

## Story Overview:

The story follows **Della** and her husband **Jim**, a young couple living in poverty in New York City. Christmas is approaching, and Della wants to buy Jim a meaningful gift, but she only has \$1.87 saved up. In a desperate move, Della sells her long, beautiful hair to a wig-maker for \$20 in order to buy Jim a beautiful gold watch chain for his prized pocket watch. Meanwhile, Jim, wanting to buy Della a special gift, sells his pocket watch to buy a set of expensive combs for Della's hair. When they exchange gifts, they realize that both sacrifices were for naught, as Della no longer has the hair for the combs, and Jim no longer has the watch to pair with the chain. Despite this, the story ends with a powerful message about the wisdom of their love and sacrifices, comparing them to the **Magi** who brought gifts to the newborn Jesus.

## Teaching Focus and Suggestions:

### 1. Themes and Character Motivation

- **Key Theme: Sacrifice and Love**
  - Explore how Della and Jim's sacrifices for each other highlight the true meaning of love and giving. Their actions are driven by their love for one another rather than the material value of the gifts.
  - **Teaching Tip:** Have students reflect on the sacrifices they might make for someone they love. Do they think it's always worth it? Why or why not?
- **Character Motivation**
  - Why does Della sell her hair? Why does Jim sell his watch? Discuss their motivations for their actions.
  - **Teaching Tip:** Use a "Character Motivation Chart" where students list key events in the story and discuss why the characters acted the way they did.

### 2. Literary Devices

- **Irony:** The story is full of **situational irony**, where the outcome is the opposite of what we expect (both characters sell what they value most, and in the end, neither can use the gift they bought).
  - **Teaching Tip:** After reading the story, ask students to identify examples of irony and discuss how O. Henry uses it to deliver his message.
  - Discuss the **symbolism** of the hair and the watch, and how these items represent the characters' most valuable possessions.
- **Foreshadowing:** At the beginning of the story, Della's worries about not having enough money foreshadow her drastic action.
  - **Teaching Tip:** Ask students to identify clues that foreshadow the sacrifices they make and how it prepares the reader for the ironic twist.
- **Theme of Wisdom:** The ending ties the couple's actions to the **Magi**, suggesting that real wisdom lies in the selfless love they express through their gifts.
  - **Teaching Tip:** Discuss the ending with your students. Do they agree that Della and Jim were "the most wise"? What does it mean to give wisely?

### 3. Character Analysis

- **Della:** Examine how she is portrayed throughout the story. Discuss her emotions, her desperation, and the pride she has in her hair.
- **Jim:** Similarly, analyze Jim's actions. How does he show love and sacrifice for Della? What do we learn about his character through his actions?
- **Teaching Tip:** Have students write a journal entry from Della's or Jim's perspective. This helps them step into the character's shoes and better understand their emotions and choices.

### 4. Vocabulary and Contextual Understanding

- Some words and phrases might be challenging for students (e.g., "magi", "combs", "furnished rooms"). It might be useful to explore the historical and cultural context of the story, especially the symbolism of the Magi and the significance of Christmas gifts in the early 20th century.
- **Teaching Tip:** Have students create a glossary of challenging words or phrases. Discuss the importance of the term "Magi" and its symbolism.

### 5. Writing Prompts and Activities

- **Writing Prompt:** "If you were in Della's position, would you have sold your hair? Why or why not? What would you do to give someone a meaningful gift if you were in her place?"
- **Writing Activity:** Ask students to write a letter from Jim to Della after they exchange gifts. This can help them explore deeper emotions and empathy.
- **Class Discussion:** What do you think is the real meaning of Christmas in the story? Discuss how gift-giving is portrayed and how it differs from materialistic holiday consumerism.

### 6. Comparing the Magi to Della and Jim

- Discuss the comparison between Jim and Della and the **Magi**, who brought gifts to Jesus. What makes Della and Jim the "wisest" in the end?
- **Teaching Tip:** You could also have students research the historical and biblical Magi and draw comparisons to Della and Jim.

### 7. Visual and Emotional Engagement

- **Illustration Activity:** Have students create a scene that captures the moment of emotional realization when Jim and Della exchange their gifts. This visual activity helps students engage more deeply with the characters' emotions.
- **Discussion on Emotional Impact:** How did the story make them feel? Ask students to share if they were surprised by the ending. This helps them connect emotionally with the text.

### Assessment Suggestions:

- **Short Answer Questions:** Focus on understanding the main themes, character motivations, and literary devices.
- **Essay:** "Explain how irony is used in *The Gift of the Magi* to convey the theme of love and sacrifice."

- **Creative Project:** Have students create a modern-day version of the story (e.g., what might Della and Jim give up today to show love for each other?). This could be done as a skit, comic, or short story.

### **Additional Teaching Strategies:**

- **Group Work:** Split students into small groups to discuss key themes (e.g., love, sacrifice, materialism) and present their findings to the class.
- **Interactive Questions:** As you read, ask students to predict what will happen next, and how they think the characters will feel. This keeps them engaged and thinking critically about the story.

By emphasizing the human emotions, the lessons of love and sacrifice, and the clever use of irony, you can help struggling students connect deeply with this classic story while building their reading comprehension and analytical skills.