

**MASTERPIECE**  
A great work of literature

"O. Henry" is a pen name. The author of this story was really named William Sydney Porter (1862-1910).

# The Gift of the Magi

O. HENRY'S CLASSIC HOLIDAY TALE

ADAPTED FOR SCOPE BY MACK LEWIS • ART BY LINDA WINGERTER



**AS YOU READ,  
THINK ABOUT:**

## Situational Irony

Situational irony is a contradiction between what is expected and what actually occurs. *Can you find the situational irony in this play?*

## CHARACTERS

- \* **NARRATORS 1, 2, 3 (N1, N2, N3)**
- \* **DELLA:** a young woman
- \* **JIM:** Della's husband
- SYDNEY:** the janitor in Jim and Della's apartment building
- MRS. PORTER:** a neighbor
- MADAME SOPHIE:** a wig maker
- SHOPKEEPER**
- \*indicates large speaking role*

## PROLOGUE

**N1:** The holidays are near, a time of love and celebration—and gifts too.

**N2:** Many people associate the tradition of giving gifts at Christmastime with the Magi.

**N3:** According to the Bible, the Magi were three men who traveled a great distance to give gifts to the baby Jesus.

**N1:** They are often called the "Wise Men."



**N2:** But today, let us tell you a tale about some other gift-givers.

### SCENE 1

#### NEW YORK CITY, TWO DAYS BEFORE CHRISTMAS, 1900

**N3:** Della and Jim are a young married couple living in New York City.

**DELLA:** What a splendid walk that was!

**JIM:** Indeed it was, Della. Central Park at Christmastime is always so delightful.

**DELLA:** What shall we do now?

**JIM:** Let's walk down Broadway and window-shop.

**DELLA:** But we haven't any money.

**JIM:** It costs nothing to look. Besides, we can dream, can't we? Why, look here. Look at these scarves.

**DELLA:** Oh, wouldn't I be lovely wearing one of those?

**JIM:** Don't be silly. You're lovely just as you are.

**DELLA:** And look at those combs! I've admired them forever. Pure tortoiseshell. Imagine how they'd look in my hair.

**JIM:** Della, your hair is already so long and beautiful. Look, it's almost to your knees.

**DELLA:** Do you think so, Jim?

Do you really think it's beautiful?

**JIM:** I may be poor, Della, but I'm the luckiest man in all New York!

### SCENE 2

#### THE NEXT MORNING, JIM AND DELLA'S APARTMENT

**N1:** Jim and Della live in a shabby little one-room apartment.



**N2:** But Jim does have one possession he is proud of: his pocket watch.

**JIM** (*checking his watch*): I must be off to work.

**DELLA:** Don't be home late, Jim.

**JIM:** I'll put in my time and nothing more.

**DELLA:** You look so sophisticated when you glance at your watch.

**JIM:** Do I? Even with this old leather strap I use in place of a chain?

**DELLA** (*hugging him*): Who's to notice the strap when such a handsome man is holding such a glorious watch?

**N3:** Jim leaves for his office. On the way out, he waves to the janitor, Sydney.

**SYDNEY:** Good morning, Mr. Young. Off to work already, are you?

**JIM** (*checking his watch*): I mustn't be late for work, Sydney.

**SYDNEY:** No, sir. That's quite a watch.

**JIM:** It was my grandfather's. Keeps perfect time.

**SYDNEY:** It's quite remarkable.

**JIM:** Sydney, about my mailbox.

**SYDNEY:** It says on it, "Mr. James Dillingham Young," just like you asked.

**JIM:** That's just it. Perhaps it would

be best if it just said, "Mr. James D. Young."

**SYDNEY:** Oh, no, sir. Dillingham sounds so distinguished.

**JIM:** Distinguished for a man who makes \$30 a week—not for a man who makes a mere \$20.

**SYDNEY** (*shaking his head, frowning*): Another pay cut? Times are hard.

**JIM** (*checking his watch again*): Yes they are, Sydney. But whether \$20 or \$30 a week, I must be on time.

### SCENE 3

#### JIM AND DELLA'S APARTMENT

**N1:** Like Jim, Della has only one treasure—her long, beautiful hair.

**N2:** Della and her neighbor sit together at the kitchen table.

**DELLA** (*counting coins*): . . . 85, 86 . . . one dollar and 87 cents. No matter how often I count it, Mrs. Porter, the amount never changes.

