



*Windows
to the
World*

An Introduction to Literary Analysis

Student Book

Lesha Myers, M.Ed.

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Windows to the World

An Introduction to Literary Analysis

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2. Annotation

What do you do when you read? If you are like most students, you read passively. That is, you take in the words, let them wash over you, and view the scene as it lives in your mind. It's like watching a movie: the actors do all of the work and you just sit back and watch.

When reading good literature, passive reading won't do. You need to train yourself to read actively. That means you need to *think* as you're reading—you need to hold a conversation with yourself. What should you think about? Well, certainly not what you plan to do after you finish reading and certainly not how much longer this is going to take. You need to stay focused and engaged with the story, listening to that inner voice. What if you don't have an inner voice? You will need to develop one. What if you don't have a conversation with yourself? You will need to begin one.

One way to begin is to read slowly. When you slow yourself down, you give yourself time to think—time to consider what happens in the story and how to respond. At first, your inner voice might be very quiet, but the more you purposely think about what you are reading, the louder that voice will become.

You will also need a place to store all of that thinking, and that is where the technique called **annotation** comes in. To annotate means to explain, to comment upon, to note. With respect to literature, it also means to interact, to talk back, to go beyond.

To annotate, you need three items: a pencil or pen, a highlighter, and some Post-It notes. Ideally, when you annotate, you will write directly in your book. Of course, if you don't own the book, this won't be possible, but you can write on Post-It notes and store them on the page. You can also use Post-It™ notes if you want to record a comment that won't fit in the margin.

What should you annotate? Almost anything. Here are some beginning ideas:

- ◆ What does the title mean?
- ◆ Where does the story take place?
- ◆ Who is in it? What happens?
- ◆ Can you make any personal connections? Shared experiences?
- ◆ What is the author's purpose?
- ◆ How does he or she accomplish that purpose?
- ◆ Are there any particularly beautifully-written sentences or sections?
- ◆ Do you have questions? (and attempts at answers?)

The best way to explain annotation is to illustrate it. You may be familiar with the story on the following pages, "The Gift of the Magi" by O. Henry. It's one of my favorites, and I've re-read and annotated it. Read the story and look at my notes, the conversation I had with the story in my head.

One more comment before we begin. Annotation is highly personal. It's your conversation, your inner voice. Don't worry if your comments are not the same as mine—I would be amazed if they were. Keep in mind that the purpose of annotation is to record your own unique thoughts, feelings, and impressions.



The Gift of the Magi

by O. Henry (1906)

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, 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.

Della finished her cry and attended to her cheeks with the powder rag. She stood by the window and looked out dully at a gray cat walking a gray fence in a gray backyard. Tomorrow would be Christmas Day, and she had only \$1.87 with which to buy Jim a present. She had been saving every penny she could for months, with this result. Twenty dollars a week doesn't go far. Expenses had been greater than she had calculated. They always are. Only \$1.87 to buy a present for Jim. Her Jim. Many a happy hour she had spent planning for something nice for him. Something fine and rare and sterling—something just a little bit near to being worthy of the honor of being owned by Jim.

There was a pier-glass between the windows of the room. Perhaps you have seen a pier-glass in an \$8 flat. A very thin and very agile person may, by observing his reflection in a rapid sequence of longitudinal strips, obtain a fairly accurate conception of his looks. Della, being slender, had mastered the art.

Suddenly she whirled from the window and stood before the glass.

Magi? As in the wise men who brought presents to Jesus?

Not much money. Had to be a while ago. Today the butcher wouldn't quibble over a penny. Also, no vegetable man today.

Is she a child?

Nice alliteration ☺

Not a child—very emotional or sad.

Mendicancy squad? What's that?

Wife, then. Going through some difficult financial times—newly married? I like the way Henry tells us they are all alone. Probably turn of the 20th century.

Wonder why the pay cut. Depression?

Yes, very good!

Repetition of "gray"

She loves him a lot.

Sterling silver. Expensive.

What is a pier-glass?—skinny mirror between two big windows

She must be pretty.





Her eyes were shining brilliantly, but her face had lost its color within twenty seconds. Rapidly she pulled down her hair and let it fall to its full length.

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.

So now Della's beautiful hair fell about her rippling and shining like a cascade of brown waters. It reached below her knee and made itself almost a garment for her. And then she did it up again nervously and quickly. Once she faltered for a minute and stood still while a tear or two splashed on the worn red carpet.

