

Before Reading

The Rocking-Horse Winner

Short Story by D.H. Lawrence

Can MONEY buy HAPPINESS?

It's easy to imagine that unlimited wealth would lead to almost perfect happiness. With all financial concerns swept away, what would be left to worry about? "The Rocking-Horse Winner" explores the connection between money and happiness.

LIST IT Create a list of things you would need to have to feel content. Then put check marks next to the things that can be obtained with enough money. Compare lists with a partner.

What do I need to be happy?	Can this be bought?
1. _____ _____	
2. _____ _____	
3. _____ _____	
4. _____ _____	
5. _____ _____	

Text Analysis: Theme

The **theme** of a story is the underlying message about life or human nature that the writer wants readers to understand. The theme is often what makes that story linger in your memory. Fiction writers almost never directly state the theme. Instead, they develop it using a variety of literary elements. The following questions can help you discover the theme of "The Rocking-Horse Winner."

- What are the **characters'** dominant, or main **traits**? What are their **motivations** for acting as they do?
- What is the main **conflict**, or problem, and how is it resolved?
- What are the central **symbols** in the story? What do they represent?

As you read "The Rocking-Horse Winner," answer these questions. Then ask yourself what theme these story elements suggest.

Reading Skill: Draw Conclusions

In this story, luck plays a significant role in the characters' lives, though the role is not always obvious. To **draw conclusions**, you must combine information stated in the text with your **inferences**, or logical guesses, and your own prior knowledge. As you read, activities in the margins will ask you to note information and your inferences about the three main characters in a chart like the one below. Consider what your inferences indicate about each character's true nature, goals, and ideas about luck.

Character	Information	Inferences
Paul		
Paul's mother		
Wear		

Vocabulary in Context

materialize (mə-tīr'ē-ə-līz) *v.* to take form; to appear; to become fact

Her dream of becoming a pilot never did materialize.

career (kə-rīr') *v.* to move at full speed; to rush wildly

The car careered down the hill.

steed (stēd) *n.* a horse, especially a high-spirited riding horse

The knight rode his steed into battle.

reiterate (rē-ī'tē-rāt') *v.* to repeat

He reiterated his explanation.

uncanny (ŭn-kăn'é) *adj.* strange or mysterious in a way that causes unease; eerie

It was an uncanny coincidence.

Vocabulary Practice

Review the vocabulary words and think about their meanings. Then use two of the words in a few lines of dialogue.

SET A PURPOSE FOR READING

Read this story to see what effects greed can have on a family.

The Rocking-Horse Winner

Short story by D. H. LAWRENCE

DRAW CONCLUSIONS

Review lines 1–15. Underline information about Paul's mother's behavior and feelings toward her children. What can you infer about her character from this information? Complete the chart below to answer this question.

Character

Information

Inference



BACKGROUND Two of the five great annual horseraces in England are the St. Leger Stakes and the Derby. Other notable English races mentioned in this story are the Grand National, the Ascot Gold Cup, and the Lincolnshire. Large sums of money are bet on horseraces. The amount a bettor can win depends on the odds. The odds on each horse are expressed as a ratio—3 to 1, for example—and are determined by what proportion of the total amount bet on the race is bet on that horse. The more money bet on a horse, the lower the odds and the lower the payoff.

There was a woman who was beautiful, who started with all the advantages, yet she had no luck. She married for love, and the love turned to dust. She had bonny¹ children, yet she felt they had been thrust upon her, and she could not love them. They looked at her coldly, as if they were finding fault with her. And hurriedly she felt she must cover up some fault in herself. Yet what it was that she must cover up she never knew. Nevertheless, when her children were present, she always felt the center of her heart go hard. This troubled her, and in her manner she was all the more gentle and anxious for her children, as if she loved them very much. Only she herself knew that at the center of her heart was a hard little place that could not feel love, no, not for anybody. Everybody else said of her: "She is such a good mother. She adores her children." Only she herself, and her children themselves, knew it was not so. They read it in each other's eyes. ☉

1. bonny: pretty.



There were a boy and two little girls. They lived in a pleasant house, with a garden, and they had discreet servants, and felt themselves superior to anyone in the neighborhood.

