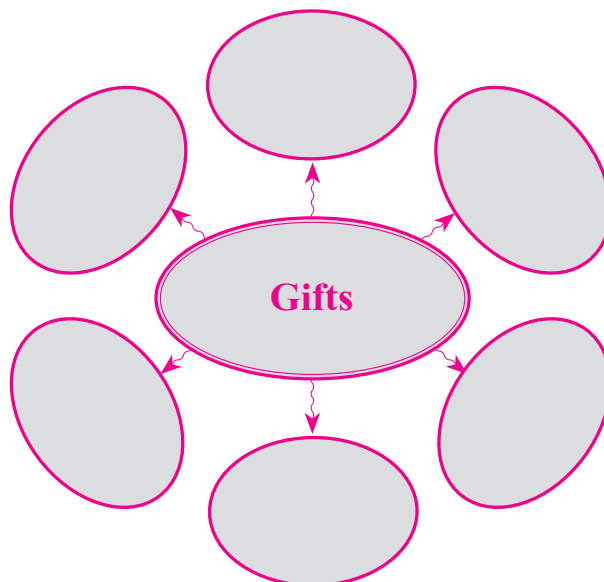


4.6 The Gift of the Magi

Warming Up!

1. The moment you hear the word 'Gift', what feelings do you experience? Complete the web with those feelings.



2. 'Gifts' need not be material gifts. They can be abstract and yet priceless. For example, favours, kindness, help in times of need etc.

Think of and enlist such unforgettable gifts given to you by :

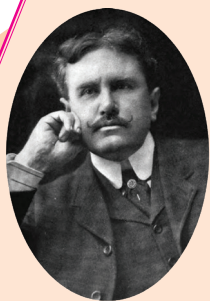
- (1) Parents/ Grand parents :
- (2) Siblings/ relatives :
- (3) Friends :
- (4) Strangers :

3. Say whether the words underlined are infinitives/ participles or gerunds.

- (1) The athletes wanted to take part in the running race.
(a) (b)
- (2) Would you like to eat at the dinning table?
(a) (b)
- (3) Reading is good for the mind and soul. So take up reading books.
(a) (b)
- (4) I like to eat fruits rather than eating sweets.
(a) (b)
- (5) Listening and speaking sharpen your language skills.
(a) (b)



The Gift of the Magi



O Henry (1862 - 1910) William Sydney Porter, better known by his pen name, O Henry, was an American short story writer. He was famous for his art, and his stories which had surprise endings. 'The Gift of the Magi' is a story of an impoverished young couple, who have no money, yet wish to buy each other Christmas gifts.

♦ *Why do you think Della counted the money three times?*

- **bulldozing** : pressurizing
- **cheeks burned** : felt embarrassed

- **imputation** : associative action to some person
- **parsimony** : unwillingness to spend money
- **instigates** : provokes

- **mendicancy squad** : police who arrest beggars and the homeless

- **coax** : urge
- **appertaining** : concerning

♦ *What signs indicate that Della was very poor?*

- **unassuming** : simple and humble

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 look out 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** there unto 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, 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 gray cat walking a gray fence in a gray 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 honour 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.

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

Now, there were two possessions of James Dillingham Young 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

- **agile** : quick and light-footed
- **accurate** : correct/precise
- ◆ *What was the cause of Della's disturbed mind?*
- ◆ *What were the couple's prized possessions?*
- **depreciate** : gradually diminish in value
- **basement** : the floor of a building which is partly or entirely below ground level
- **cascade** : a small waterfall
- **garment** : clothing

- **fluttered** : danced/
hovered

- **platinum** : a precious
silvery-white metal

- ◆ *What made Della
look at her reflection
critically?*

- **cents** : a monetary
unit in various
countries equal to one
hundredth of a dollar,
Euro or other decimal
currency unit

- **gave way** :
submitted, yielded

- **prudence** : quality of
being wise

- **tremendous** : very
big

- **mammoth** : huge

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 practiced 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** fobchain 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. 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 of saying little silent prayer 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,” she cried, “don’t look at me that way. I had my hair cut off and sold 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 labour.

“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?”



◆ *What good habits did Della have ?*

● **whispered** : spoke very softly

◆ *Why did Jim stare at Della?*

● **disapproval** : disagreement

● **patent** : obvious

• **curiously** : eagerly

• **idiocy** : foolishness

• **trance** : half-conscious state

• **inconsequential** : unimportant

◆ *What gift had Jim brought for Della?*

◆ *Why did the beautiful present flash?*

◆ *Why are Jim and Della referred to as the magi?*

• **coveted** : sought after

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. 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 jeweled 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. 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.