**MRS. PORTER:** Of course not, dear, but a penny saved is a penny earned.

**DELLA:** And how I've earned these pennies, Mrs. Porter. I've learned to drive a hard bargain. The grocer, the butcher, the milkman—I think they cringe when they see me coming. I'll take the worst cuts of meat to save a penny, the bruised fruit to save two.

**MRS. PORTER:** Don't you worry now, dear. Things will turn around for you two. I just know it.

**DELLA** (*crying*): But it's Christmas Eve. One dollar and 87 cents! What can I buy my wonderful Jim with one dollar and 87 cents?

**MRS. PORTER:** Now don't cry, Della.



**N3:** Just then, Della happens to glance in the mirror.

**N1:** She catches sight of her long, beautiful hair, rippling and shining like a cascade of brown water.

**N2:** She stands for a moment. A final tear splashes on the worn carpet.

**DELLA:** I have it, Mrs. Porter.

**N3:** Della's face grows pale as she quickly arranges her hair into a bun.

**MRS. PORTER** (*concerned*): Oh, Della, you mustn't.

**DELLA:** I must. For Jim. For Christmas.

**N1:** On goes Della's old brown coat and old brown hat.

**N2:** And with a whirl of skirts and a brilliant sparkle still in her eye . . .

**N3:** . . . she flutters out the door and down the stairs into the street.

#### SCENE 4

##### ON BROADWAY

**N1:** Moments later, Della arrives at Madame Sophie's Hair Goods of All Kinds.

**DELLA:** Will you buy my hair?

**MADAME SOPHIE:** I do buy hair. Take off your hat and let's have a look at it.

**N2:** Down ripples the brown cascade.

**MADAME SOPHIE:** What could be so important that you'd sacrifice such lovely hair?

**DELLA:** I'd sacrifice anything for my Jim. How much is it worth?

**MADAME SOPHIE:** Your hair? Twenty dollars.

**DELLA:** I'll take it.

**N3:** Her hair gone and 20 dollars crumpled in her fist, Della rushes out onto the street.

**DELLA** (*to herself*): Now for Jim's present.

**N1:** For two hours, Della ransacks the stores searching for that special something.

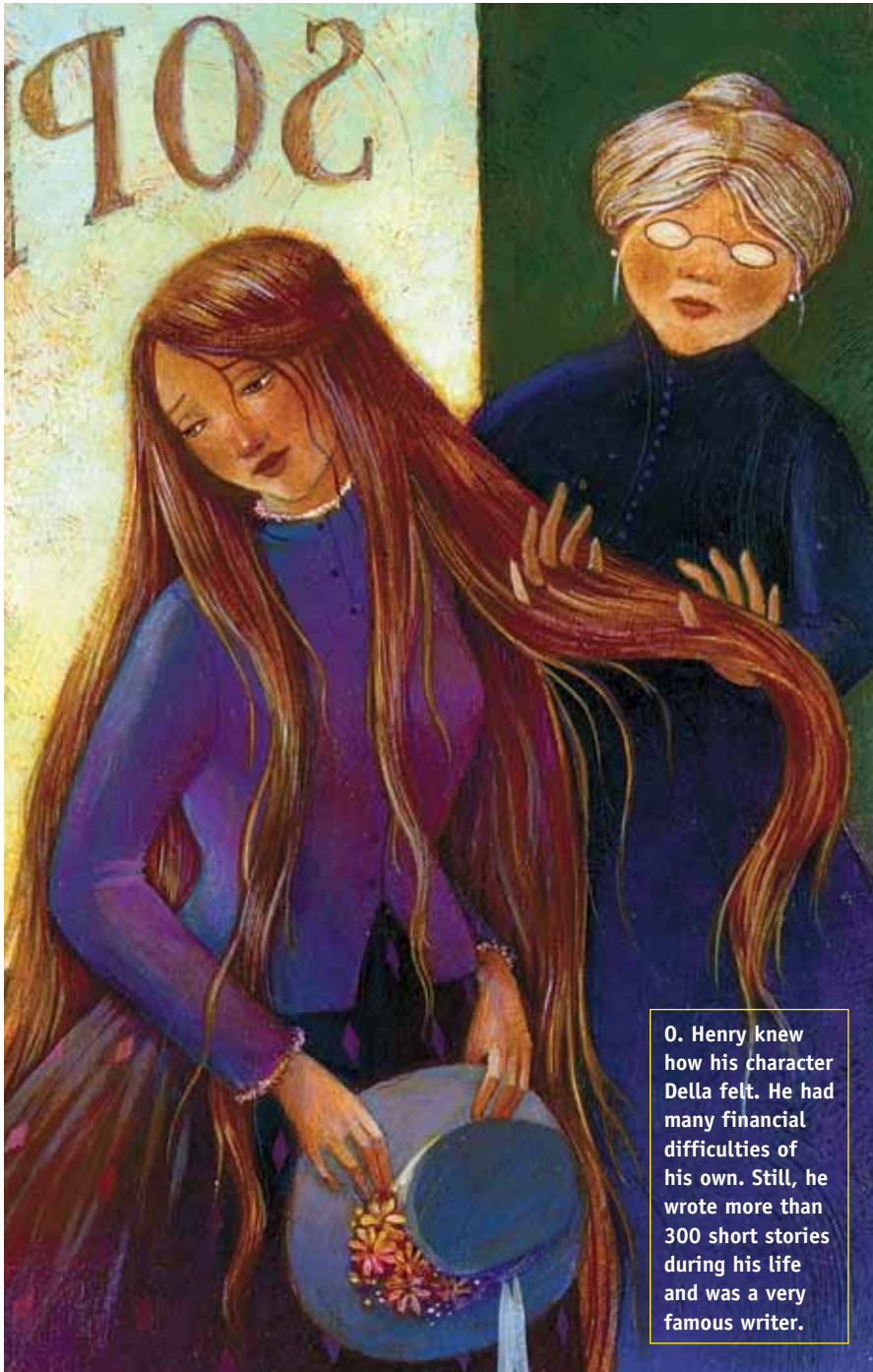
**DELLA:** He needs a new overcoat, and every day he goes off to work without gloves to warm his hands. But his gift must be something precious, something worthy of the honor of being owned by Jim.