Although they lived in style, they felt always an anxiety in the house. There was never enough money. The mother had a small income, and the father had a small income, but not nearly enough for the social position which they had to keep up. The father went into town to some office. But though he had good prospects, these prospects never materialized. There was always the grinding sense of the shortage of money, though the style was always kept up.

At last the mother said: "I will see if I can't make something." But she did not know where to begin. She racked her brains, and tried this thing and the other, but could not find anything successful. The failure made deep lines come into her face. Her children were growing up, they would have to go to school. There must be more money, there must be more money. The father, who was always very handsome and expensive in his tastes, seemed as if he never *would* be able to do anything worth doing. And the mother, who had a great belief in herself, did not succeed any better, and her tastes were just as expensive. Ⓞ

And so the house came to be haunted by the unspoken phrase: *There must be more money! There must be more money!* The children could hear it all the time, though nobody said it aloud. They heard it at Christmas, when the expensive and splendid toys filled the nursery. Behind the shining modern rocking-horse, behind the smart doll's house, a voice would start whispering: "There *must* be more money! There *must* be more money!" And the children would stop playing, to listen for a moment. They would look into each other's eyes, to see if they had all heard. And each one saw in the eyes of the other two that they too had heard. "There *must* be more money! There *must* be more money!"

It came whispering from the springs of the still-swaying rocking-horse, and even the horse, bending his wooden, champing head, heard it. The big doll, sitting so pink and smirking in her new pram,¹ could hear it quite plainly, and seemed to be smirking

materialize (mā'tī-ə-ē-ā-lee-ō) to take form; to appear; to become fact

Ⓞ THEME

Reread lines 19–35. Underline statements about the family's concerns with social position and money. What **theme** is suggested by their attitude?

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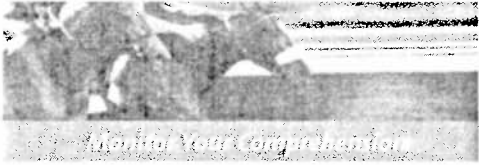
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1. pram: baby carriage (a shortened form of *perambulator*)



THEME

Review lines 36–58. Notice details about the story’s **setting**. What ideas are suggested by the house’s “whispers”?

CHARACTER

What is unusual about Paul’s mother’s views on luck?

all the more self-consciously because of it. The foolish puppy, too, that took the place of the teddy bear, he was looking so extraordinarily foolish for no other reason but that he heard the secret whisper all over the house: “There *must* be more money!”

Yet nobody ever said it aloud. The whisper was everywhere, and therefore no one spoke it. Just as no one ever says: “We are breathing!” in spite of the fact that breath is coming and going all the time. ③

“Mother,” said the boy Paul one day, “why don’t we keep a car of our own? Why do we always use uncle’s, or else a taxi?”

“Because we’re the poor members of the family,” said the mother.

“But why *are* we, mother?”

“Well—I suppose,” she said slowly and bitterly, “it’s because your father has no luck.”

The boy was silent for some time.

“Is luck money, mother?” he asked, rather timidly.

“No, Paul. Not quite. It’s what causes you to have money.”

“Oh!” said Paul vaguely. “I thought when Uncle Oscar said *filthy lucker*, it meant money.”

70 “*Filthy lucre*³ does mean money,” said the mother. “But it’s lucre, not luck.”

“Oh!” said the boy. “Then what *is* luck, mother?”

“It’s what causes you to have money. If you’re lucky you have money. That’s why it’s better to be born lucky than rich. If you’re rich, you may lose your money. But if you’re lucky, you will always get more money.”

“Oh! Will you? And is father not lucky?”

“Very unlucky, I should say,” she said bitterly.

The boy watched her with unsure eyes.

80 “Why?” he asked.

“I don’t know. Nobody ever knows why one person is lucky and another unlucky.”

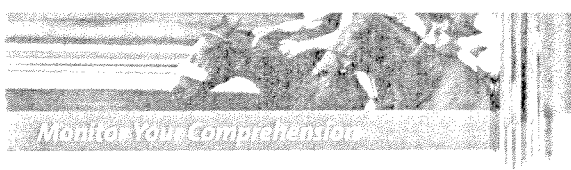
“Don’t they? Nobody at all? Does *nobody* know?”