- O Henry



ENGLISH WORKSHOP

1. Complete the following.

- (a) Della had saved
- (b) Della wanted to buy
- (c) Della’s beautiful hair tell about

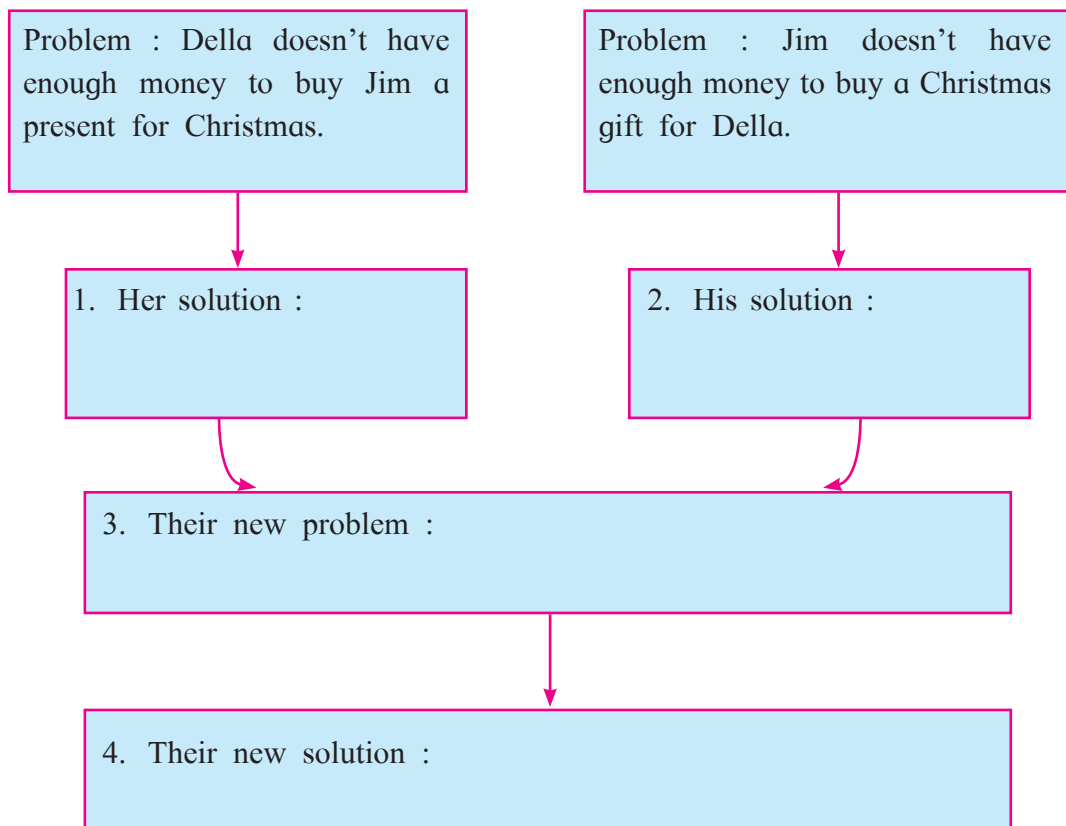
2. Answer the following questions:

- (a) How much did Della save for Christmas? What does it show?
- (b) Why did Della take pride in the beauty of her hair?
- (c) Why and how did Della sell her hair? Do you think she did well?
- (d) Why did Jim sell his gold watch? Do you think he did well?

- (e) Why did Jim and Della want to present the gifts?
- (f) Why did Della feel sad on losing her hair?
- (g) What did Jim bring out from his coat? Describe the scene.
- (h) How beautiful was the gold watch chain? Would you have liked to own it?
- (i) How did the Magi want to celebrate their Christmas (OR) Who were the first people to give Christmas gifts?
- (j) What is the moral of the story?

3. Complete the following activity :

Map the problems and solutions in “The Gift of the Magi” on the diagram below. Two problems have already been filled in.



4. Read the following and answer.

(A) Say WHAT

- (a) troubled Della on Christmas Eve?
- (b) was the current family income?
- (c) could have outshone Queen of Sheba's jewels?
- (d) was the cost of the fob chain?
- (e) sent Jim into a trance, on his return?

(B) Say WHY

- (a) did Della sell her lovely long hair ?
- (b) was Della a bit apprehensive after she had sold her hair ?

- (c) did Jim avoid checking the time in his gold watch, in a public place?
- (d) did Della's scream of joy change to loud wails ?
- (e) in the end, did Jim ask Della to put the chops on?

(C) Say WHEN

- (a)..... had Jim added 'Dillingham' as his middle name ?
- (b)did a tear or two drop on the old red carpet ?
- (c) did Della go through goods in the stores ?
- (d)did Della say a silent prayer to God ?
- (e)..... did Jim try to divert their attention for ten seconds, at least?

5. Complete : Use the chart below to explain situational irony in 'The Gift of the Magi'. For each character, identify what is expected to happen and what actually happens.

