

Name _____

Date _____

O. Henry - Answer Key

Use the text to answer each question below.

1. *An adapted excerpt from “The Gift of the Magi” by O. Henry* One dollar and 87 cents. Tomorrow would be Christmas Day, and after saving every penny she could for months, that was all Della had to buy her husband a present. She flopped down on the threadbare little couch in their shabby flat and howled. Della and Jim were poor, but they each had one possession in which they took great pride. Della’s was her long and beautiful hair. Jim’s was a gold watch. Though it had no chain, he carried it with him everywhere. Suddenly, Della had an idea. Throwing on her old coat, she dashed out the door and down the street to a store with a sign that read: “Mrs. Sofronie. Hair Articles of All Kinds.” She sold her hair to Mrs. Sofronie for \$20. Della spent the next two hours going from shop to shop, looking for the perfect gift for Jim. Finally she found it: a platinum chain that would pair perfectly with his watch. She paid \$21 and headed home with just 87 cents left in her pocket.

What do we learn about Della in this excerpt?

- A. She lives in a luxurious home.
- B. She takes pride in her many fine possessions.
- C. She spends frivolously.
- ✓ D.

She cares deeply for her husband.

In this excerpt, we learn that Della cares deeply for her husband. This is demonstrated by her determination to buy Jim a Christmas present, though she has little money.

2. *An adapted excerpt from “The Gift of the Magi” by O. Henry* When Della reached home her elation gave way to fear. She looked at her reflection in the mirror long, carefully, and critically. “Jim will think I look like a little schoolboy,” she said to herself. “But what could I do—oh! What could I do with a dollar and 87 cents?” By 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 clutched the chain in her hand and sat at the corner of the table near the door that he always entered. She had a habit of making wishes about the simplest everyday things, and now she whispered: “Please, let him think I am still pretty.” The door opened and Jim stepped in, wrapped in a tattered overcoat. His eyes were fixed upon Della, and there was an expression in them that she could not read. 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.

What is the conflict in this excerpt?

- A. Della worries that Jim will not like the present she bought for him.
- B. Jim arrives home unusually late, which frightens Della.
- ✓ C. Della worries that Jim will no longer think she’s pretty with short hair.
Della worries that “Jim will think I look like a little schoolboy” and later wishes, “Please, let him think I am still pretty.”
- D. Della struggles to prepare dinner in time for Jim’s arrival.

3. *An adapted excerpt from “The Gift of the Magi” by O. Henry* “Jim, darling,” Della cried, “I had my hair cut off and sold because I couldn’t have lived through Christmas without giving you a present.” “Your hair is gone?” he said slowly, glancing around the room. “Don’t you still like me? Maybe the hairs on my head were numbered,” she went on, “but nobody could ever count my love for you.” Jim drew a package from his pocket and placed it on the table. “Make no mistake,” he said, “There’s nothing you could do that would make me like you any less. But if you unwrap that package, you may see why I reacted the way I did.” Della tore at the paper and string, revealing a set of tortoiseshell combs. Ever since she had seen them in a shop window years ago, she had wanted to wear them in her hair—but her hair was gone now. She hugged them to her heart. “My hair grows so fast, Jim!” Then she held out Jim’s present. “Isn’t it dandy? Give me your watch. I want to see how it looks on you.” Jim sat down on the couch and smiled wryly. “I sold the watch to get the money to buy your combs. How about we put our gifts away for a while and enjoy them later?” The couple enjoyed their dinner and basked in the spirit of the holiday.

How does this story exemplify Henry’s characteristic surprise endings?

A. Jim and Della do not like the gifts they receive.



B.

Jim and Della can’t use the gifts they bought each other.

At the end of the story, it is revealed that Jim “sold the watch to get the money to buy” Della’s combs, so he has no use for a watch chain. Meanwhile, Della can’t use the combs Jim bought for her because she “had [her] hair cut off and sold.”

C. Jim and Della realize that gifts are extremely important in a relationship.

D. Della’s hair grows back unexpectedly quickly.