“Perhaps God. But He never tells.”

“He ought to, then. And aren’t you lucky either, mother?”

FOOTNOTES

3. *filthy lucre* (fĪL’ē krē): money, especially when obtained through fraud or greed. The term comes from the King James Bible (Titus 1:11) and has passed into familiar usage.



⊙ DRAW CONCLUSIONS

Reread lines 86–94. What is Paul’s mother trying to hide from him?

Handwritten lines for writing an answer.



career: to rush; to move at full speed; to rush wildly

VOCABULARY

When might a person career wildly?

Handwritten lines for writing an answer.

“I can’t be, if I married an unlucky husband.”

“But by yourself, aren’t you?”

“I used to think I was, before I married. Now I think I am very unlucky indeed.”

90 “Why?”

“Well—never mind! Perhaps I’m not really,” she said.

The child looked at her to see if she meant it. But he saw, by the lines of her mouth, that she was only trying to hide something from him. ⊙

“Well, anyhow,” he said stoutly,⁴ “I’m a lucky person.”

“Why?” said his mother, with a sudden laugh.

He stared at her. He didn’t even know why he had said it.

“God told me,” he asserted, brazening it out.

100 “I hope He did, dear!” she said, again with a laugh, but rather bitter.

“He did, mother!”

“Excellent!” said the mother, using one of her husband’s exclamations.

The boy saw she did not believe him; or rather, that she paid no attention to his assertion. This angered him somewhere, and made him want to compel her attention.

He went off by himself, vaguely, in a childish way, seeking for the clue to “luck.” Absorbed, taking no heed of other people, he went about with a sort of stealth, seeking inwardly for luck. He 110 wanted luck, he wanted it, he wanted it. When the two girls were playing dolls in the nursery, he would sit on his big rocking-horse, charging madly into space, with a frenzy that made the little girls peer at him uneasily. Wildly the horse careered, the waving dark hair of the boy tossed, his eyes had a strange glare in them. The little girls dared not speak to him.

When he had ridden to the end of his mad little journey, he climbed down and stood in front of his rocking-horse, staring fixedly into its lowered face. Its red mouth was slightly open, its big eye was wide and glassy-bright.

4. stoutly; bravely; firmly.



steed (stēd) *n.* a horse, especially a high-spirited riding horse

THEME

Review lines 104–126. Why is Paul so determined to find luck? What might his **motivation** be?

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DRAW CONCLUSIONS

Review lines 133–154. Underline the line that indicates Paul has grown. Circle the comment that suggests he is still immature. Is Paul developing normally? Explain.

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120 “Now!” he would silently command the snorting steed. “Now, take me to where there is luck! Now take me!”

And he would slash the horse on the neck with the little whip he had asked Uncle Oscar for. He *knew* the horse could take him to where there was luck, if only he forced it. So he would mount again and start on his furious ride, hoping at last to get there. He knew he could get there. **Ⓢ**

“You’ll break your horse, Paul!” said the nurse.

“He’s always riding like that! I wish he’d leave off!” said his elder sister Joan.

130 But he only glared down on them in silence. Nurse gave him up. She could make nothing of him. Anyhow, he was growing beyond her.

One day his mother and his Uncle Oscar came in when he was on one of his furious rides. He did not speak to them.

“Hallo, you young jockey! Riding a winner?” said his uncle.

“Aren’t you growing too big for a rocking-horse? You’re not a very little boy any longer, you know,” said his mother.

But Paul only gave a blue glare from his big, rather close-set eyes. He would speak to nobody when he was in full tilt.⁵ His

140 mother watched him with an anxious expression on her face.

At last he suddenly stopped forcing his horse into the mechanical gallop and slid down.

“Well, I got there!” he announced fiercely, his blue eyes still flaring, and his sturdy long legs straddling apart.

“Where did you get to?” asked his mother.

“Where I wanted to go,” he flared back at her.

“That’s right, son!” said Uncle Oscar. “Don’t you stop till you get there. What’s the horse’s name?”

“He doesn’t have a name,” said the boy.

