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Skip to content Manage consent Which is the better gift, the comb or the pocket watch? O. Henry's short story, The Gift of the Magi (1905) offers a memorable ironic twist. We hope our study guide is particularly useful for teachers and students to study irony and appreciate O. Henry's clever literary devices. Read the story: The Gift of the Magi, Character Analysis & Summary, Genre & Literary Devices, Etymology of "Magi", Quotes, Discussion Questions, Paired Readings, Useful Links, and Notes/Teacher Comments Della Dillingham - The young woman, married to Jim, whose prized possession was her long, beautiful hair. Jim Dillingham - The young man, married to Della, whose prized possession was an old pocketwatch with a leather strap. Plot Summary: Jim and Della Dillingham are a poor, young married couple who don't have enough money to buy Christmas gifts. Both sell their most prized possessions in order to pay for a gift for the other at Christmas time. Della combing her hair Genre While The Gift of the Magi certainly falls in the fictional short story genre, it employs what could be called a sub-genre of "dramatic irony." Dramatic irony is where the reader learns a secret that the main character(s) don't know about yet. Without the other knowing, both traded their most valuable possessions (priceless) for a gift that could no longer be used by the other because that person gave up their own possession. We wish we could stop Della from selling her hair, or Jim from selling his watch, but we can't. That's what makes for an engaging storyline that keeps us hooked. We want to know how they'll react when they find out. Literary Devices Intimacy - O. Henry effectively employs a literary technique of creating intimacy with his reader, addressing us directly so we feel like we are in the same room with the main characters. Examples: "...already introduced to you as Della" "Perhaps you have seen a pier-glass in an $8 Bat." Self-deprecating - O. Henry makes fun of himself and his writing "Oh, and the next two hours tripped by on rosy wings. Forget the hashed metaphor. She was ransacking the stores for Jim's present." Similes - Comparing Della's hair, "rippling and shining like a cascade of brown waters" and describing herself after the haircut: "[I] look like a Coney Island chorus girl." Describing Jim standing still, "as immovable as a setter at the scent of quail." Biblical References The Magi King Solomon Queen of Sheba Primary Themes Comparative Themes Yearning for what you can't have vs. receiving what you can't use Material happiness vs. spiritual or emotional happiness The Three Kings Magi is Latin, meaning skilled magicians, astrologers. Singular is "magus" which is the Persian root from Indo-Iranian "magh" which means powerful and rich, expressing ability. The Latins called them wise men, the Persians called them Magi. Also from the Greek "magos" (5th century BCE) which refers to the Persian priestly and learned class as portrayed in The Bible in The Gospel of Matthew According to Ludolph of Saxony (died 1378): "The three pagan kings were called Magi not because they were magicians but because of the great science of astrology which was theirs. Those whom the Hebrews called scribes and the Greeks, philosophers, and the Latins, wise men, the Persians called Magi. And the reason that they were called kings is that in those days it was the custom for the philosophers and wise men to be rulers." Pocketwatch, 1859 Explain what the following quotes mean and how they relate to the story: "One dollar and eighty-seven cents. That was all. And sixty cents of it was in pennies." "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." "Had King Solomon been the janitor, with all his treasures piled up in the basement, Jim would have pulled out his watch eveyr 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." "'I buy hair,' said Madame. 'Taker yer hat off and let's have a sight at the looks of it.'" "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." "Don't you like me just as well, anyhow? I'm me without my hair, ain't I?" "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 dull precious metal seemed to flash with a reflection of her bright and ardent spirit." "Let's put our Christmas presents away and keep 'em a while. They're too nice to use just at present." "[The magi] 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." "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." Tortoise-shell comb 1. The opening line, "One dollar and eight-seven cents" (in 1905) is equivalent to how much in today's dollars? Here's an Inflation calculator Why is this amount both important and unimportant in the story? 2. Define irony and how O. Henry's employs it in the story. 3. Discuss the themes of sacrifice and love in the story. 4. Do Della's and Jim's reactions to their predicament giving up their most valued possesions for gifts that are now useless surprise you? Rather than be angry at eachother or sad, Jim suggests they put the presents away for awhile and says, "And now suppose you put the chops on." How do material possessions compare to their true love for one another? 5. Della coveted the hair combs without the least hope of possession, and now that they were hers, she couldn't use them. Think of a situation in your own life that might be defined as ironic. 