



PLANIT
TEACHERS

Introduction to Reading Comprehension: Unlocking the Secrets of a Short Story

Student Name: _____

Class: _____

Due Date: _____

Introduction and Instructions

Welcome to this reading comprehension assignment! In this activity, you will read a short story called "The Gift of the Magi" by O. Henry and complete tasks to improve your reading skills. Please follow these steps:

- Read the short story carefully
- Identify main characters, settings, and plot events
- Make inferences based on textual evidence
- Develop your vocabulary through context clues and definitions
- Answer reading comprehension questions

Short Story - "The Gift of the Magi"

"The Gift of the Magi" by O. Henry

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 lookout 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 thereunto 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, the letters of "Dillingham" looked blurred, as 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.

Now, there were two possessions of the James Dillingham Youngs 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 of such a timepiece.

So the next day, being Christmas, Della went to the shop where she had bought the watch-chain and sold her hair. She got \$20 for it, which she had the shopkeeper put into a ten-dollar bill and a five and five ones.

And then she went to the shop where Jim bought his watch-chain, and she said to the shopkeeper: "I want to buy a watch-chain for my husband, something nice, about \$20 or \$25." The shopkeeper showed her some nice ones, but Della said: "I want something that will make Jim's watch look shabby in comparison." The shopkeeper laughed and said: "Well, I have just the thing." And he showed her a beautiful chain, all made of solid gold, with a large, shiny locket in the middle.

Della was so pleased with it that she paid the shopkeeper \$21 and took the chain home with her. When Jim came home from work that night, Della put the chain on his watch and said: "Merry Christmas, Jim." Jim was so surprised and pleased that he took Della in his arms and kissed her.

"My dear," he said, "you are the best wife a man ever had. I don't know what I should do without you." Della smiled and said: "You will never have to find out, Jim, because I will always be here to take care of you."

Reading Comprehension Questions

Answer the following questions in complete sentences, using evidence from the text to support your answers:

1. Who are the main characters in the story, and what are their relationships?

2. Describe the setting of the story. How does it influence the plot?

3. What is the central conflict of the story, and how is it resolved?

4. Make an inference about the character of Jim. What motivates him, and what does this reveal about his personality?

5. Define the following vocabulary words using context clues: *sacrifice*, *treasured*, *poverty*.

Vocabulary Building

Match the vocabulary words from the story with their definitions:

Word	Definition
Sacrifice	_____
Treasured	_____
Poverty	_____

Extension Activity - Creative Writing

Imagine an alternative ending to the story. Write a short paragraph (5-7 sentences) describing what happens to the main characters after the events of the story.

Extension Activity - Character Analysis

Choose a main character from the story and create a character map. Include the character's traits, motivations, and relationships with other characters. Use quotes from the story to support your analysis.

Self-Assessment Opportunities

As you complete the assignment, ask yourself:

- Can I identify the main characters, settings, and plot events in the story?
- Can I make inferences based on textual evidence?
- Do I understand the vocabulary words and their definitions?
- Can I answer the reading comprehension questions in complete sentences with textual evidence?

Time Management Guidelines

Reading and note-taking: 10-12 minutes

Answering reading comprehension questions: 8-10 minutes

Vocabulary building activity: 3-5 minutes

Extension activities (optional): 10-15 minutes

Conclusion and Parent/Guardian Notes

Congratulations on completing this reading comprehension assignment! To support your child's learning, please encourage them to read the story carefully, discuss the story with them, and review the vocabulary words together. Encourage your child to use a dictionary or online resources to find definitions and expand their vocabulary.