level.

3. Why are the letters blurry on the Dillingham's card for their mailbox?

The letters look blurred because the card is old. Jim has not been able to replace it with a new card because he cannot afford to pay for it.

4. What is the mood of the story so far? Provide evidence to support your answer.

Sad, desperate, uncertain, and glum. Della is crying and not sure how she will be able to afford a gift for Jim. The lines “She stood by the window and looked out dully at a **grey** cat walking a **grey** fence in a **grey** backyard” emphasizes the sadness Della feels. The holiday isn't described as very cheerful.

5. What day is it? How does it contribute to the conflict?

It is Christmas Eve. Della has one day to find her husband the perfect gift with only \$1.87. The conflict is more intense because she doesn't have a lot of time or money.

## "The Gift of the Magi" by O. Henry – 2

Suddenly she whirled from the window and stood before the glass. Her eyes were shining brilliantly, but her face had lost its color within twenty seconds. Rapidly she pulled down her hair and let it fall to its full length.

Now, there were two possessions of the James Dillingham Youngs in which they both took a mighty pride. One was Jim's gold watch that had been his father's and his grandfather's. The other was Della's hair. Had the *\*Queen of Sheba* lived in the flat across the airshaft, Della would have let her hair hang out the window some day to dry just to depreciate Her Majesty's jewels and gifts.

Had *\*King Solomon* 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.

So now Della's beautiful hair fell about her, rippling and shining like a cascade of brown waters. It reached below her knee and made itself almost a garment for her. And then she did it up again nervously and quickly. Once she faltered for a minute and stood still while a tear or two splashed on the worn red carpet.

On went her old brown jacket; on went her old brown hat. With a whirl of skirts and with the brilliant sparkle still in her eyes, she fluttered out the door and down the stairs to the street.

Where she stopped the sign read: "Mme. Sofronie. Hair Goods of All Kinds." One flight up Della ran, and collected herself, panting. Madame, large, too white, chilly, hardly looked the "Sofronie."

"Will you buy my hair?" asked Della.

"I buy hair," said Madame. "Take yer hat off and let's have a sight at the looks of it."

Down rippled the brown cascade. "Twenty dollars," said Madame, lifting the mass with a practised hand.

"Give it to me quick," said Della.

Oh, and the next two hours tripped by on rosy wings. Forget the hashed metaphor. She was ransacking the stores for Jim's present.

She found it at last. It surely had been made for Jim and no one else. There was no other like it in any of the stores, and she had turned all of them inside out. It was a platinum fob chain simple and chaste in design, properly proclaiming its value by substance alone and not by **meretricious ornamentation**—as all good things should do. It was even worthy of The Watch. As soon as she saw it she knew that it must be Jim's. It was like him. Quietness and value—the description applied to both. Twenty-one dollars they took from her for it, and she hurried home with the 87 cents. With that chain on his watch Jim might be properly anxious about the time in any company.

6. Which possessions do Della and Jim value most?

Jim values his watch and Della values her long hair.

\*The Queen of Sheba is a wealthy queen from the Old Testament. She ruled an ancient kingdom in the region of modern-day Ethiopia. This allusion is also a hyperbole, as the narrator claims Della's hair is more precious than all the Queen of Sheba's jewels.

\*King Solomon of Israel is a rich king from the Old Testament. He was visited by the Queen of Sheba because she wanted to test his wisdom to which he earned many treasures by impressing her. This is another allusion and hyperbole used to say that Jim's gold watch is more precious than all the treasures of King Solomon.

7. What was Della's hair worth to Madame Sofronie?

Twenty dollars. Nothing in comparison to what it means to Della.

8. Does Della hesitate to sell her hair? What does this say about her?

She does not hesitate. She really loves Jim; she will sacrifice her most prized possession for him.

9. What Christmas gift does Della purchase for Jim? Why is it perfect for him?

She buys him a platinum chain. It was meant for him because it was simple but valuable. It didn't have a lot of tacky decor to show it's value; it was valuable as is. Jim is quiet and irreplaceable to her. The chain was a perfect choice because Jim loved his gold watch.

### "The Gift of the Magi" by O. Henry – 3

Grand as the watch was, he sometimes looked at it on the sly on account of the old leather strap that he used in place of a chain.

When Della reached home her intoxication gave way a little to prudence and reason. She got out her curling irons and lighted the gas and went to work repairing the ravages made by generosity added to love. Which is always a tremendous task, dear friends—a mammoth task.

