

Name: _____

What Can You Infer?

O. Henry, whose real name was William Sydney Porter, wrote the short story “The Gift of the Magi.” It was published in 1910.

Below are the opening paragraphs of the story. Read the passage carefully and answer the questions below.



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.

1. Why is Della crying?

2. What does Christmas have to do with her tears?

3. How did she get the money?

4. What does O. Henry mean by “with sniffles predominating”?



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Student answers will vary.

1. Why is Della crying?

Correct answers should include a reference to Della having very little money.

2. What does Christmas have to do with her tears?

Correct answers should include a mention that Della must want the money for a Christmas celebration.

3. How did she get the money?

Correct answers should include a reference to her saving it by bargaining with the tradesmen.

4. What does O. Henry mean by “with sniffles predominating”?

Correct answers should include a reference to O. Henry thinking life is often difficult (sniffles), but not impossible (sobs).

