

"The Last Leaf" (O. Henry)

O. Henry's short story "The Last Leaf" explores themes of hope, sacrifice, and the power of art. Set in Greenwich Village during a pneumonia epidemic, the story follows two aspiring artists, Sue and Johnsy, as they confront illness and despair. Johnsy becomes convinced that she will die when the last leaf falls from the vine outside her window. Their eccentric neighbor, Behrman—an unsuccessful but passionate painter—makes a life-altering decision to give Johnsy hope. The story culminates in a twist that highlights the symbolic power of the final leaf.



I. Fill in the Blank: Fill in the blank with the correct words.

1. Johnsy believes that her fate is tied to the _____ falling from the vine outside her window.
2. Sue tries to encourage Johnsy by reminding her of _____ and the beauty of life.
3. Behrman's ultimate act is painting a _____ to give Johnsy hope and save her.
4. The "last leaf" is a powerful example of _____, representing hope and perseverance.
5. O. Henry's narrative twist reveals that Behrman _____ after his act of kindness.

Word Bank: sacrifice, leaf, symbolism, optimism, dies

II. Choose the correct answer from the choices for each question.

1) What does Johnsy believe will happen when the last leaf falls?

- A) She will recover from her illness
- B) She will die
- C) She will move to California
- D) She will paint a masterpiece

2) Why does Sue seek Behrman's help?

- A) To borrow money for medicine
- B) To paint a picture for Johnsy
- C) To pose for a portrait
- D) To repair the window

3) The painted leaf on the wall is significant because:

- A) It is Behrman's first completed artwork
- B) It tricks Johnsy into believing the leaf survived
- C) It symbolizes the permanence of nature
- D) Both A and B

4) Behrman's motivation for painting the leaf can best be described as:

- A) Self-preservation
- B) Altruism and artistic purpose
- C) Jealousy
- D) Indifference

5) The story's twist at the end is that:

- A) Johnsy was never actually ill
- B) Sue painted the leaf
- C) Behrman risked his health to save Johnsy and died of pneumonia
- D) The last leaf was real

III. Open-Ended Questions: Answer the following questions in complete sentences.

Discuss the symbolism of the “last leaf” and how it contributes to the overall message of the story.

Analyze Behrman’s motivations for painting the leaf. What does his sacrifice say about his character?

How does O. Henry use the narrative twist to affect the reader’s understanding of hope and sacrifice?