Within forty minutes her head was covered with tiny, close-lying curls that made her look wonderfully like a truant schoolboy. She looked at her reflection in the mirror long, carefully, and critically.

"If Jim doesn't kill me," she said to herself, "before he takes a second look at me, he'll say I look like a Coney Island chorus girl. But what could I do—oh! what could I do with a dollar and eighty-seven cents?"

At 7 o'clock the coffee was made and the frying-pan was on the back of the stove hot and ready to cook the chops.

Jim was never late. Della doubled the fob chain in her hand and sat on the corner of the table near the door that he always entered. Then she heard his step on the stair away down on the first flight, and she turned white for just a moment. She had a habit for saying little silent prayers about the simplest everyday things, and now she whispered: "Please God, make him think I am still pretty."

The door opened and Jim stepped in and closed it. He looked thin and very serious. Poor fellow, he was only twenty-two—and to be burdened with a family! He needed a new overcoat and he was without gloves.

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. It was not anger, nor surprise, nor disapproval, nor horror, nor any of the sentiments that she had been prepared for. He simply stared at her fixedly with that peculiar expression on his face.

Della wriggled off the table and went for him.

"Jim, darling," she cried, "don't look at me that way. I had my hair cut off and sold it because I couldn't have lived through Christmas without giving you a present. It'll grow out again—you won't mind, will you? I just had to do it. My hair grows awfully fast. Say 'Merry Christmas!' Jim, and let's be happy. You don't know what a nice—what a beautiful, nice gift I've got for you."

"You've cut off your hair?" asked Jim, laboriously, as if he had not arrived at that patent fact yet even after the hardest mental labor.

10. How does the mood change in this part of the story?

The mood is filled with excitement, worry, suspense, hope, and love. It is more positive than before.

11. Do you picture Jim as 22 years old? Why or why not?

Answers will vary. Maybe yes because his wife is so beautiful and they have no children yet. Maybe no because they are struggling so much and their lives are filled with strife, as opposed to the association of youthfulness and being worry-free.

12. How does Jim react when he sees Della?

Jim lacks expression because he is bewildered. He has a peculiar face that was nor surprise, anger or disapproval. He was processing what she had done.

## "The Gift of the Magi" by O. Henry – 4

"Cut it off and sold it," said Della.  
"Don't you like me just as well, anyhow? I'm me without my hair, ain't I?"  
Jim looked about the room curiously.  
"You say your hair is gone?" he said, with an air almost of idiocy.  
"You needn't look for it," said Della. "It's sold, I tell you—sold and gone, too. It's Christmas Eve, boy. Be good to me, for it went for you. Maybe the hairs of my head were numbered," she went on with sudden serious sweetness, "but nobody could ever count my love for you. Shall I put the chops on, Jim?"  
Out of his trance Jim seemed quickly to wake. He enfolded his Della. For ten seconds let us regard with **discreet scrutiny** some inconsequential object in the other direction. Eight dollars a week or a million a year—what is the difference? A mathematician or a wit would give you the wrong answer. The *\*magi* brought valuable gifts, but that was not among them. This dark assertion will be illuminated later on.  
Jim drew a package from his overcoat pocket and threw it upon the table.  
"Don't make any mistake, Dell," he said, "about me. I don't think there's anything in the way of a haircut or a shave or a shampoo that could make me like my girl any less. But if you'll unwrap that package you may see why you had me going a while at first." White fingers and nimble tore at the string and paper. And then an ecstatic scream of joy; and then, alas! a quick feminine change to hysterical tears and wails, necessitating the immediate employment of all the comforting powers of the lord of the flat. For there lay The Combs—the set of combs, side and back, that Della had worshipped long in a Broadway window. Beautiful combs, pure tortoise shell, with jewelled rims—just the shade to wear in the beautiful vanished hair. They were expensive combs, she knew, and her heart had simply craved and yearned over them without the least hope of possession. And now, they were hers, but the tresses that should have adorned the **coveted** adornments were gone.  
But she hugged them to her bosom, and at length she was able to look up with dim eyes and a smile and say: "My hair grows so fast, Jim!" And then Della leaped up like a little singed cat and cried, "Oh, oh!"  
Jim had not yet seen his beautiful present. She held it out to him eagerly upon her open palm. The dull precious metal seemed to flash with a reflection of her bright and ardent spirit.  
"Isn't it a dandy, Jim? I hunted all over town to find it.