6. Why did O. Henry choose this simile? "Jim stopped inside the door, as immovable as a setter at the scent of quail." 7. Describe O. Henry's use of Biblical references (the magi, King Solomon, Queen Sheba) and his use of symbolism that Ella and Jim are the magi. Link to The Holy Bible, Book of Matthew 8. Compare the events of "The Adoration of the Magi" to O. Henry's story. Recommended reading: Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem, The Three Kings, particularly noting his lines: "They [the people] thought the Wise Men were men insane" and, after the kings presented their precious gifts: "And the mother wondered and bowed her head, and sat as still as a statue of stone; her heart was troubled yet comforted..." 9. Describe the meaning of "wise" in the story. What does "word to the wise" mean (still a commonly used idiom)? 10. What's the definition of a "meaningful gift"? Why do you think this story is particularly touching at Christmas? 11. Compare the elements of irony in Federigo's Falcon with The Gift of the Magi. Identify literary devices used by each author to engage his reader in the protagonists' plight. 12. Read O. Henry's story, The Last Leaf, compare its themes of sacrifice and irony with The Gift of the Magi. Essay prompt #1: Describe your own philosophy of gift giving (and receiving) and what makes for the most meaningful gifts. Relate your experiences to the story. Essay prompt #2: Think of an incident which you consider ironic in your own life (or relate a movie or story where irony is central to the plot). Why is irony so appealing to readers/viewers? Discuss how coming to terms or resolving the conundrum is important. Federigo's Falcon Compare The Gift of the Magi to other stories of the sub-genre "dramatic irony": When comparing uses of dramatic irony, discuss plot, themes, the role of irony in engaging the reader, and contrasts that make each story unique. Teachers: Challenge students to identify other stories they've read which contain dramatic irony, perhaps assign them to compose their own, to more fully appreciate the richness and appeal of irony in storytelling. It's both a pleasure for the audience and the writer! O. Henry A Teacher's Work Is Never Done We need to hear from you! Please share your lesson plans, discussion questions, or pitfalls to avoid while teaching this work, in pursuing our common interests of helping more students enjoy reading classic literature! Contact us via Facebook or Twitter Visit our Teacher Resources for recommended works, supporting literacy instruction across all grade levels American Literature's Study Guides Return to American Literature Home Page By Dr Oliver Tearle (Loughborough University) ‘The Gift of the Magi’ is, along with ‘The Last Leaf’, O. Henry’s best-known and most widely studied short story. This 1906 story is also a classic Christmas story, as the title suggests. The story explores a number of ‘big’ themes, and these are worth exploring in more detail and depth. Below, we discuss four of the story’s most prominent themes. The story can be summarised as follows: on Christmas Eve, married couple Jim and Della are both living in poverty in a rented flat in New York. Della has no money to get Jim the present he most wants: a platinum watch chain. She manages to sell her beautiful hair, and uses the money to buy the chain for Jim’s Christmas present. But in a twist, we discover that Jim has bought her hair combs for her Christmas present, selling his gold watch to raise the money for the gift. So they end up with presents that are useless to them, but they have been reminded that, poor though they may be, they have a more precious gift: the gift of love. Poverty. Significantly, O. Henry opens ‘The Gift of the Magi’ by drawing attention to how poor Jim and Della are. Della is counting her money: 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. This captures the misery but also the shame people who are living in poverty often feel. This highlights how much Della loves Jim, that she is willing to go to almost any lengths to secure the money for his present. Later, we learn that Jim needs a new overcoat and a pair of gloves, having gone out into the cold without any, and this further demonstrates how poor the Youngs are. Love and Generosity. Perhaps more than anything, O. Henry’s story can be read as a story on the theme of love. Christmas is often a time for love and goodwill, and the two central characters in ‘The Gift of the Magi’ are determined to demonstrate their love for each other through buying a special gift. What they don’t realise, of course, is that the material gifts they are purchasing as declarations of that love will be rendered useless to the other person: Della cannot use the hair combs because she has sold her hair to buy the watch chain for Jim, but Jim has sold his watch so has no need of the chain. But whereas these physical gifts begin as symbols of their love for each other, or tokens of their devotion to one another, the final ‘moral’ of O. Henry’s story is that love is itself the greatest gift they possess. And sure enough, it is by buying the thoughtful gifts which they know the other one most desires that they are able to prove their love. In other