**N2:** She soon spots just the thing.

**SHOPKEEPER:** May I help you?

**DELLA:** Might I see that watch chain?

**SHOPKEEPER:** Why certainly, Miss. It's platinum. A fine



O. Henry knew how his character Della felt. He had many financial difficulties of his own. Still, he wrote more than 300 short stories during his life and was a very famous writer.

chain—but very expensive.

**DELLA:** It's so perfect for my husband. With a chain like this on his watch, he could check the time in anyone's company. How much is it?

**SHOPKEEPER:** Twenty-one dollars.

**DELLA:** I'll take it.

## SCENE 5

### JIM AND DELLA'S APARTMENT

**DELLA:** How bad is it, Mrs. Porter?

**MRS. PORTER:** A pretty thing like you? You're adorable with or without your hair. We'll curl what's left of it. That's what we'll do. We'll curl it.

**N3:** Within 40 minutes, Della's head is covered with tiny curls.

**MRS. PORTER:** That's not so bad now, is it?

**N1:** But when Della looks at her reflection in the mirror, she remains worried.

**DELLA:** If Jim doesn't faint before he takes a second look, he'll say I look like a truant schoolboy! A boy!

**MRS. PORTER:** Now, now.

**DELLA:** But what could I do with a dollar and 87 cents?

**MRS. PORTER:** I'll go now, before Jim gets home.

**DELLA:** Yes, you had better. He's never late.

**MRS. PORTER (leaving):** Don't you worry now. It'll be all right.

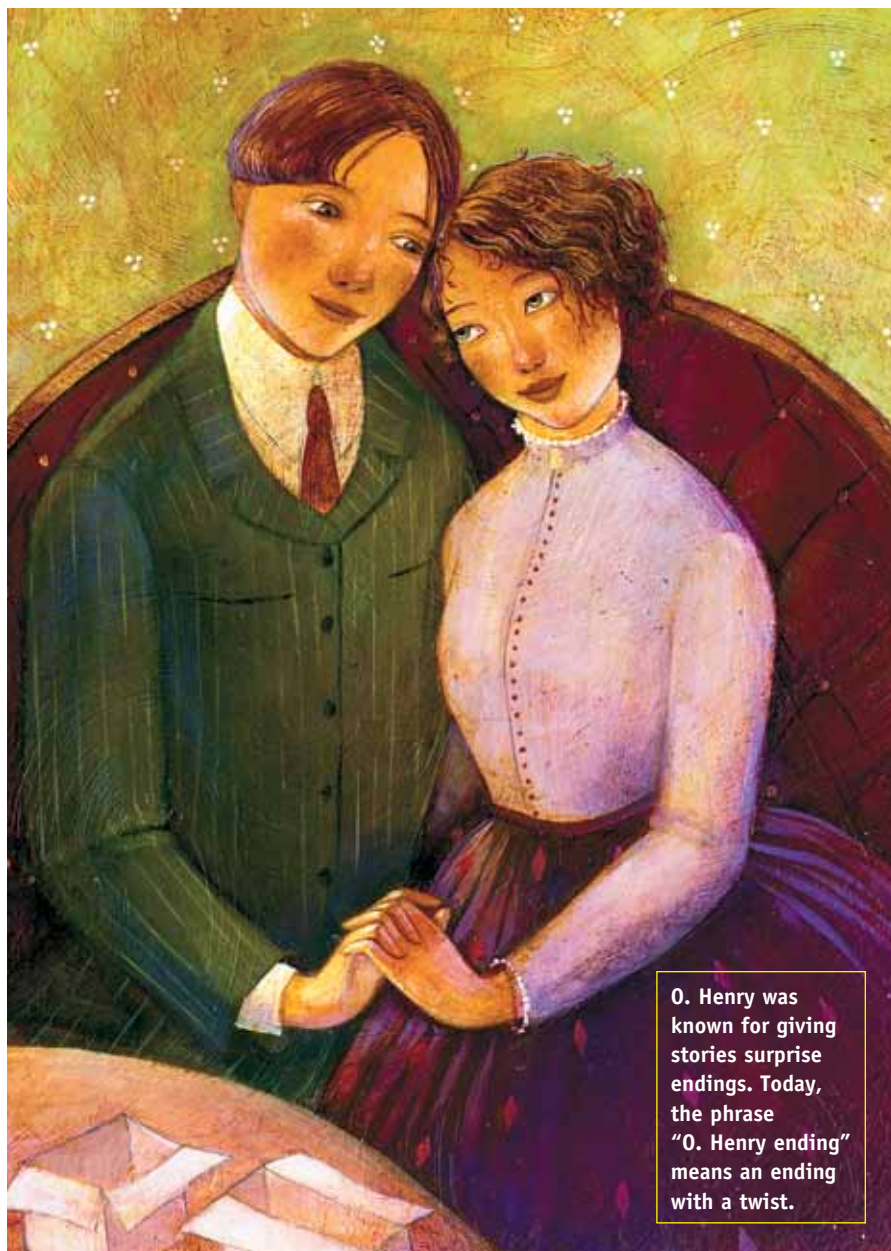
**DELLA (aside):** Oh, please, let him think I'm still pretty!

**N2:** A moment after Mrs. Porter leaves, Jim steps in.

**N3:** Seeing Della, he freezes.

**N1:** He says nothing. He merely stands there with a peculiar expression on his face.

**DELLA:** Jim, darling, don't stare at



O. Henry was known for giving stories surprise endings. Today, the phrase "O. Henry ending" means an ending with a twist.

me that way. I had my hair cut off and sold it because I couldn't have lived through Christmas without giving you a present. It'll grow back.

**N2:** But Jim continues to stare at Della. He seems to be in a trance.

**DELLA (almost crying):** You don't mind, do you, Jim? My hair grows awfully fast. Jim, say something. You can't imagine what a wonderful gift I have for you!

**JIM (confused):** You cut off your hair.

**DELLA (crying):** And sold it. Don't you like me just as well anyhow? I'm still me without my hair, aren't I?

**N3:** Jim looks around the room curiously.

**JIM (coming out of his trance):** You say your hair is gone?

**DELLA:** Don't look for it. It's gone. I did it for you.

**JIM (hugging her):** Don't make any



mistake, Della. I don't think there's anything in the way of a haircut that could make me love you any less. But if you unwrap this present, you'll see why you took me by surprise.

