

Activity: "Gift Exchange Debate"

Objective:

Students will engage in a structured debate about the main theme of *The Gift of the Magi*, practice speaking and listening skills, and use textual evidence to support their points.

Instructions:

1. Introduction (5 minutes):

Begin by reviewing the main events and themes of *The Gift of the Magi*. Ask students to recall the sacrifices that Della and Jim make for each other, and what these sacrifices say about love, selflessness, and materialism.

2. Divide the Class into Two Groups:

Split students into two groups. One group will argue that Della's sacrifice was an act of **love**, and the other group will argue that it was an act of **foolishness**.

3. Preparation (10 minutes):

Give each group time to discuss and come up with their main arguments. They should use **textual evidence** from the story to support their points (students can refer to quotes or paraphrase scenes).

4. Group 1 (Love):

- Consider how Della's decision to sacrifice her hair shows her deep love for Jim.
- Think about the symbolism of the gifts exchanged and what they represent.

5. Group 2 (Foolishness):

- Think about the consequences of Della's sacrifice, like her loss of beauty.
- Consider whether there might have been a more practical way to show her love.

6. Debate (15 minutes):

The debate will follow this structure:

○ Opening Statement (2 minutes each):

Each group presents their argument, using at least **one piece of textual evidence** to support their position.

○ Follow-up Questions (5 minutes):

After the opening statements, students in the opposing group will ask questions. Encourage students to respond **respectfully** and use **evidence** from the text to support their answers.

○ Example questions:

- "Why do you think Jim would have wanted the combs more than having Della's hair?"
- "Do you think Della's sacrifice was truly necessary? Why or why not?"

○ Closing Statement (1 minute each):

Each group provides a final statement, summarizing why they believe their point of view is correct.

7. Debrief (5 minutes):

After the debate, have a short class discussion. Ask students to reflect on the points made by both sides and how the conversation helped them better understand the story.

8. Discussion Questions:

- What did you learn from hearing both sides of the debate?
- Do you agree with the conclusion of your group, or did the debate change your perspective?

Speaking and Listening (SL.8.1 a-b) Standards:

- **SL.8.1a: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions** (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.
- **SL.8.1b: Follow rules for collegial discussions** and carry out assigned roles.

Materials Needed:

- Copies of *The Gift of the Magi* (or a summary, if needed)
- Whiteboard or projector for group ideas (optional)
- Timer for each speaking turn (optional)

Assessment:

- **Formative:** Observe each student's participation in the debate. Are they listening actively? Are they asking relevant questions? Are they using evidence from the text in their responses?
- **Summative:** A short reflection paragraph about the activity, asking students to explain which side of the debate they agreed with most and why, using evidence from the text.

Modification for ELLs (English Language Learners):

- Provide sentence starters or a list of vocabulary words (e.g., "sacrifice," "selflessness," "materialism") to help students with their speaking and listening.
- Allow students to use their native language to discuss ideas with a peer before speaking to the whole group.