150 “Gets on without all right?” asked the uncle.

“Well, he has different names. He was called Sansovino last week.”


“Sansovino, eh? Won the Ascot.⁶ How did you know his name?”

“He always talks about horse races with Bassett,” said Joan. **Ⓢ**

5. In full tilt: moving at full speed.

6. Won the Ascot: won at the famous horse races held on Ascot Heath, a horsetrack southwest of London.



The uncle was delighted to find that his small nephew was posted with all the racing news. Bassett, the young gardener, who had been wounded in the left foot in the war and had got his present job through Oscar Cresswell, whose batman⁷ he had been, was a perfect blade of the "turf."⁸ He lived in the racing events, and the small boy lived with him. 

Oscar Cresswell got it all from Bassett.

"Master Paul comes and asks me, so I can't do more than tell him, sir," said Bassett, his face terribly serious, as if he were speaking of religious matters.

"And does he ever put anything on a horse he fancies?"

"Well—I don't want to give him away—he's a young sport,"⁹ a fine sport, sir. Would you mind asking him himself? He sort of takes a pleasure in it, and perhaps he'd feel I was giving him away, sir, if you don't mind."

Bassett was serious as a church.

The uncle went back to his nephew and took him off for a ride in the car.

"Say, Paul, old man, do you ever put anything on a horse?" the uncle asked.

The boy watched the handsome man closely.

"Why, do you think I oughtn't to?" he parried.

"Not a bit of it! I thought perhaps you might give me a tip for the Lincoln."

The car sped on into the country, going down to Uncle Oscar's place in Hampshire.

"Honor bright?"¹⁰ said the nephew.

"Honor bright, son!" said the uncle.

"Well, then, Daffodil."

"Daffodil! I doubt it, sonny. What about Mirza?"


"I only know the winner," said the boy. "That's Daffodil."

"Daffodil, eh?"

There was a pause. Daffodil was an obscure horse comparatively.

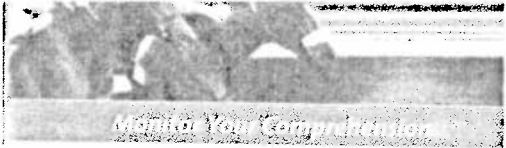
"Uncle!"

"Yes, son?"

 DRAW CONCLUSIONS

Review lines 138–160. Think about how important the races are becoming to Paul. Then make an inference about him.

7. batman: in Britain, a soldier who acts as an officer's servant.
 8. blade of the "turf": someone very knowledgeable about horse racing.
 9. sport: good fellow.
 10. Honor bright: an expression meaning "on your honor."



Ⓢ DRAW CONCLUSIONS

Review lines 171–196 and think about Uncle Oscar’s conversation with Paul. What can you conclude about why Uncle Oscar takes Paul for a ride?

150 “You won’t let it go any further, will you? I promised Bassett.”
“Bassett be damned, old man! What’s he got to do with it?”

“We’re partners. We’ve been partners from the first. Uncle, he lent me my first five shillings,¹¹ which I lost. I promised him, honor bright, it was only between me and him; only you gave me that ten-shilling note I started winning with, so I thought you were lucky. You won’t let it go any further, will you?”

The boy gazed at his uncle from those big, hot, blue eyes, set rather close together. The uncle stirred and laughed uneasily.

160 “Right you are, son! I’ll keep your tip private. Daffodil, eh? How much are you putting on him?”

“All except twenty pounds,”¹² said the boy. “I keep that in reserve.”

The uncle thought it a good joke.

“You keep twenty pounds in reserve, do you, you young romancer? What are you betting, then?”

“I’m betting three hundred,” said the boy gravely. “But it’s between you and me, Uncle Oscar! Honor bright?”

The uncle burst into a roar of laughter.

170 “It’s between you and me all right, you young Nat Gould,”¹³ he said, laughing. “But where’s your three hundred?”

“Bassett keeps it for me. We’re partners.”

“You are, are you! And what is Bassett putting on Daffodil?”

“He won’t go quite as high as I do, I expect. Perhaps he’ll go a hundred and fifty.”

“What, pennies?” laughed the uncle.

“Pounds,” said the child, with a surprised look at his uncle.