words, the fact that the material objects turn out to be useless does not matter, for they were merely a means to an end, the end being to show how much the happiness of their spouse means to them. Love, we might say, is more important than possessions. Sacrifice. O. Henry does not invite us to laugh at the folly of Jim and Della, but to celebrate their mutual sacrifice. Indeed, although the narrator describes them as ‘children’, what motivated them was not foolishness or naivety but wisdom, as he remarks in the story’s closing words: 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. The ‘magi’ or ‘wise men’ were the Zoroastrian astrologers who, in the Gospel of Matthew, visited the infant Jesus and brought him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. But it should be noted that O. Henry’s third-person narrator of the story doesn’t explain why Jim and Della, and other people like them, are ‘wisest’. And they are wise because, despite the fact that their well-meaning gift-buying goes awry, they are happy in spite of this – and happy with each other. They have seen the sacrifice the other has made in order to get them the special gift they wanted. Love, O. Henry seems to say, is about giving up physical possessions in one’s mission to demonstrate one’s love for someone. Gender. And with this thought in mind, we might conclude by considering one last theme that’s relevant to O. Henry’s story: gender. Note the sacrifices which Jim and Della make, which subtly hint at the gender roles of the time when the story was published (the first decade of the twentieth century). When describing Della’s long hair, O. Henry uses the word ‘gifts’ to play on the story’s title: 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. Della’s hair, then, is so beautiful that even the biblical Queen of Sheba would feel that her own jewels and gifts were lessened in value next to Della’s natural ‘gift’: her hair. This is, of course, ironic, since Della will sell her hair in order to buy another gift: it turns out her hair has a monetary value after all, and it is twenty dollars. But the fact that she is willing to part with a part of her which, in many respects, symbolises her feminine beauty reveals how far she is prepared to go to make Jim happy. Jim, too, parts with a gift which represents his masculinity: fob watches were part of a gentleman’s essential accoutrements, and Jim’s gold watch has been passed down the male line of the family for several generations. He is prepared to part with it in order to buy Della the gift he knows she desires. Of course, the two gifts which each buys the other reinforce their respective gender roles: the watch chain would literally attach Jim’s gold watch to his person, making it a kind of extension of himself, while Della’s hair would be made more beautiful and admirable when combed using the tortoiseshell combs Jim buys for her. Subscribe to get the latest posts sent to your email. “Gift of the Magi” constantly contrasts the idea of inner beauty and value with outside appearances. The story begins, for example, with a description of bleak surroundings (“a gray cat walking a gray fence in a gray background,” “shabby couch”) while hinting at a warm home life that brightens the exterior (Jim arrives home “to be greatly hugged”). When Della examines the watch chain, she also compares its exterior appearance and actual value to Jim’s own appearance and value. Both lack ornamentation, but are remarkable and beautiful for their inner substance.Della also worries that Jim will no longer find her pretty once she sells her hair—but when he sees her and recovers from the shock of her haircut, he tells her that there’s nothing in the way of “a haircut or shave or shampoo that could make me like my girl any less.” If anything, Jim appreciates the generosity of Della’s sacrifice, and the story ends on a satisfied note, with Jim sitting back on the couch and smiling. The story begins with Della despairing over the meager amount of money she’s managed to save over the past few months by pinching pennies. She had been hoping to save enough to buy her husband Jim a worthy Christmas present. Della suddenly goes to gaze at her reflection in a window, letting her hair fall to its full length below her knee. Della’s brown hair and Jim’s gold watch that had been passed down from his grandfather are the couple’s most prized possessions. Della runs to a hair shop and sells her hair for twenty dollars. Then she uses the money to buy Jim a simple platinum watch chain. The chain is described as possessing “quietness and value,” like Jim. Della returns home to fix her hair into curls and make dinner. When Jim walks into the door, he freezes, staring at Della’s hair. Della tells him that she did it in order to buy a proper Christmas present for him. Jim snaps out of his shock, hugs Della, and throws a package on the table. He explains that no haircut could make him love her any less, but that he was surprised because of the present that he bought for her. Della opens the package to find expensive tortoiseshell combs for her long hair. She’s ecstatic for a moment before she begins crying, and Jim has to comfort her. Suddenly, Della remembers her present to Jim, and asks to see Jim’s watch so that she could put the new chain on