

## Discussion Questions for “The Rocking-Horse Winner”

1. List the parts of a fairy tale. How is this story like a fairy tale? How is it different?
2. Characterize the mother fully. How does she differ from the stepmothers in fairy tales like “Cinderella” and “Hansel and Gretel”? How does the boy’s mistake about “filthy lucre” clarify her thinking and her motivations? Why has her love for her husband “turned to dust”? Why is she unlucky?
3. What kind of child is Paul? What are his motivations?
4. The initial assumptions of the story are that (a) a boy might get divinatory powers by riding a rocking horse and (b) a house can whisper. Explain how the second of these could be a metaphor. Once we have granted these initial assumptions, does the story develop plausibly?
5. It is ironic that the boy’s attempt to stop the whispers should only increase them. Is this a plausible irony? Why? What does it tell us about the theme of the story? Why is it ironic that the whispers should be especially audible at Christmas time? What irony is contained in the boy’s last speech?
6. In what way is the boy’s furious riding on the rocking horse an appropriate symbol for materialistic pursuits?
7. How might a sentimental writer have ended the story, and what would a change in the ending do to the meaning of the story?
8. How many people in the story are affected (or infected) by materialism?
9. What is the theme of the story?