“Bassett keeps a bigger reserve than I do.”

120 Between wonder and amusement Uncle Oscar was silent. He pursued the matter no further, but he determined to take his nephew with him to the Lincoln races.

“Now, son,” he said, “I’m putting twenty on Mirza, and I’ll put five on for you on any horse you fancy. What’s your pick?”

“Daffodil, uncle.”

11. **shillings**: former British coins worth 1/20 of a pound.
12. **twenty pounds**: the equivalent of about a thousand dollars in today’s money. (in the mid-1920s, a pound was worth about five dollars, and the purchasing power of a dollar was about ten times what it is now.)
13. **Nat Gould**: a well-known British horseracing authority and writer.



"No, not the fiver on Daffodil!"

"I should if it was my own fiver," said the child.

"Good! Good! Right you are! A fiver for me and a fiver for you on Daffodil."

Is Uncle Oscar being helpful to Paul by placing the bet, or is he doing something that will be harmful to him? Explain.

The child had never been to a race-meeting before, and his eyes were blue fire. He pursed his mouth tight and watched. A Frenchman just in front had put his money on Lancelot. Wild with excitement, he flayed his arms up and down, yelling "*Lancelot! Lancelot!*" in his French accent.

Daffodil came in first, Lancelot second, Mirza third. The child, flushed and with eyes blazing, was curiously serene. His uncle brought him four five-pound notes, four to one.

"What am I to do with these?" he cried, waving them before the boy's eyes.

"I suppose we'll talk to Bassett," said the boy. "I expect I have fifteen hundred now; and twenty in reserve; and this twenty."

His uncle studied him for some moments.

"Look here, son!" he said. "You're not serious about Bassett and that fifteen hundred, are you?"

"Yes, I am. But it's between you and me, uncle. Honor bright?"

"Honor bright all right, son! But I must talk to Bassett."

"If you'd like to be a partner, uncle, with Bassett and me, we could all be partners. Only, you'd have to promise, honor bright, uncle, not to let it go beyond us three. Bassett and I are lucky, and you must be lucky, because it was your ten shillings I started winning with. . . ."

Uncle Oscar took both Bassett and Paul into Richmond Park for an afternoon, and there they talked.

"It's like this, you see, sir," Bassett said. "Master Paul would get me talking about racing events, spinning yarns, you know, sir. And he was always keen on knowing if I'd made or if I'd lost. It's about a year since, now, that I put five shillings on Blush of Dawn for him; and we lost. Then the luck turned, with that ten shillings he had from you; that we put on Singhalose. And since that time, it's been pretty steady, all things considering. What do you say, sir?"



Monitor Your Comprehension

I haven't even an idea, have I, Bassett? Then we're careful, because we mostly go down."

"You do, do you! And when you're sure, like about Daffodil, what makes you sure, sonny?"

"Oh, well, I don't know," said the boy uneasily. "I'm sure, you know, uncle; that's all."

"It's as if he had it from heaven, sir," Bassett reiterated.

"I should say so!" said the uncle.

But he became a partner. And when the Leger was coming on Paul was "sure" about Lively Spark, which was a quite inconsiderable horse. The boy insisted on putting a thousand on the horse, Bassett went for five hundred, and Oscar Cresswell two hundred. Lively Spark came in first, and the betting had been ten to one against him. Paul had made ten thousand.

"You see," he said, "I was absolutely sure of him."

Even Oscar Cresswell had cleared two thousand.

"Look here, son," he said, "this sort of thing makes me nervous."

"It needn't, uncle! Perhaps I shan't be sure again for a long time."

"But what are you going to do with your money?" asked the uncle.

"Of course," said the boy, "I started it for mother. She said she had no luck, because father is unlucky, so I thought if I was lucky, it might stop whispering."

"What might stop whispering?"

"Our house. I *bate* our house for whispering."

"What does it whisper?"

"Why—why"—the boy fidgeted—"why, I don't know. But it's always short of money, you know, uncle."

"I know it, son, I know it."

"You know people send mother writs,¹⁶ don't you, uncle?"

"I'm afraid I do," said the uncle.