it. Jim sits back on the couch and smiles, then admits that he sold his watch in order to buy the combs. The narrator wraps up the story by describing the magi who invented the art of giving Christmas presents. He compares Della and Jim to these wise men, and concludes that of all those who give gifts, these two are the wisest. Della’s main concern is that the money she’s saved by pinching pennies isn’t enough to buy Jim a worthy Christmas present. For her, the main obstacle that poverty poses to her happiness is its limitation of her expression of love.After the twist ending, Jim sits back on the couch and smiles, even after it’s revealed that both their gifts are now useless. Because while the gift themselves have no purpose, the giving of the gifts means everything: they now know that each one of them would sacrifice their most prized possessions for the other. Their love triumphs over material wealth and possessions. They gave to each other not objects, but love. The narrator, although omniscient, tells most of the story from Della’s perspective. She’s described as young, affectionate, selfless, and somewhat hysterical, requiring Jim to comfort her when she’s upset. She cares deeply for Jim, and… read analysis of Della Jim, Della’s husband, and “the lord of the flat,” is only twenty-two and heavily burdened by the need to support the household on a low salary. Despite this burden, however, he’s described as content, quiet… read analysis of Jim Madame Sofronie owns the hair shop to which Della sells her hair. She’s described as “large, too white, chilly,” and her manner with Della is brusque and to the point. She wastes no time… read analysis of Madame Sofronie By Dr Oliver Tearle (Loughborough University) ‘The Gift of the Magi’ is a short story by the US short-story writer O. Henry, whose real name was William Sydney Porter (1862-1910). His stories are characterised by their irony, their chatty narrative style, their occasional sentimentality, and by their surprise twist endings. All of these things became something of a signature feature, and ‘The Gift of the Magi’ embodies them all to some extent. But what does this Christmas story mean? You can read ‘The Gift of the Magi’ here before proceeding to our summary and analysis of O. Henry’s story below. We discuss some of the key themes of ‘The Gift of the Magi’ in a separate post. ‘The Gift of the Magi’: plot summary It is Christmas Eve. Jim and Della are a married couple living in a modest furnished flat in New York. They have little money. The story opens with Della upset because she has just one dollar and eighty-seven cents to spend on a Christmas present for her husband. The narrator tells us the married couple each have a possession in which they take great pride. For Jim, it’s a gold watch that had been his father’s and, before that, his grandfather’s. Della’s prized possession is her beautiful hair. Della goes to a woman who deals in hair goods. This woman agrees to buy Della’s hair for twenty dollars. With the newly acquired money, Della goes to buy a platinum fob chain for Jim’s gold watch. This costs her twenty-one dollars, leaving her just eighty-seven cents in the whole world. When she gets home, she sets about curling what’s left of her hair so it looks presentable. When Jim gets home, he is surprised by his wife’s actions, but when she explains why she had her hair cut off, he embraces her and gives her the present he has bought her: two jewelled tortoiseshell combs she has long admired in a shop window. The combs are useless to her until her hair grows out again, but at least she can give Jim his present … But in a last twist, Jim tells Della that he sold his gold watch to pay for the expensive combs he bought for her. So now, she has two combs but no hair to use them on, and he has a platinum fob chain for a gold watch he no longer owns. ‘The Gift of the Magi’: analysis Many of O. Henry’s short stories – the majority of which stretch to only five or six pages – are marked by their ironic twists, and ‘The Gift of the Magi’ is a good example of this typical feature of his work. In their attempts to buy each other their dream Christmas gift, young Jim and Della end up sacrificing the very things that their presents are designed to complement: the combs for Della’s (sold) hair, and the chain for Jim’s (sold) watch. As the narrator observes in the final paragraph: 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 O. Henry is not inviting us to laugh at their folly, but to celebrate their sacrifice. Indeed, what motivated them was not foolishness but wisdom, as the narrator remarks in the story’s closing words: 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. So there are, in a sense, two surprise twists at the end of ‘The Gift of the Magi’: the trademark plot twist which characterises most of O. Henry’s short stories, and the narratorial ‘twist’ in which he overturns our initial response – which might be to laugh good-naturedly at the unhappy turn of events which have just been narrated – and makes a moral point that Jim and Della behaved out of wisdom, even though they ended up with ‘useless’ presents from each other. This is all well and good, but it’s worth noting that the narrator doesn’t gloss why he believes that Jim and Della were ‘wisest’ of all