

The Gift of the Magi Questions and Answers, Summary, Notes

Question 1.

How did Della save her one dollar and eighty-seven cents?

Answer:

Della had saved the money by bargaining hard about prices with the grocer, the vegetable man, and the butcher.

Question 2.

The writer gives details of Jim's flat. Pick out the details.

Answer:

It was a furnished flat at \$8 per week. There was nothing to describe. In the vestibule below was a letterbox into which no letter would go, and an electric button from which no mortal finger could coax a ring. Attached to the button was a card bearing the name "Mr. James Dillingham Young."

Question 3.

The card bearing the full name of Jim now had only one letter 'D' on it. State whether the statement is true or false.

Answer:

True

Question 4.

What were the most precious possessions of Jim and Della?

Answer:

The most precious possession of Jim was the gold watch that had been his father's and his grandfather's before him. Della's possession was her long rippling, shining hair that fell down like a cascade of brown waters.

Question 5.

How has the writer compared Della's hair to Queen of Sheba's jewels?

Answer:

The writer says that 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.

Question 6.

How has the writer compared Jim's watch to King Solomon's treasures?

Answer:

The writer says that 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 with envy.

Question 7.

Why did Della decide to sell her hair?

Answer:

Della wanted to buy a gift for Jim and she had only \$1.87 which was not sufficient to buy any gift. Hence she decided to sell her hair and buy a good gift with the money she would get.

Question 8.

How much money did she get for her hair?

Answer:

She got \$20 for her hair.

Question 9.

What did Della buy for Jim?

Answer:

Della bought a platinum fob chain to be used for Jim's watch in place of the old leather strap that he used.

Question 10.

How was the gift worthy of the watch?

Answer:

The platinum fob chain was simple and chaste in design, properly proclaiming its value by substance alone and not by meretricious ornamentation.

Question 11.

The writer says that the platinum chain was like Jim. How?

Answer:

Della feels that the platinum chain was like Jim. Quietness and value – the description applied to both.

Question 12.

What did Della try to fix before Jim get home?

Answer:

Della tried to fix her chopped hair with curls before Jim got home.

Question 13.

What was Jim's reaction when he saw Della without her lovely hair?

Answer:

Jim was dumb-struck upon seeing Della. His eyes were fixed upon Della, and there was an expression in them that she could not read.

Question 14.

What was Jim's gift for Della? Give a brief description of the gift.

Answer:

Jim's gift for Della was a set of combs, side, and back, that Della had worshipped long in a Broadway window. They were beautiful, expensive combs, made of pure tortoiseshell, with jeweled rims – just the shade to wear in the beautiful brown hair of Della.

Question 15.

Were the gifts useful to each other?

Answer:

No, the gifts were not useful to either of them.

Question 16.

How did Della react when she saw Jim's gift to her?

Answer:

There was an ecstatic scream of joy when Della saw Jim's gift to her. Then immediately, there was a quick change to hysterical tears and wails. She recalled how much she had yearned for them. She hugged them to her bosom, and at length, looked up with dim eyes and a smile and assured Jim that her hair would grow very fast.

Question 17.

Jim and Della both gave up something dear to them. What does it tell us about them?

Answer:

We have been already told that Jim and Della are a loving couple. Even in their exigent condition, they desire to gift something to each other. Both keep their attempts to buy a gift a secret from each other. In order to gather the money needed to buy a gift, they sell the most precious things they possess. Though their gifts prove to be useless, they gain in love and satisfaction with each other.

Question 18.

O. Henry's stories often blend humor and pathos. The description of the card bearing Jim's name is an example of this. Can you identify one more example from the story?

Answer:

The mention of a pier-glass between the windows of the room is one more example of O. Henry's humour blended with pathos. A very thin and very agile person might, by observing his reflection in a rapid sequence of longitudinal strips, obtain a fairly accurate conception of his looks. Della, being slender, had mastered this art.

The other example is of Della's gift. When Jim looks at Della's gift, he just puts his hands under the back of his head and smiles. He tells Della to put away their Christmas presents for some time, as they were too nice to use just at that time.

Question 19.

Who were the Magi?

Answer:

The Magi were the wise men who brought gifts to the newborn Jesus.

According to the Bible, the magi were three kings (Casper, Melchior, and Balthazar) who traveled to Bethlehem from somewhere in the East (probably Persia).

Question 20.

What is the writer's last word to the wise of these days?

Answer:

The writer says that these two, Della and Jim, were the wisest of all those who give gifts. Of all who gave and received gifts, they were the wisest. They were the Magi.

B. Close Study

Read the following extracts carefully. Discuss in pairs and then write the answers to the questions given below them.

Question 1.

She got out her curling irons and lighted the gas and went to work repairing the ravages made by generosity added to love.

a) What does 'generosity' refer to?