**N1:** Della unwraps the gift and screams for joy . . .

**N2:** Then cries aloud.

**N3:** For there are the combs, the precious tortoiseshell combs she'd so long desired without the hope of ever having.

**DELLA** (*sniffing*): My hair does grow fast, Jim.

**N1:** Jim has not yet seen his present.

**N2:** Della holds it out to him in her open palm.

**DELLA** (*excited*): Isn't it dandy, Jim? Let's put it on your watch. I want to see how it looks!

**N3:** Jim tumbles onto the sofa and begins to laugh.

**JIM:** Della, I sold the watch to get the money to buy your combs!

**N1:** Now they laugh together.

**JIM:** Let's put our presents away and keep them for a while. They're too nice to use just yet. And now,

suppose we have some dinner.

**N2:** Today we've told you of two people who sacrificed their greatest treasures.

**N3:** You might think they were foolish.

**N1:** But in a word to the wise, let us conclude with this:

**N2:** Of all who give and receive gifts, these two were the wisest.

**N3:** They are the Magi. ●

## SCOPE CLOSE-UP

### A REAL-LIFE MAGI

In 2006, Hannah Salwen, then 14 years old, was with her dad, driving home from a sleepover. At a traffic light, she looked out the window and saw an expensive Mercedes next to them. On the sidewalk, next to the Mercedes, was a homeless man begging for food.

"Dad," Hannah said, "if that man had a less-nice car, the other man could have a meal."

They drove away, but the idea stuck in Hannah's mind—how the well-off could help the poor by doing with less. She kept bringing it up to her parents until finally her mom asked, "What do you want to do? Sell our house?"

Hannah's answer was YES.

Shockingly, Hannah's parents did just that.

They sold their fancy home, bought a more modest one, and donated the difference—nearly \$1 million—to the Hunger Project, an organization that fights poverty and hunger in Africa. Later, they wrote about their experience in a book called *The Power of Half*.

Now, the Salwens live in a house that is half the size of their old one.

But their hearts feel twice as big.

## PROMPT

### Isn't It Ironic?

Were you surprised by the way the play ended? Write a paragraph explaining what makes this ending ironic. **HINT:** Consider how Della's and Jim's expectations about Christmas are different from what actually happens. Be sure to use text evidence in your answer.





## Lesson 2

# Readers Theater Play: *The Gift of the Magi*, p. 7

### SUMMARY

For the holidays, we present our play adaptation of O. Henry's classic story about giving from the heart.

### MAIN SKILLS AND TEACHING OBJECTIVES

This lesson will help your students:

- Understand irony, specifically situational irony
- Understand theme

### BEFORE READING

#### UNDERSTANDING IRONY (5 minutes)

Write the following pairs of sentences where students can see them: **1.** "Jorge was sure he would ace his math test because he stayed up all night studying for it. However, he was so tired that he slept right through math class and failed the test." **2.** "Maggie refused to go skiing with her family because she thought it was too dangerous. While she was in the ski lodge waiting for them, she tripped over a chair and broke her arm." Ask students to explain the relationship between the two sentences in each set. (*The opposite of what the person expects occurs.*) Then direct students to read the Check It Out box on page 7 and look for situational irony as they read.

#### VOCABULARY (5 minutes)

Project or distribute page 1 of "Vocabulary: *The Gift of the Magi*" from *Scope's* Web site. Review the definitions. (Page 2 of this worksheet has a vocab-reinforcement activity.)

### DURING READING

#### UNDERSTANDING THEME (10 minutes)

Pause at the end of the prologue. Have a brief discussion about why people give gifts at holidays. What gift-giving traditions do students have with their families? What, if anything, do they think is important about exchanging gifts?

### AFTER READING

#### CRITICAL-THINKING AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (15 minutes)

*Go online to find these questions in a format suitable for printing or projecting.*

- How do Jim and Della feel about each other? What lines show this? (**making inferences**) *They adore each other, as shown when Della tells Jim, "You look so sophisticated," when she refers to Jim as "wonderful," and when she says, "I'd sacrifice anything for my Jim." Jim's adoration is*

*shown when he says, "I'm the luckiest man in all of New York," and "I don't think there's anything in the way of a haircut that could make me love you any less."*