gift-givers. Of course, ‘wise’ here is suggested by the Magi, the Zoroastrian astrologers who, in the Gospel of Matthew, visited the infant Jesus and brought him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh: hence the title of the story. But what makes Jim and Della wise? And why doesn’t O. Henry tell us? Is it because he wanted us to make up our own minds, or did he assume that the answer was fairly self-explanatory? The latter seems more likely. For surely the ‘moral’ of ‘The Gift of the Magi’, given its Christmas setting and the fact that Jim and Della clearly love each other and treat each other well despite having no money to afford the finer things in life, is that love is more important than possessions. And when it comes to Christmas and buying gifts for our loved ones, it really is the thought that counts. But there’s a little more to ‘The Gift of the Magi’ than this rather hackneyed old adage, which would reduce the story to a sentimental and rather twee fable about ‘giving being better than receiving’ and ‘love being more important than money’. Both of these statements are relevant to the story, but what is also relevant is the element of sacrifice the two characters make, and their reaction to learning the implications of this. So Jim is happy to part with a gold watch that has been passed down the male line for three generations, while Della is happy to lose her hair (which would, despite her protestations, take many months to grow back fully) in order to purchase the gift the other one most desires. But with the story’s twist, they learn that their personal sacrifices – committed for their love of the other one – have been in vain. But they are happy about this, not because of the gesture of buying the gift but the great cost that it has incurred for the other. Love, O. Henry seems to say, is about giving up that which you most treasure in order to show your beloved – whom you should love even more – the extent of your devotion. In other words, what is remarkable about ‘The Gift of the Magi’ is that its moral seems to be not just ‘giving is better than receiving’ but ‘giving and losing is all that matters’, since what they receive is of no practical use to them. Subscribe to get the latest posts sent to your email. "Gift of the Magi" revolves around a young couple, Della and Jim, who lack a lot in the way of material possessions and external amusements. The beginning of the story focuses on their poverty—the shabby couch, the lack of mirror, the eight-dollar flat, the broken doorbell. Despite this, the narrator adds that Jim always arrives home to be “greatly hugged. Which is all very good.” Their poverty doesn’t seem to affect their cozy home life on a daily basis, and the emotional value of having each other outweighs their lack of material wealth. The question of material vs. inner value comes up again when Della finds the chain for Jim’s watch, which is “simple and chaste in design” but has value in its substance alone—Della likens this to Jim, who possesses inner value despite having a slight income. In the description of Jim’s watch and Della’s hair, the narrator compares them to King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba—an allusion that describes how much the watch and hair mean to Jim and Della, even if they aren’t truly comparable to an abundance of treasures and jewels, showing that value is subjective. The chatty narrator makes this clear when he says, “Eight dollars a week or a million a year—what is the difference? A mathematician or a wit would give you the wrong answer.” Welcome to the LitCharts study guide on O. Henry's The Gift of the Magi. Created by the original team behind SparkNotes, LitCharts are the world's best literature guides. William Sydney Porter spent his childhood in North Carolina, where he read voraciously and attended his aunt’s elementary school. His uncle trained him to become a pharmacist at nineteen. At twenty, he moved to Texas to work on a sheep ranch. Soon afterwards, he worked a number of jobs as a bank teller, draftsman, and journalist, all while writing on the side. Sometime after his first marriage to Athol Estes, he began writing for the Houston Post, but he was arrested soon afterwards for embezzling funds at his previous bank position. He escaped to Honduras, but returned to the United States when he learned that Estes died from tuberculosis. Porter spent the next three years in prison, where he wrote and published under various pseudonyms, the most popular one being “O. Henry.” After his release from prison, Porter moved to New York City where he wrote most of his short stories. He died in 1910, at age forty-seven, from complications that likely arose from his drinking. The setting of “Gift of the Magi” likely reflects O. Henry’s location at the time in New York City. In 1906, New York was still a shipping city, bustling and packed. There were no skyscrapers yet, and South Street was still an important commercial district rather than the tourist attraction it would become by the end of the century. The Williamsburg Bridge had been built just three years earlier, and the Manhattan Bridge wouldn’t be built for another three years. O. Henry occupied the city at this point during its transition, and he was fascinated by all the people who inhabited New