\*The "Magi" is a reference to the biblical Magi who brought gifts to Jesus when he was born. The Magi are also known as the three wisemen. The Magi each brought a different gift for Jesus: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. These gifts established the Christian tradition of gift-giving on Christmas Day.

13. What can you gather about Jim's character from the following quote?

"I don't think there's anything in the way of a haircut or a shave or a shampoo that could make me like my girl any less." Jim loves Della for more than her beauty. He is not a shallow man.

14. What gift did Jim bring home for Della?

Tortoiseshell combs that she had really wanted for her hair.

15. Explain the irony of the situation.

The irony is that Jim bought Della a set of decorative combs that she can no longer use because she cut off all her hair. She didn't expect this gift, which is why she didn't hesitate to get her hair cut. It's the opposite of what was expected to happen.

## “The Gift of the Magi” by O. Henry – 5

You'll have to look at the time a hundred times a day now. Give me your watch. I want to see how it looks on it."

Instead of obeying, Jim tumbled down on the couch and put his hands under the back of his head and smiled.

“Dell,” said he, “let's put our Christmas presents away and keep 'em a while. They're too nice to use just at present. I sold the watch to get the money to buy your combs. And now suppose you put the chops on.”

The magi, as you know, were wise men—wonderfully 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 exchange in case of duplication. And here I have lamely related to you the uneventful chronicle of two foolish children in a flat who most unwisely sacrificed for each other the greatest treasures of their house. But in a last word to the wise of these days let it be said that of all who give gifts these two were the wisest. Of all who give and receive gifts, such as they are wisest. Everywhere they are wisest. They are the magi.

PREVIEW

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16. What shocking news does Jim reveal about the watch?

He sold his gold watch to afford the combs for Della.

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17. Why does the narrator think that Jim and Della are wise?

Jim's and Della's gifts demonstrate their love for each other and the true spirit of the holiday. The most valuable gifts for either of them to have given each other are the sacrifices they are willing to make for one another. Their love is the gift and they are wise for realizing it.

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18. What is the theme of this story?

*Multiple answers. Wording will vary.*

Love is more important than expensive gifts.

People are willing to sacrifice what means the most to them for the person they love.

The value of a gift is in the giver, rather than the gift itself.

It's the thought that counts, not the gift.

Appreciate your loved ones because they are the real treasure in life.

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## ANSWERS

### "The Gift of the Magi" by O. Henry After Reading Questions

1. Why do you suppose the couple is still happy after they realize both of their gifts are useless?

Answers will vary. Jim smiles on the couch. They realize how much they love each other which makes them happy.

2. How would this story be different if we were to follow Jim's point of view rather than Della's?

Answers will vary. We would understand Jim's sacrifice more thoroughly and the steps he took to buy Della her gift. We wouldn't get the highs and lows of emotion that Della goes through as she anxiously tries to find Jim the perfect gift.

3. Although the story is written in 1905, it is still considered timeless. Why do you think that is?

Answers will vary. The message is universal and can still be applied today: it's the thought that counts, not the gift itself.

4. Though both characters gave up their most prized possession, were their sacrifices equal? Why or why not?

Answers will vary. Some students might say while Jim pawned a family heirloom that meant a lot to him, Della actually gave a part of herself, her identity, her hair—meaning it is the greater sacrifice. Her sacrifice is also recognizable to anyone who sees her. Some students might say that Jim gave the greater sacrifice because Della's hair will grow back, but it's unlikely Jim will be able to get that exact watch back, a watch that belonged to his father and grandfather.

5. How does Jim and Della's class/financial situation contribute to the story's plot and themes?

The main conflict is a direct result of the couple's financial status. They cannot afford to buy one another gifts. It also adds to the dramatic ending where both Della and Jim can't use their gifts, nor can they go out and buy their sold items back. It is a primary factor in the theme that love is more valuable than anything money can buy.

6. Do you agree that the couple is wise? If not, explain. If so, why might someone say they are foolish?

Answers will vary. Some students might say they are foolish for not discussing their ideas/plans with one another. Some might say they are not foolish because they are still happy at the end of the story.

Write a brief summary of the short story. You must use all the words in the box below.

sacrifice

love

value

beauty

money

Answers will vary.

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