SITUATIONAL IRONY	
What Della plans :	What actually happens
What Jim plans :	What actually happens :

6. Complete the following activity.

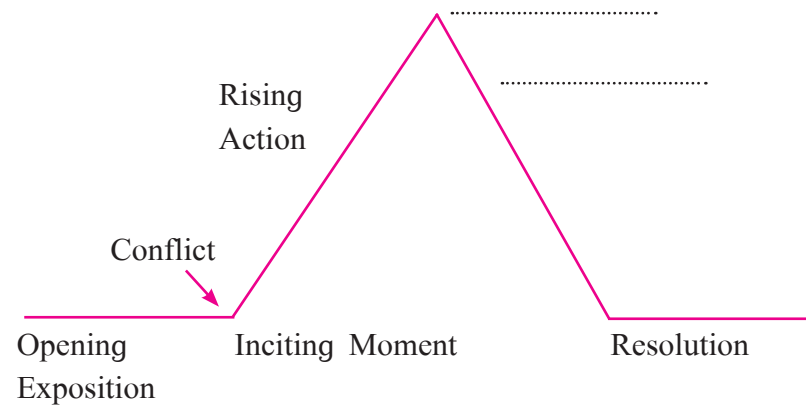
Word List :

agile	cascade	coveted
instigate	prudence	assertion
chronicle	inconsequential	predominating
subside	gobbling	

Fill in each set of blanks with the correct word from the word list. The boxed letters will spell out something that Della receives.

1. A small waterfall	- - - <input type="text"/> - - -
2. You wished greedily for something.	- <input type="text"/> - - - - -
3. This describes something important.	- - - - - <input type="text"/> - - - - -
4. You hope a loud siren will do this.	- - <input type="text"/> - - - -
5. Troublemakers do this.	- - <input type="text"/> - - - - -

7. Complete the following basic plot diagram :



8. Pick out from the story words that mean the following.

Against each consumer write (N) if it is a Noun (V) for Verb and (Adj) for Adjective.

- (1) reluctance to spend money ()
- (2) relating to ()
- (3) urge ()
- (4) reduce in value ()
- (5) wisdom ()
- (6) very huge ()
- (7) foolishness ()

9. Think and answer on your own in a few sentences, in your notebook.

- (a) What would you do if you ran short of money, to buy a birthday gift for one of your parents/ siblings ?
- (b) Think of two alternatives that could have prevented Della and Jim from selling their most precious possessions.
- (c) Justify the title of the story, 'The Gift of the Magi'.
- (d) Gifts that you buy have fixed prices/ rates. How can the buyer increase the value of a gift bought for someone very dear in the family ?
- (e) What situation is the climax of the story ? How does it end up as an anticlimax ?
- (f) If you share this story with some friends in a junior class, how would they react in the end ?
- (g) Who were the very first people to give Christmas gifts ? What had inspired them to do so ?
- (h) At the end of the story, O Henry remarks that of all who give gifts, Della and Jim were the wisest. Think and explain this paradoxical remark.

10. Pick out and rewrite the exact sentence which indirectly imply the following :

- (a) Della was not too happy about bargaining for grocery etc.

.....

- (b) The flat was in a dilapidated condition.

.....

(c) King Solomon would express his jealousy of Jim.

(d) Della spent a joyful time, for two hours.

(e) Della's elated mood underwent a change as she opened her gift.

(f) The weekly income amount does not matter.

(g) Let us set aside our gifts and get ready for dinner.

11. Frame wh-questions to get the underlined answers.

(1) Life is made up of sobs, sniffles and smiles.

(2) Many a happy hour she had spent planning for something nice for him.

(3) Her hair reached below her knee.

(4) She was ransacking the stores for Jim's present.

(5) At 7 o'clock the coffee was made.

(6) The magi were wise men.

12. (A) Add appropriate question tags.

(1) Della leaped up,?

(2) You'll have to look at the time,?

(3) They were expensive combs,?

(4) I just had to do it,?

(5) I am still pretty,?

(6) Give it to me quick,?

(7) There was clearly nothing to do,?

(8) My hair grows so fast,?

(9) Let's put our Christmas presents away,?

(10) She had a habit for saying a silent prayer, ?

(B) Supply short answers (Pronoun + Auxiliary Verb)

Questions

Answers

(1) Don't you like me ?

Yes,

(2) Have you cut off your hair ?

Yes,

(3) Shall I put the chops on ?

Yes,

- | | |
|-------------------------------|------------|
| (4) Isn't it a dandy ? | Yes, |
| (5) Does it make difference ? | No, |
| (6) Will you buy my hair ? | No, |
| (7) Can you afford it ? | No, |
| (8) Are you fooling me ? | No, |

13. Pick out the infinitives/ gerunds/ participles from the following sentences and state what each one is.

(1) I want to see how it looks.

.....

(2) I don't like frightening stories.

.....

(3) We decided to settle in Pune.

.....

(4) Playing sitar is Arjun's hobby.

.....

(5) It was a horrifying experience for all of us.

.....