York, leading him to title his second collection of stories The Four Million. O. Henry was a prolific short story writer who specialized in twist endings—much like the popular 19th century French writer, Guy de Maupassant. The two writers have been compared because of their use of situational irony, but O. Henry’s work tends to be more playful, often making use of a witty narrator. This humorous tone shows the influence of fellow American writer Mark Twain, whose writing was also considered realistic, witty, and often irreverent. Key Facts about The Gift of the Magi Full Title: The Gift of the Magi When Written: 1905 Where Written: New York City When Published: 1905 Literary Period: Realism Genre: Short story/Parable Setting: A city, probably around the beginning of the 20th century Climax: Della opens her present and finds the combs Antagonist: Poverty Point of View: Third person omniscient, with a focus on Della’s perspective “Grift of the Magi.” “Gift of the Magi” has inspired numerous pop culture references, including a Sesame Street holiday special and a Simpsons episode called “Grift of the Magi.” Banana Republic. O. Henry coined the term “banana republic” to describe a small tropical nation with a narrowly agrarian economy when he fled to Honduras to escape trial in 1886. Love: Love is the central theme in The Gift of Magi. Living in abject poverty, Jim and Della sell their most prized possessions in order to afford Christmas gifts for one another. Their actions demonstrate their willingness to sacrifice material goods for their love. Jim sells his beloved watch to buy Della combs for her hair; Della sells her hair to buy Jim a chain for his watch. While both sacrifices render the gifts they buy pointless, the narrative shows how it is the sentiment, rather than the gift itself, that truly matters. (The Gift of the Magi Book Report/Review Example | Topics and Well Written Essays - 750 words, n.d.) The Gift of the Magi Book Report/Review Example | Topics and Well Written Essays - 750 words. Retrieved from (The Gift of the Magi Book Report/Review Example | Topics and Well Written Essays - 750 Words) The Gift of the Magi Book Report/Review Example | Topics and Well Written Essays - 750 Words. . “The Gift of the Magi Book Report/Review Example | Topics and Well Written Essays - 750 Words”. . Cited: 6 times Della and Jim’s unselfish love underscores every decision they make in the story: for example, Della penny-pinches for months to buy a worthy Christmas present for Jim. Along with her extended savings effort, she sacrifices her most beloved possession—her hair—to purchase a gift that tangibly expresses her unassailable love for Jim. Later, Jim reassures and validates Della’s sacrifice, claiming her external appearance, such as her haircut, does not affect his love for her. Similarly, Jim sells his treasured watch to procure a set of adorned, tortoise-shell hair combs for Della. The couple's mutual sacrifice of their dearest belongings for each other’s happiness embodies a generous, undying love that transcends physical assets and material wealth. However, while the story shows love triumphant over tangible possessions, the narrator acknowledges that adversity can still suffuse and complicate relationships. While Della frets that Jim will no longer find her beautiful with her new haircut, the narrator admits that Della’s love for Jim has “ravaged” or ruined her: she has willingly lost her hair and now runs the risk of angering Jim (11). The narrator characterizes love as a “mammoth task” that risks tumult and anxiety in addition to generosity, tenderness, and selflessness (11). “The Gift of the Magi” interrogates the ways we deem external belongings valuable. Della explicitly displays her value system—which prioritizes simplicity rather than opulence—when she purchases the chain for Jim. She admires the chain’s “chaste” and understated appearance, which reminds her of Jim (10). Notably, Della and Jim take immense pride in two of their possessions: Della’s beautiful, knee-length hair and Jim’s gold watch passed down from his grandfather. The narrator compares Jim’s watch to King Solomon’s treasures and Della’s hair to the Queen of Sheba’s jewels, which highlights the subjective aspect of ascribing value to tangible objects. Because the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon are two of the wealthiest biblical figures, the material value of Della’s hair and Jim’s watch are not truly comparable with Sheba and Solomon’s opulent, extravagant collection of jewels and other riches. Rather, it is the hair and watch’ sentimental, symbolic connotations of beauty and family that underscores and validates the allusion to the two biblical figures. In other words, the story suggests that the "value" of objects is a personal, innately subjective question. Moreover, the narrator rebuffs the common practice of linking meaning to wealth, as proven by their remark, “Eight dollars a week or a million a year—what is the difference? A mathematician or a wit would give you the wrong answer” (14). Here, the narrator asserts that value is not inextricably tied to money, and that there is not a meaningful difference between a rich man and a poor man. Instead, value is rooted in generosity, thoughtfulness, and sacrifice. Poverty pervades Della