

The Gift of the Magi Literary Device

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Imagery Definition: The use of words or expressions that create a vivid picture in the reader's mind and make them see, feel, or sense the scene clearly. Example: "Like a cascade of brown waters." (Della's hair is described like brown water.)

Figures of Speech

Imagery

- **Definition:** The use of words or expressions that create a vivid picture in the reader's mind and make them see, feel, or sense the scene clearly.
- **Example:** "Like a cascade of brown waters." (Della's hair is described like brown water.)
- **Explanation:** Here Della's long brown hair is called a "brown water." The reader can clearly imagine her hair falling like a stream of water. It expresses both the beauty and the movement of her hair.
- **Effect:** This imagery highlights Della's beauty, her femininity, and the value of her hair. As a result, her sacrifice becomes even more emotional and powerful.

Simile

- **Definition:** A comparison between two things using "like" or "as."
- **Example:** "Shining like a cascade of brown waters."
- **Explanation:** Della's hair is compared to a flowing stream of brown water. This shows the color, smoothness, and flowing beauty of her hair.
- **Effect:** This simile makes the beauty of Della's hair more vivid in the reader's mind and makes her sacrifice feel even deeper.

Irony

- **Definition:** When the result is the opposite of what is expected.
- **Example:** Della sells her hair to buy a chain for Jim's watch, and Jim sells his watch to buy combs for Della.

- **Explanation:** Both believe their gifts will make the other happy. But because of their sacrifices, neither gift can be used. This is a perfect example of dramatic irony.
- **Effect:** This irony surprises the reader and deepens the emotional impact of the story. It also shows that love is greater than material possessions.

Allusion

- **Definition:** A reference to a well-known story, person, event, or idea from history, religion, or culture.
- **Example:** “The Magi”, a reference to the three Wise Men from the Bible.
- **Explanation:** At the end, the author calls Della and Jim “the Magi.” This refers to the Biblical story of the three Wise Men who brought gifts to baby Jesus.
- **Effect:** This allusion gives the story a deeper religious and moral meaning. It shows that the sacrifice of Della and Jim is the true gift, and they are the real wise ones.

Symbolism / Symbols

- **Definition:** Symbolism means expressing a larger idea, human truth, or moral meaning through an object, character, or event. In “The Gift of the Magi,” every important object carries deep meanings of selfless love, sacrifice, dignity, and humanity. These symbols lift the story beyond a simple incident and place it on a universal and timeless human level.
- **Della’s Hair:** Della’s long brown hair is her greatest beauty, pride, and personal possession. It is not just hair. It symbolizes a woman’s identity, self-respect, and beauty. But Della sells it for Jim’s happiness. This sacrifice shows that love is stronger than material beauty. Her hair becomes a powerful symbol of selfless love and giving.
- **Jim’s Gold Watch:** Jim’s gold watch is the family’s heirloom. It holds the memory of his father and grandfather. The watch symbolizes his identity, masculinity, and connection to his past. When Jim sells the watch to buy a gift for Della, it shows that Della means more to him than tradition or pride. Thus the watch symbolizes old glory, personal values, and heritage surrendered in the face of love.
- **The Gifts:** The chain perfectly matches Jim’s watch, and the combs are ideal for Della’s long hair. The irony is that neither gift can be used because each has lost the thing the gift was meant for. Yet the gifts symbolize love, sacrifice, and pure intentions. They prove that the value of a gift lies not in its price, but in the depth of the giver’s love.
- **The Magi:** The Magi were the three wise men in the Bible who brought gifts to baby Jesus. O. Henry calls Della and Jim the “real Magi” because they understand the true meaning of giving: sacrifice, sincerity, and love. The Magi symbolize selflessness, true wisdom, spiritual

value, and the highest form of humanity.

- **Christmas:** Christmas is a time of giving and love. During Christmas, both Della and Jim give up their dearest possessions. This symbolizes the real spirit of Christmas: generosity, sacrifice, and the shining power of love.

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