

## “The Gift of the Magi” Questions for Critical Reading

*Review these questions. Take time to create your responses.*

1. What are instance of irony in the short story?
2. What is the significance of “3” in the story?
  - a. The story has three main characters: Della, Jim, and Madame Sophronie
  - b. Della counts her money three times (para. 1).
  - c. The narrator says that “Life is made up of sobs, sniffles, and smiles” (para. 2).
  - d. A reference is made to the Queen of Sheba, who gave King Solomon three types of gifts: spices, gold, and jewels.
  - e. A sentence in para. 5 states, “She stood by the window and looked out dully at a grey cat walking a grey fence in a grey backyard.”
  - f. The narrator alliteratively describes Della as speaking with “sudden serious sweetness.”
  - g. Balthasar, Melchior, and Gaspar are the three magi, with three homelands.
  - h. The magi offered three gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.
  - i. The story centers on three valuables: Jim’s gold watch, Della’s hair, and the love that Jim and Della share.
3. Several passages in the story give subtle clues about Jim. Identify at least three passages that reveal aspects of Jim’s character and explain their significance.
4. Why does the author make reference to the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon?
5. What aspects of the story would be revealed or hidden if it were told from another point of view? For instance, how would the story change if it were told completely from Jim’s perspective?
6. Who is the protagonist? Who or what is the antagonist?
7. How would the story change if the setting were different? Would this be an effective story if it were set in today’s time?
8. Is there foreshadowing in the story?
9. Does the story end the way that you expect? Why or why not?

10. Would you invite either Della or Jim over for dinner? Why or why not?
11. Pretend that Jim sold his gold watch in a newspaper ad instead. Write the newspaper ad for Jim's gold watch. What details would he include? Would he divulge the reasoning behind him selling his possession?
12. If Della had had short hair in the beginning of the story, what do you think that she would have done/sold in order to pay for the gold chain? Why do you think so?