and Jim’s lives: Jim only earns $20 a week, and he and Della live in a cheaply furnished flat with a shabby couch, a broken doorbell and mailbox, and a worn-out rug. To afford quality Christmas gifts for each other, they must sacrifice their most precious belongings. Moreover, at the beginning of the story, Della has only saved $1.87 after months of parsimony. Despite their impoverished living conditions and lack of possessions, Della and Jim live a comfortable, affectionate life together. Della warmly greets Jim every day when he returns from work, and she prays for simple quotidian things, rather than for an ascended socioeconomic position. Indeed, the couple does not lament their lack of wealth, nor does their limited income weaken their profound devotion to each other. By showing Della and Jim’s joy within their economic constraints, the story reveals how true fulfillment and meaning derives from intangible and internal factors—such as love and commitment—over tangible factors—such as material wealth. Della and Jim both sacrifice their most valued belongings to buy each other gifts that adequately convey their love for each other. However, neither can use each other’s gifts for their intended purposes precisely because of the respective sacrifices they have made: Della cannot use the combs on her short hair, and Jim cannot use the chain for the now-sold watch. Situational irony suffuses the futility of Della and Jim’s sacrifices: if Della and Jim hadn’t given up their treasures, then they could have used their gifts for their intended purposes. While the gifts now lack concrete value, they nonetheless represent the extreme lengths Della and Jim willingly endure for each other’s happiness. The generosity of Della and Jim’s sacrifices encapsulates the purest form of gift-giving, which prompts the narrator to compare the couple to the magi from the Christian Bible. The narrator suggests that a gift’s value lies in selfless intentions and sacrifice—rather than its cost or market value. Della and Jim’s sacrifices thus signify the most valuable gift of all: unconditional love. Share — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format for any purpose, even commercially. Adapt — remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially. The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms. Attribution — You must give appropriate credit , provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made . You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use. ShareAlike — If you remix, transform, or build upon the material, you must distribute your contributions under the same license as the original. No additional restrictions — You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits. You do not have to comply with the license for elements of the material in the public domain or where your use is permitted by an applicable exception or limitation . No warranties are given. The license may not give you all of the permissions necessary for your intended use. For example, other rights such as publicity, privacy, or moral rights may limit how you use the material. The Gift of Magi is a short story written by O. Henry, focusing on the conflict between an old man and his wife over gifts given to their three sons at Christmas. The term “The Gift of the Magi” became associated with this phrase, which was used in religious contexts before it found its way into popular culture via The Gift of The Magi (an oil painting). While there are many variations of this tale out there, most would agree that one thing must be given up for another gift or else disaster will follow. Introduction: In 1923 Otto Harbach wrote “the present-day classic” about a struggling pair who go from job to job only to realize they have been working towards getting married all along – instead they end up giving away everything because they need each other so much more than anything else ever could., Unfortunately, few people know how darkly humorous it is when you understand what’s going on from start but still find yourself laughing anyway.). The “what is the theme of the story The Gift of Magi” is a short story by O. Henry, which takes place in New York City and tells the tale of an elderly couple who are down on their luck. They receive a gift from a wealthy woman but refuse to accept it because they can’t afford anything else for themselves. Read more in detail here: what is the theme of the story the gift of magi. The story’s external conflict is Jim and Della’s poverty, or their need for money. It’s the holiday season, and everyone wants to give each other a unique gift. They are, however, quite impoverished and unable to purchase the things that they want. Aside from that, what is the fundamental point of contention in the Gift of Magi? The fundamental tension in “The Present of the Magi” is that Della does not have enough money saved to purchase the gift that she believes Jim deserves. Furthermore, how is the issue addressed in the Magi’s gift? The decision to “When Jim tells his wife that they should “put our Christmas presents away and keep them for a while,” he is referring to “The Gift of the Magi.” They’re much too good to be used right now.” He says this because, like his wife, he sold his most valuable asset—his watch, and she her hair. In