On went her old brown jacket; on went her old brown hat. With a whirl of skirts and with the brilliant sparkle still in her eyes, she fluttered out the door and down the stairs to the street.

Where she stopped the sign read: "Mne. Sofronie. Hair Goods of All Kinds." One flight up Della ran, and collected herself, panting. Madame, large, too white, chilly, hardly looked the "Sofronie."

"Will you buy my hair?" asked Della.

"I buy hair," said Madame. "Take yer hat off and let's have a sight at the looks of it."

Down rippled the brown cascade.

"Twenty dollars," said Madame, lifting the mass with a practised hand.

"Give it to me quick," said Della.

Oh, and the next two hours tripped by on rosy wings. Forget the hashed metaphor. She was ransacking the stores for Jim's present.

She found it at last. It surely had been made for Jim and no one else. There was no other like it in any of the stores, and she had turned all of them inside out. It was a platinum fob chain simple and chaste in design, properly proclaiming its value by substance alone and not by meretricious ornamentation—as all good things should do. It was even worthy of The Watch. As soon as she saw it she knew that it must be Jim's. It was like him. Quietness and value—the description applied to both. Twenty-one dollars they took from her for it, and she hurried home with the 87 cents. With that chain on his watch Jim might be properly anxious about the time in any company. Grand as the watch was, he sometimes looked at it on the sly on account of the old leather strap that he used in place of a chain.

When Della reached home her intoxication gave way a little to prudence and reason. She got out her curling irons and lighted the gas and

She thought of something!

Heirloom. I wonder if it's a pocket watch like my great-grandfather's?

Biblical stories.

Vivid—these are prized possessions.

Wow! That's magnificent hair!

Oh, oh.

Emphasis on *old*.

Fluttered—interesting word choice, like a bird.

She's going to cut that magnificent hair? Oh, dear.

A lot of money—one week's wages for the two.

Well, "rosy wings" really is a hashed metaphor.☺

"Ransacking," interesting word choice.

Fob? What's a fob?

Meretricious? He sure likes big words.

Capital letters make it sound so important.

A pocket watch.



went to work repairing the ravages made by generosity added to love. Which is always a tremendous task, dear friends—a mammoth task.

Within forty minutes her head was covered with tiny, close-lying curls that made her look wonderfully like a truant schoolboy. She looked at her reflection in the mirror long, carefully, and critically.

“If Jim doesn’t kill me,” she said to herself, “before he takes a second look at me, he’ll say I look like a Coney Island chorus girl. But what could I do—oh! what could I do with a dollar and eighty-seven cents?”

At 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 doubled the fob chain in her hand and sat on the corner of the table near the door that he always entered. Then she heard his step on the stair away down on the first flight, and she turned white for just a moment. She had a habit for saying little silent prayers about the simplest everyday things, and now she whispered: “Please God, make him think I am still pretty.”

The door opened and Jim stepped in and closed it. He looked thin and very serious. Poor fellow, he was only twenty-two—and to be burdened with a family! He needed a new overcoat and he was without gloves.

Jim stopped inside the door, as immovable as a setter at the scent of quail. His eyes were fixed upon Della, and there was an expression in them that she could not read, and it terrified her. 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.

Della wriggled off the table and went for him.

“Jim, darling,” she cried, “don’t look at me that way. I had my hair cut off and sold because I couldn’t have lived through Christmas without giving you a present. It’ll grow out again—you won’t mind, will you? I just had to do it. My hair grows awfully fast. Say ‘Merry Christmas!’ Jim, and let’s be happy. You don’t know what a nice—what a beautiful, nice gift I’ve got for you.”

“You’ve cut off your hair?” asked Jim, laboriously, as if he had not arrived at that patent fact yet even after the hardest mental labor.

“Cut it off and sold it,” said Della. “Don’t you like me just as well, anyhow? I’m me without my hair, ain’t I?”

Jim looked about the room curiously.

“You say your hair is gone?” he said, with an air almost of idiocy.

“You needn’t look for it,” said Della. “It’s sold, I tell you—sold and gone, too. It’s Christmas Eve, boy. Be good to me, for it went for you. Maybe the hairs of my head were numbered,” she went on with sudden serious sweetness, “but nobody could ever count my love for you. Shall I put the chops on, Jim?”

Out of his trance Jim seemed quickly to wake. He enfolded his

Generosity added to love. I like that.