"And then the house whispers, like people laughing at you behind your back. It's awful, that is! I thought if I was lucky—"

"You might stop it," added the uncle. ⓓ

The boy watched him with big blue eyes, that had an uncanny cold fire in them, and he said never a word.

reiterate (rē-ī'tā-rāt') v. to repeat

VOCABULARY

Why might Bassett have reiterated his point?

Four horizontal lines for writing a response to the vocabulary question.

ⓓ DRAW CONCLUSIONS
Review lines 303–327. Circle the lines that explain how Uncle Oscar not only allows Paul to continue gambling, but also becomes a partner. What does Oscar's decision to join in the gambling venture reveal about his character?

Character

Information

Apprentice

16. writs: legal documents, in this case demanding payment of debts.



DRAW CONCLUSIONS

Reread lines 347–351. Underline the statement about the house's whispering. Based on what you know about the characters, what is the most likely explanation for the house's increased whispering?

CRITICAL THINKING

Paul's mother could only work secretly because in that era working for a wage was not socially acceptable for a woman belonging to the upper classes. Did this social rule contribute to the family's money problems? Why or why not?

330 "Well, then!" said the uncle. "What are we doing?"
"I shouldn't like mother to know I was lucky," said the boy.
"Why not, son?"
"She'd stop me."
"I don't think she would."
"Oh!"—and the boy writhed in an odd way—"I *don't* want her to know, uncle."

"All right, son! We'll manage it without her knowing."

They managed it very easily. Paul, at the other's suggestion, handed over five thousand pounds to his uncle, who deposited
340 it with the family lawyer, who was then to inform Paul's mother that a relative had put five thousand pounds into his hands, which sum was to be paid out a thousand pounds at a time, on the mother's birthday, for the next five years.

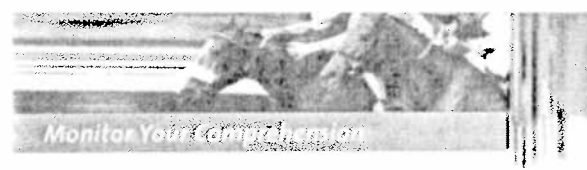
"So she'll have a birthday present of a thousand pounds for five successive years," said Uncle Oscar. "I hope it won't make it all the harder for her later."

Paul's mother had her birthday in November. The house had been "whispering" worse than ever lately, and, even in spite of his luck, Paul could not bear up against it. He was very anxious to
350 see the effect of the birthday letter, telling his mother about the thousand pounds. **CRITICAL THINKING**

When there were no visitors, Paul now took his meals with his parents, as he was beyond the nursery control. His mother went into town nearly every day. She had discovered that she had an odd knack of sketching furs and dress materials, so she worked secretly in the studio of a friend who was the chief "artist" for the leading drapers.¹⁷ She drew the figures of ladies in furs and ladies in silk and sequins for the newspaper advertisements. This young woman artist earned several thousand pounds a year, but Paul's mother
360 only made several hundreds, and she was again dissatisfied. She so wanted to be first in something, and she did not succeed, even in making sketches for drapery advertisements. **CRITICAL THINKING**

She was down to breakfast on the morning of her birthday. Paul watched her face as she read her letters. He knew the lawyer's

17. *Drapers*: British term for a dealer in cloth and dry goods.



THEME

Reread lines 363–375. Underline the mother's reaction to the letter from the lawyer, and the request she then makes. What do the reaction and request suggest about her attitude toward money?

Handwritten lines for student response.

THEME

Reread lines 385–397. Underline the sentences that discuss the voices in the house. What point might Lawrence be making here?

Handwritten lines for student response.

letter. As his mother read it, her face hardened and became more expressionless. Then a cold, determined look came on her mouth. She hid the letter under the pile of others, and said not a word about it.

170 “Didn’t you have anything nice in the post for your birthday, mother?” said Paul.

“Quite moderately nice,” she said, her voice cold and absent. She went away to town without saying more.

But in the afternoon Uncle Oscar appeared. He said Paul’s mother had had a long interview with the lawyer, asking if the whole five thousand could not be advanced at once, as she was in debt. 18

“What do you think, uncle?” said the boy.

“I leave it to you, son.”