turn, what tension is shown in the narrative The Gift of Magi’s exposition? The exposition of the narrative ‘The Gift of the Magi’ demonstrates that the characters and poverty are at odds throughout the story. Della has just $1.87 despite months of saving and scrimping. She ‘flops down on the shabby little couch at one point. What happens at the end of The Gift of Magi? The Gift of the Magi’s climax occurs when Jim and Della display each other the presents they had purchased for each other. Answers to Related Questions What is the central theme of the Magi’s Gift? Explanation and Answer: True love is more important than money or possessions, according to the story’s main idea or central theme. Both Jim and Della’s sacrifices for the other demonstrate this. Jim sells his beloved watch to get a pair of combs for Della’s hair. What is the Gift of the Magi’s central theme? Love is the most important subject in “The Gift of the Magi.” Jim and Della are prepared to give up their most valued assets in order to make each other happy, illustrating that a richness of love can compensate for a lack of worldly prosperity. Generosity, selflessness, and poverty are some of the other themes. What is The Gift of Magi’s plot? It is set around the Christmas season and depicts the tale of Jim and Della Dillingham, a poor, young married couple who cannot afford to give each other Christmas presents. Both trade their most valued possessions to buy for a present for the other as The Gift of the Magi unfolds. What does the Gift of the Magi teach us? The message of “The Gift of the Magi” is that the best gifts of all are selflessness and love. Della and Jim Young are in love in the story. Which of the four major categories of literary conflict are there? Many tales involve numerous sorts of conflict, but the major emphasis is generally on one. Self vs. Character. Character versus. Character is a battle between two characters. Nature vs. Character. Supernatural vs. Character. Technology vs. Character. Society vs. Character. What is the significance of the Magi’s gift? Gold, as a metal, represents earthly kingship; frankincense, as an incense, represents godliness; and myrrh, as an embalming oil, represents death. As a result, the gifts were presented in honor of Jesus’ significance in the Christian tale. The magi in “The Gift of the Magi” represent knowledge. What is the source of the internal conflict in the Magi’s gift? Explanation and Answer: Internal conflict is the battle that Della is going through in O. Henry’s “The Gift of the Magi.” She wants to get her husband Jim an outstanding Christmas present, but she only has $1.87. When she considers a strategy to raise the funds, her internal conflict is evident. What are the characters in the Magi’s Gift? Characters. Della and her husband, Jim, are the central characters in O. Henry’s short story “The Gift of the Magi.” The majority of the time, Della’s point of view is used so that we can see her as the most important character. In The Gift of the Magi, what kind of issue does Della have to deal with? The story’s major topic is about love and sacrifice. This is correct; nevertheless, since Della was the protagonist, she included a social struggle. Della does not have enough money to buy a gift for her spouse, therefore she or he must give something away. What is the final leaf’s resolution? Because of the falling movement, the leaf remains in place, and Johnsy improves. The plot thickens when Sue informs Johnsy that the leaf isn’t real, that Behrman painted it, and that he later died of pnemonia. What is the location of the Gift of the Magi? New York City is a city in the United States. What happened to Jim and Della’s presents to each other? Similarly, Della recognizes that Jim will no longer need the chain since he no longer wears a watch. Both Jim and Della are well aware of the folly of their presents. They gave up their most precious assets to purchase a present that each of them would treasure. Their selfless offering has undoubtedly earned them the title of magi. What is a fictional plot’s rising action? The term “rising action” is defined as “action that is increasing in intensity In a storyline, rising action refers to a succession of events that build suspense, intrigue, and tension in the story. A rising action in literature refers to all actions, character faults, and background conditions that combine to generate turns and twists that lead to a climax. About Author Looking for free essays online? We have a massive database of free essay examples just for you. Browse our collection of countless essays at any time of the day to find the one that aligns with your objectives. You can set various filters when checking our free essays database, including topic, and discipline. To make things even easier, we allow you to search our free examples by alphabet. Can I download the free essays? Yes. We avail downloadable samples in Word and PDF format. Downloading these free papers online ensures that you always have an access to inspirational material. If there’s no internet or the connection is disrupted, you can still work with the essay samples on your PC. Our samples are ever available to guarantee that you can access them right when you need them. 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