Tremendous—as in extremely hard or extremely good?

Would he be expecting an extravagant present?

Wow! That \$20 might have been put to better use.

Nice simile. He’s just shocked.

He just can’t process the news.

Ain’t? That clashes with my mental picture of Della.

He has to ask twice!

Another Biblical verse. She loves him as Christ loves us?

Emphasis on trance—he’s totally shocked!



8. Symbolism & Emphasis

Symbolism

Stories, whether short stories, novellas, or novels, only have the attention of the reader for a short period of time. People have other things they need to do: eat, sleep, study, socialize, and enjoy life. Even those who truly love to read can't do it every waking moment of every day. Authors know this, of course, but it creates a dilemma for them. They need to communicate a lot of information about their characters in a very short period of time—sometimes in just one page.

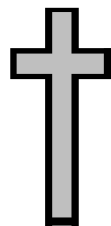
The writer's toolbox contains a number of helpful literary devices, and one of the most useful is the *symbol*. A symbol is an object, an action, or a character (person or animal) that serves double-duty.

First, it stands for itself. A red rose, for example, is a beautiful flower. It is tangible—you can see it, touch it, and sometimes smell it. The rose is a rose. It grows in the garden or greenhouse. People cut bouquets of them and decorate their homes.

However, a red rose also symbolizes more: love. The young man who wants to honor his young lady presents her with a single, long-stemmed red rose. The husband who wants to celebrate thirty years of wedded bliss brings his wife thirty red roses. On Valentine's Day, the day of love, what flower is most in demand? The red rose. On these occasions, the impact would not be the same if a bunch of daisies were substituted for the red roses. Yes, it would be nice, but romantic? No. Daisies do not have the connotation, the emotional appeal, of red roses. They are nice, but not symbolic.

Conventional Symbols

There are two kinds of symbols: conventional or universal and private or constructed. You are probably familiar with *conventional* symbols. If I ask you what the following stand for, you would probably be able to identify most. Give it a try before continuing:





Meaning of conventional or universal symbols on previous page:

- ◆ **American flag:** America, patriotism, freedom
- ◆ **Dove:** peace, Holy Spirit
- ◆ **Cross:** Jesus Christ, Christianity, salvation, suffering
- ◆ **Eagle:** courage, freedom, strength
- ◆ **Caduceus:** medicine, healing (Numbers 21:8), idolatry (2 Kings 18:4)
- ◆ **Skull and Crossbones:** death, poison, pirates

Other conventional symbols include the following:

- ◆ **Lion:** strength, courage
- ◆ **Serpent:** evil, deceit
- ◆ **Scales:** justice
- ◆ **Flowing water:** time and eternity
- ◆ **Voyage:** life
- ◆ **White:** purity
- ◆ **Black:** death
- ◆ **Light:** knowledge
- ◆ **Spring:** life, hope, renewal
- ◆ **Winter:** death, despair

Of course, there are many more. Through use and cultural expectations, certain objects become associated with ideas. When this happens, they become *symbols* for the idea.

Private Symbols

In addition to conventional symbols, authors also construct symbols within a story. That is, they pick an object, action, or character and make it serve dual purposes. First, it is itself. The tree is a tree, the fox a fox. But, by calling attention to it through emphasis or repetition, the author gives it additional meaning.

When I teach *The Art of Watching Movies*, a film appreciation class, I show the 1953 movie *Shane* directed by George Stevens when I discuss color, especially Technicolor, since it is a great transition from the black and white to the color genre. In the movie, Joe (Van Heflin) attempts to create a farm on land that cattle ranchers desire. Shane (Alan Ladd), a weary gunfighter looking to settle down, visits, helps out, and stays. As we watch the movie, the director spends a lot of time emphasizing a tree stump. At the beginning of the movie when Shane rides up to the farm, Joe is attempting to remove a big tree stump, but he can't. It's just too difficult. Later, Shane joins forces with Joe and through strenuous effort, the two conquer the stump. Finally, when the cattle ranchers come back to the farm and threaten the family, the director again focuses the camera on the uprooted stump. I won't tell you how the movie ends, just in case you want to see it yourself.

Instead, I want to focus on the tree stump. It's a private symbol. First, it's a tree stump. It's in the way and needs to be removed so that the family can plant crops. Second, however, it represents the friendship of Joe and Shane. Alone, Joe struggles. Alone, he is at the mercy of the cattle ranchers. Together, the two conquer their problems. Only when they work as a team do they triumph.