- Why is it so important to Della to buy Jim a present? (**understanding theme/character motivation**) *She wants to make him happy and show how much she loves him.*
- What is Jim most likely thinking when he sees that Della has cut her hair? (**understanding irony**) *The combs he just bought for Della will now be useless.*
- In what way is the end of the story ironic? (**understanding irony**) *Jim and Della both believed they were giving each other the perfect gift, but they each gave up the treasure that would have made the gifts they received useful.*
- Are Jim and Della wise or foolish? Why does the narrator conclude, "They are the Magi"? (**understanding theme**) *Answers will vary; they are the Magi, or wise, because what they really gave each other was love—which is more precious than any material item.*

#### UNDERSTANDING IRONY (20 minutes)

Ask students to make two pairs of sketches. *Pair one:* Jim buying Della's gift, with a thought bubble showing what he expects will happen when he gives it to her, and Jim finding out that Della has cut her hair, with a thought bubble showing what he thinks about his gift for Della now. *Pair two:* Della buying Jim's present, with a thought bubble showing what she expects will happen when she gives it to him, and Della just after Jim tells her that he sold his watch, with a thought bubble showing what she thinks about her gift for him now. **Go online to find a template to use with this activity.**

#### WRITING PROMPTS

**Personal narrative:** Write about a gift you gave or received that had meaning beyond the value of the item itself.

**Contest:** Write a paragraph explaining why the play's ending is ironic, and enter it in our contest. **Go online for contest details.**

#### Online Resources

##### Activities to print or project:

- Vocabulary from this play
- Bubble test (interactive and noninteractive)
- Illustrating-irony template
- Critical-thinking questions
- Contest entry form

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# The Gift of the Magi Quiz

**Directions:** Read the play *The Gift of the Magi* in this issue of *Scope*. Then answer the multiple-choice and short-answer questions below.

1. What is the purpose of the prologue in this play?
  - Ⓐ It foreshadows the ironic ending.
  - Ⓑ It introduces the main characters and the setting.
  - Ⓒ It is part of the play’s rising action.
  - Ⓓ It introduces the time of year and the topic of gift-giving.
2. Why does Jim sell his watch?
  - Ⓐ It isn’t working anymore.
  - Ⓑ He can’t afford a chain for it.
  - Ⓒ He needs money to buy Della a present.
  - Ⓓ It always makes him late for work.
3. Why does Jim react so strangely when he comes home and sees Della with short hair?
  - Ⓐ He is mad because she cut her hair.
  - Ⓑ He doesn’t recognize her.
  - Ⓒ He is upset that he had to sell his watch.
  - Ⓓ He is confused because he bought Della combs to use in her long hair.
4. Which of the following lines from the play uses a simile?
  - Ⓐ “I’ve learned to drive a hard bargain.”
  - Ⓑ “She catches sight of her long, beautiful hair, rippling and shining like a cascade of brown water.”
  - Ⓒ “And with a whirl of skirts and a brilliant sparkle in her eye . . .”
  - Ⓓ “A final tear splashes on the worn carpet.”
5. In Scene 3, what is the biggest clue that Della plans to cut and sell her hair?
  - Ⓐ Della cries because she can’t buy Jim a wonderful present with only one dollar and 87 cents.
  - Ⓑ Della explains how she saves money when she buys food.
  - Ⓒ Della admires her hair in the mirror and says, “I have it, Mrs. Porter.”
  - Ⓓ Della puts on her coat and hat.
6. In Scene 1, Jim says, “I may be poor, Della, but I’m the luckiest man in all New York.” Why does Jim feel lucky?
  - Ⓐ He knows Della is going to buy him a beautiful watch chain for Christmas.
  - Ⓑ He thinks he is about to get a promotion at work.
  - Ⓒ He loves window-shopping.
  - Ⓓ He has a wonderful wife, and they love each other.
7. Who is the author of the original story, “The Gift of the Magi”?
  - Ⓐ O. Henry, who wrote under the name William Sydney Porter
  - Ⓑ William Sydney, who wrote under the name O. Henry
  - Ⓒ Mack Lewis
  - Ⓓ the Magi
8. Which word BEST describes Jim’s reaction when Della gives him the watch chain?
  - Ⓐ amused
  - Ⓑ overjoyed
  - Ⓒ disappointed
  - Ⓓ embarrassed

## Critical-Thinking Questions

9. Explain how Della and Jim are both poor and rich at the same time. \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
10. Do you think that Jim and Della appreciate the gifts they receive, even though they can’t use them? Explain. \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_