Answer:

The 'generosity' referred to was the readiness of Della to sacrifice the one precious thing she had-her shining brown hair.

b) What repairing work was carried out?

Answer:

Her hair was being curled in order to make it look pleasant.

c) Why was the girl repairing the ravages?

Answer:

Della knew that Jim would be shocked and disappointed to see her beautiful hair chopped off. Hence she tried to 'repair the savages'.

Question 2.

A mathematician or a wit would give you the wrong answer.

a) What is the question alluded to here?

Answer:

The question referred to here is 'Eight dollars a week or million a year – what is the difference?'

b) What is the 'right' answer?

Answer:

The cost of the flat doesn't matter as long as the people who live there love each other very much.

c) What is the implied meaning of the statement?

Answer:

In spite of their strained financial condition, Della and Jim were truly rich because they had a lot of love for each other and were ready to sacrifice their most prized possessions for each other.

III. Paragraph Writing:

Discuss in groups of 4 each the answers to the following questions. Individually note down the important points for each question and then develop the points into one paragraph answers.

Question 1.

Why are the gifts of Della and Jim compared to those of the Magi?

Answers:

1. The Magi brought gifts on their own, out of love for their lord.
2. They brought wonderful gifts, which could possibly be exchanged in case of duplication.
3. Della and Jim too brought gifts for each other, sacrificing their own precious possessions in the process.
4. Their gifts are greater than those of the Magi because they cannot be exchanged.

Paragraph: The gifts of Della and Jim are compared to those of the Magi. The Magi were the three wise men who brought gifts to the newborn Jesus. Casper, Melchior, and Balthazar traveled from Persia to Bethlehem at great risk to themselves to give their gifts to the newborn. This showed their love and reverence for the newborn.

Likewise, Jim and Della took risks when they sold the most precious possessions they had in order to show their love for each other. In fact, the writer describes them as the wisest of all those who give and receive gifts as

they gave up the only prized possessions they had. They are fit to be described as the Magi.

Question 2.

Write on the appropriateness of the title.

Answers:

1. The gift of the Magi was an offering to the Lord.
2. It was given out of love and affection.
3. The writer points out that the couple is greater than the Magi because their gifts cannot be exchanged unlike those of the Magi.

Paragraph: The writer gives the title to suggest that the story is one of love and affection. The writer points out that the gifts of even ordinary people like Della and Jim can be greater than those of the Magi who were kings and had a lot of wealth. Finally, when they are not able to collect enough money for the gifts, both of them sell the most precious things they had with them – Jim sells his gold watch which belonged to his father and grandfather before him. Della sells her long, beautiful, rippling hair.

The most important point is that, unlike the gifts of the Magi which could be exchanged in case of duplication, the gifts of Della and Jim cannot be exchanged at all. It would be a long time before they used their gifts.

Question 3. Imagine that you were Della and write on the conflict you went through before you sacrificed your hair.

Answers:

1. I desperately wanted to give a gift to Jim for Christmas.
2. I had very little money, Jim doesn't earn much, and I try very hard to save whatever little I can by bargaining with all the sellers I have to deal with.
3. I always knew that my long, beautiful hair was something even Jim was proud of.
4. When I looked at myself in the mirror, I realized I could earn a little money by selling my hair. Anyway, the hair would grow back.
5. When I finally got ready to step out of the house to sell my hair, I had second thoughts. I did not want to lose something so beautiful. But I had to do it. There was no other way to get money. And I had to present a gift to Jim for Christmas.

IV. Vocabulary Exercises:

A. Fill in the blanks with the phrases given in the box below.

(beggar description, at last, made for,,’’ turn inside out, on the sly, on account of, give way, look for, be on the lookout for, to attend to)

1. Della’s despair _____ to ecstatic joy.
2. The takeoff was delayed _____ the bad weather.
3. We are _____ new opportunities.
4. Her conduct is so strange that it _____.
5. I have some urgent work _____.
6. _____ we reached home.
7. The burglar had _____ the house _____.
8. Della and Jim were _____ each other.
9. The two of them must have been ‘meeting _____.
10. We _____ an improvement in our son’s performance this year.

Answers:

1. gave way
2. on account of
3. on the lookout for
4. beggars description
5. to attend to
6. At last
7. turned, inside out
8. made for
9. on the sly
10. are looking for.

1. Can you pick up one more such example from the story?

Answer:

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. OR 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.

2. Can you try writing a paragraph on one of the following using a similar style?
 - a) Love
 - b) Friendship
 - c) Sacrifice

Answer:

(a) Love. Love, the most desired experience in the world! Also, the most incomprehensible thing in the world! I want to be loved, but do I understand it when I am shown, love? Not at all. I am searching for love everywhere except where it has always been. Perhaps I am only in love with love, and cannot be in love with any person.