OK, how did I know the tree stump was a symbol? Through emphasis. The director spends quite a bit of time and attention on it. The scene where Joe and Shane uproot it is stressed, especially through the music which underscores the rhythm of the axes and rises to a crescendo when the stump is finally conquered. Plus, the plot of the movie underscores the symbolism. Alone, Joe is powerless. He attains victory only when Shane helps him—both with the tree stump and with the threat of the cattle ranchers.

Symbolism in “The Necklace”

The story you have just read, “The Necklace,” contains a symbol. Can you guess what it is? It’s the necklace itself. Let’s go back to the story and see how de Maupassant emphasizes the necklace and what it symbolizes.

Quotation	Comment
“Suddenly she discovered, in a black satin case, a superb diamond necklace; her heart began to beat covetously. Her hands trembled as she lifted it. She fastened it round her neck, upon her high dress, and remained in ecstasy at sight of herself” (83).	Note the word choice: “superb,” “covetously,” “trembled,” “ecstasy.” These are unusual choices to describe a necklace and demonstrate how important it is to Mathilde.
“She took off the garments in which she had wrapped her shoulders, so as to see herself in all her glory before the mirror. But suddenly she uttered a cry. The necklace was no longer round her neck!” (83).	Because the necklace is gone, so is Mathilde’s glory. The author makes a clear connection between the two concepts in this passage.
“‘You must write to your friend,’ he said, ‘and tell her that you’ve broken the clasp of her necklace and are getting it mended. That will give us time to look about us’” (84).	The first example of deception that is associated with the necklace. Things are not what they appear to be.
“In a shop at the Palais-Royal they found a string of diamonds which seemed to them exactly like the one they were looking for. It was worth forty thousand francs” (84).	Note the discord between the necklace’s appeared worth with its actual worth. What it appears to be and what it actually is are not the same.
“What would have happened if she had never lost those jewels. Who knows? Who knows? How strange life is, how fickle! How little is needed to ruin or to save!” (85).	The narrator emphasizes a connection between Mathilde’s fate and the necklace itself.
“‘Oh, my poor Mathilde! But mine was imitation. It was worth at the very most five hundred francs! . . .’” (85).	The final example of deception—the necklace is fake. It is not what it appears to be.

Clearly, the necklace is an important symbol in Guy de Maupassant’s story. But what does it symbolize? After examining all of the above quotations and thinking about the story’s meaning, what are your thoughts? Record them below before you turn the page:



Symbol Analysis

Directions: Thomas Hardy wrote the following poem after the disastrous sinking of the H.M.S. Titanic in 1912. If you are unfamiliar with this tragedy, look it up in an online or print dictionary. The poem contains two symbols. Read and annotate the poem, re-reading as often as necessary—several times, most likely. Be sure to look up the definition of words you don't know.

When you have finished your analysis and annotation, answer the questions following the poem.

The Convergence of the Twain

By Thomas Hardy (1912)

I

In a solitude of the sea
Deep from human vanity,
And the Pride of Life that planned her, stilly couches she.

II

Steel chambers, late the pyres
Of her salamandrine¹ fires,
Cold currents thrud,² and turn to rhythmic tidal lyres.

¹Capable of surviving fire

²Thread

III

Over the mirrors meant
To glass the opulent
The sea-worm crawls—grotesque, slimed, dumb, indifferent.

IV

Jewels in joy designed
To ravish the sensuous mind
Lie lightless, all their sparkles bleared and black and blind.

V

Dim moon-eyed fishes near
Gaze at the gilded gear
And query: "What does this vaingloriousness down here?" . . .

VI

Well: while was fashioning
This creature of cleaving wing,
The Immanent Will that stirs and urges everything





VII

Prepared a sinister mate
For her—so gaily great—
A Shape of Ice, for the time fat and dissociate.

VIII

And as the smart ship grew
In stature, grace, and hue
In shadowy silent distance grew the Iceberg too.

IX

Alien they seemed to be:
No mortal eye could see
The intimate welding of their later history.

X

Or sign that they were bent
By paths coincident
On being anon twin halves of one August event,

XI

Till the Spinner of the Years
Said "Now!" And each one hears,
And consummation comes, and jars two hemispheres.

Questions:

1. What is the message of this poem?
2. What are the two symbols?
3. How do the symbols contribute to Hardy's message?