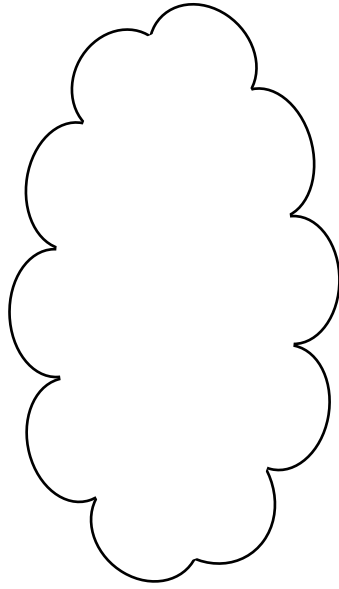
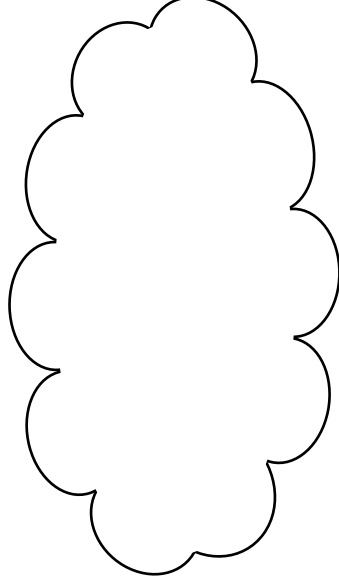
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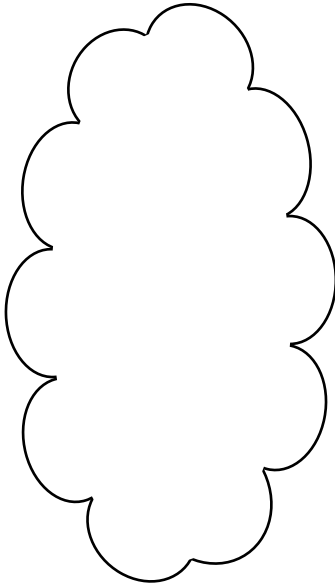
# Illustrating Irony

In this activity, you are going to illustrate two pairs of scenes from *The Gift of the Magi*. One pair is on this page, and one pair is on the next page. When you are done, each pair will show an example of situational irony. Follow the directions above each box to know what to draw and whose thoughts to write in the thought bubble (the cloud shape). Remember, a thought bubble shows what someone is thinking, so it should be written in first person.

**Draw:** Jim buying Della's Gift**Thought bubble:** What Jim expects to happen when he gives Della his gift**Draw:** Jim discovering that Della has cut her hair**Thought bubble:** What Jim now thinks about the gift he bought for Della**WHAT JIM EXPECTS****WHAT OCCURS**

