The Gift of the Magi

Use this key to check answers and read the explanations.

1. Why does Della count her savings at the beginning of the story?
   A. She wants to buy Jim a Christmas present.
   B. She plans to buy a train ticket.
   C. She is checking the price of a new apartment.
   D. She wants to repay a stranger.
   Correct answer: A. She wants to buy Jim a Christmas present.
   Christmas is the next day. Della has saved what she can to buy a gift for Jim.

2. When do the main events of Della’s search for a present take place?
   A. Christmas morning
   B. New Year’s Eve
   C. Christmas Eve
   D. The week after New Year’s Day
   Correct answer: C. Christmas Eve
   Della has one day left before Christmas when she looks for a way to increase her savings.

3. What does Della sell to pay for a gift?
   A. Her winter coat
   B. Her long hair
   C. A family watch
   D. A set of combs
   Correct answer: B. Her long hair
   A hair dealer pays Della for cutting and selling her long hair.

4. What does Della choose for Jim after selling her hair?
   A. A pair of gloves
   B. A velvet watch case
   C. A winter overcoat
   D. A platinum watch chain
   Correct answer: D. A platinum watch chain
   She chooses a simple platinum chain to go with Jim’s prized watch.

5. What does Jim give Della?

A. A new mirror
B. Decorative combs
C. A silver necklace
D. A hat with a ribbon

Correct answer: B. Decorative combs
Jim buys a set of combs that Della had admired.

6. Della has $1.87 saved when the story opens. Which earlier action best explains how she has accumulated that amount?

A. Saving small sums when buying household goods
B. Selling Jim’s watch before the story opens
C. Borrowing a large amount from the hair dealer
D. Paying a yearly bonus into a bank account

Correct answer: A. Saving small sums when buying household goods
She has been saving small amounts over time, including pennies kept back while shopping.

7. Della thinks that the chain’s plain design suits Jim. What does that choice show about how she shops?

A. She chooses a piece mainly because she wants to wear it.
B. She picks whatever a salesperson suggests first.
C. She hopes the gift will make Jim look rich in public.
D. She considers what matches his character.

Correct answer: D. She considers what matches his character.
She looks for a gift worthy of his watch and sees the chain’s simplicity as a good match for Jim.

8. What later detail helps explain why Jim is so surprised when he first sees Della’s short hair?

A. He had ordered a new watch for himself.
B. He expected her to have left for another city.
C. He bought a gift meant for her long hair.
D. He had arranged to meet a different person at home.

Correct answer: C. He bought a gift meant for her long hair.
Jim has brought the combs Della wanted. Seeing her without her long hair makes the timing of his gift unexpected.

9. Della begins with $1.87, receives $20 for her hair, and buys the chain for $21. How much money remains?

A. $0.87
B. $0.13
C. $1.87
D. $20.87

Correct answer: A. $0.87
The sale brings her total to $21.87. Paying $21 leaves 87 cents.

10. Which pair represents the two possessions that the narrator sets up as especially important to Della and Jim?

A. Della’s mirror and Jim’s chair
B. Della’s coat and Jim’s gloves
C. Della’s combs and Jim’s chain
D. Della’s hair and Jim’s watch

Correct answer: D. Della’s hair and Jim’s watch
Early in the story, the narrator singles out Della’s hair and Jim’s family watch. The couple later gives them up to buy presents.

11. As Jim arrives home, what do readers already know that he has yet to learn?

A. The combs can still be used that evening.
B. Jim sold his watch to buy Della’s gift.
C. Della sold her hair to afford a chain for him.
D. Della plans to return both gifts before dinner.

Correct answer: C. Della sold her hair to afford a chain for him.
Readers accompany Della when she sells the hair and buys the chain. Jim learns about her decision after he arrives.

12. What revelation creates the central irony when Della asks Jim to put the chain on his watch?

A. Jim has already bought exactly the same chain.
B. Jim sold the watch to pay for the combs.
C. The watch was in Della’s pocket all along.
D. The combs accidentally belonged to another shopper.

Correct answer: B. Jim sold the watch to pay for the combs.
Della’s chain requires a watch Jim no longer has. His combs were meant for the hair she has just sold.

13. After the couple discovers what each has done, Jim suggests putting the gifts away for a while. Which reading best fits his response?

A. He tells Della that her gift has no personal meaning.
B. He values the chain only if he can sell it at a profit.
C. He thinks Della set out to embarrass him.
D. He accepts what happened and recognizes the care behind both gifts.

Correct answer: D. He accepts what happened and recognizes the care behind both gifts.
Jim treats the gifts gently even though neither is immediately useful. His response recognizes their shared intention.

14. Who are the Magi in the comparison the narrator makes at the end?

A. Wise gift bearers in the story of Jesus’s birth
B. Shopkeepers who sell accessories to Jim and Della
C. The neighbors who live above Jim and Della
D. Family members who gave Jim his watch

Correct answer: A. Wise gift bearers in the story of Jesus’s birth
The title refers to the wise men associated with gifts in the Nativity story. The narrator uses the reference to consider what makes a gift wise.

15. Why does the narrator ultimately call the couple wise after describing their impractical purchases?

A. They invested their savings in gifts that could earn more money.
B. Each found a way to keep both of their most valuable possessions.
C. Each gave up something personally valuable out of love for the other.
D. They had planned the exchange together and predicted the result.

Correct answer: C. Each gave up something personally valuable out of love for the other.
The closing judgment values generosity and willingness to sacrifice. Those qualities give the gifts their significance.