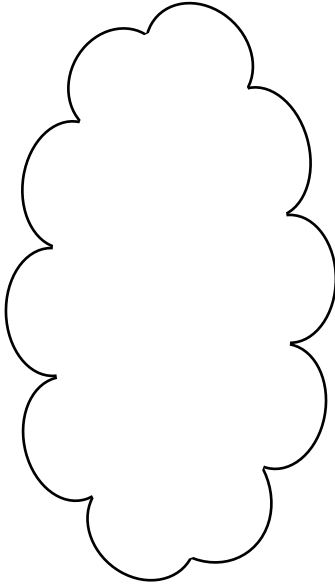
**Draw:** Della buying Jim's present

**Thought bubble:** What Della expects to happen when she gives Jim her gift



**Draw:** Della just after Jim tells her that he sold his watch

**Thought bubble:** What Della now thinks about the gift she bought for Jim



**WHAT DELLA EXPECTS**

**WHAT OCCURS**

# Vocabulary:

## *The Gift of the Magi*

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- 1. cascade (kass-KAYD)** *noun*; a waterfall, or anything that seems to flow and hang downward  
*example:* The wizard's hooded cloak was draped like a cascade of midnight-blue velvet.
- 2. cringe (KRINJ)** *verb*; to shrink back out of fear or dislike; wince  
*example:* Whenever my dad starts singing along to the *High School Musical* soundtrack in the car, I cringe in the backseat.
- 3. distinguished (dih-STING-gwisht)** *adjective*; dignified in looks and manner  
*example:* When he walked into the restaurant, Brian felt out of place. He was wearing jeans and a T-shirt, and the dining room was full of distinguished older gentlemen in suits.
- 4. mere (MEER)** *adjective*; nothing more than; hardly anything  
*example:* The hundred-yard dash was the most exciting event at the track meet. The winner crossed the finish line a mere hundredth of a second before the second-place runner.
- 5. platinum (PLAT-uhn-uhm)** *noun*; a very valuable, silvery-white metal that is often used in jewelry  
*example:* Mr. Hayford always removes his platinum wedding band before he scrubs the dishes.
- 6. ransack (RAN-sak)** *verb*; to search a place wildly  
*example:* Before soccer practice, E.J. had to ransack his room looking for his other shin guard.
- 7. shabby (SHAB-ee)** *adjective*; worn-out; run-down; in need of repair  
*example:* Looking at my shabby sneakers, Mom said, "How can you stand to wear such worn-out shoes? It's time for a new pair, buster."
- 8. truant (TROO-uhnt)** *adjective*; absent from school without permission  
*example:* When the truant students returned, the principal gave them a choice between detention or community service.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE &gt;



Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Vocabulary Practice

**Directions:** Do you remember the vocabulary you learned in *The Gift of the Magi*? Let's find out! Complete the sentences using the vocabulary words listed in the word bank.

WORD BANK			
cascade	cringe	distinguished	mere
platinum	ransack	shabby	truant

- The idea of exploring a cave made Justin \_\_\_\_\_. He hated small, enclosed spaces.
- It takes a \_\_\_\_\_ breath to topple a house of cards.
- The United States Mint makes an American Eagle \_\_\_\_\_ coin that is worth \$100.
- After Sasha missed three days of school, she brought a note from her doctor so her teachers didn't think she was \_\_\_\_\_.
- I was having a massive sugar craving, so I started to \_\_\_\_\_ the refrigerator looking for that leftover piece of pumpkin pie.
- Before Pearl started to paint her room, she changed into an old, \_\_\_\_\_ shirt that already had stains on it.
- If you hike alongside this stream for two miles, you will come to a stunning \_\_\_\_\_.
- Arturro thought that his new leather briefcase would help him appear more \_\_\_\_\_ at work.

**Directions:** For each vocabulary word below, write the letter of its synonym in the blank provided.

VOCABULARY	SYNONYM
___ 1. cringe	A. missing
___ 2. cascade	B. dignified
___ 3. ransack	C. ragged
___ 4. shabby	D. tiny
___ 5. truant	E. waterfall
___ 6. mere	F. rummage
___ 7. platinum	G. flinch
___ 8. distinguished	H. metal

**CRITICAL THINKING**

1. They adore each other, as shown when Della tells Jim, “You look so sophisticated”; when she refers to Jim as “wonderful”; and when she says, “I’d sacrifice anything for my Jim.” Jim’s adoration is shown when he says, “I’m the luckiest man in all of New York” and “I don’t think there’s anything in the way of a haircut that could make me love you any less.”
2. Della wants to make him happy and show how much she loves him.
3. The combs he just bought for Della will now be useless.
4. Jim and Della both believe they are giving each other the perfect gift, but they each give up the treasure that would make the gifts they receive useful.
5. Answers will vary; they are the Magi, or wise, because what they really give each other is love—which is more precious than any material item.

**QUIZ**

- |      |      |
|------|------|
| 1. D | 5. C |
| 2. C | 6. D |
| 3. D | 7. B |
| 4. B | 8. A |

9. *Answers will vary but should be similar to the following:* Della and Jim don’t have much money, and they live in a shabby apartment. In terms of finances, they are poor. But they have a wonderful, loving relationship, and they are willing to sacrifice for each other. In this way, they are emotionally rich.
10. Instead of being upset about receiving gifts they can’t use, Jim and Della laugh. They appreciate the thought behind the gift and the sacrifice the other person made to buy the gift.

**ILLUSTRATING IRONY**

Answers will vary, but in the first box of each pair, students should indicate that the person thinks his/her spouse will love the gift, and in the second box, that the person thinks his/her gift is useless.

**VOCABULARY**

1. cringe
2. mere
3. platinum
4. truant
5. ransack
6. shabby
7. cascade
8. distinguished

*Matching:*

- |      |      |
|------|------|
| 1. G | 5. A |
| 2. E | 6. D |
| 3. F | 7. H |
| 4. C | 8. B |