“Oh, let her have it, then! We can get some more with the other,” said the boy.

180 “A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, laddie!” said Uncle Oscar.

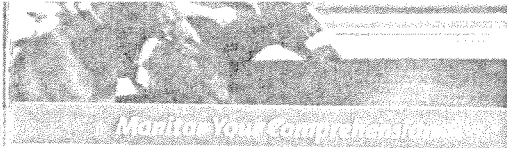
“But I’m sure to *know* for the Grand National; or the Lincolnshire; or else the Derby.¹⁸ I’m sure to know for *one* of them,” said Paul.

So Uncle Oscar signed the agreement, and Paul’s mother touched¹⁹ the whole five thousand. Then something very curious happened. The voices in the house suddenly went mad, like a chorus of frogs on a spring evening. There were certain new furnishings, and Paul had a tutor. He was *really* going to Eron, his father’s school, in the following autumn. There were flowers in the winter, and a blossoming of the luxury Paul’s mother had been used to. And yet the voices in the house, behind the sprays of mimosa and almond-blossom, and from under the piles of iridescent cushions, simply trilled and screamed in a sort of ecstasy: “There *must* be more money! Oh-h-h; there *must* be more money. Oh, now, now-w! Now-w-w—there *must* be more money!—more than ever! More than ever!” 19

It frightened Paul terribly. He studied away at his Latin and Greek with his tutor. But his intense hours were spent with

18. Grand National . . . Derby: three major English horse races held annually. The Derby is England’s best-known flat-track race.

19. touched: took.



DRAW CONCLUSIONS

Reread lines 398–418. Underline details that convey Paul's emotional state. What is happening to him? Write your conclusion in the chart.

Clues



Information



Inference

DRAW CONCLUSIONS

Reread lines 428–433. Underline the conclusion Paul's mother draws about why Paul wants to stay at home. Why is she unable to draw a correct conclusion here?

900 Bassett. The Grand National had gone by: he had not “known,” and had lost a hundred pounds. Summer was at hand. He was in agony for the Lincoln. But even for the Lincoln he didn’t “know,” and he lost fifty pounds. He became wild-eyed and strange, as if something were going to explode in him.

“Let it alone, son! Don’t you bother about it!” urged Uncle Oscar. But it was as if the boy couldn’t really hear what his uncle was saying.

410 “I’ve got to know for the Derby! I’ve got to know for the Derby!” the child reiterated, his big blue eyes blazing with a sort of madness.

His mother noticed how overwrought he was.

“You’d better go to the seaside. Wouldn’t you like to go now to the seaside, instead of waiting? I think you’d better,” she said, looking down at him anxiously, her heart curiously heavy because of him.

But the child lifted his uncanny blue eyes.

“I couldn’t possibly go before the Derby, mother!” he said. “I couldn’t possibly!”

200 “Why not?” she said, her voice becoming heavy when she was opposed. “Why not? You can still go from the seaside to see the Derby with your Uncle Oscar, if that’s what you wish. No need for you to wait here. Besides, I think you care too much about these races. It’s a bad sign. My family has been a gambling family, and you won’t know till you grow up how much damage it has done. But it has done damage. I shall have to send Bassett away, and ask Uncle Oscar not to talk racing to you, unless you promise to be reasonable about it: go away to the seaside and forget it. You’re all nerves!”

“I’ll do what you like, mother, so long as you don’t send me away till after the Derby,” the boy said.

“Send you away from where? Just from this house?”

“Yes,” he said, gazing at her.

“Why, you curious child, what makes you care about this house so much, suddenly? I never knew you loved it.”



He gazed at her without speaking. He had a secret within a secret, something he had not divulged, even to Bassett or to his Uncle Oscar.

But his mother, after standing undecided and a little bit sullen for some moments, said:

440 "Very well, then! Don't go to the seaside till after the Derby, if you don't wish it. But promise me you won't let your nerves go to pieces. Promise you won't think so much about horse-racing and events, as you call them!"

"Oh no," said the boy casually. "I won't think much about them, mother. You needn't worry. I wouldn't worry, mother, if I were you."

"If you were me and I were you," said his mother, "I wonder what we *should* do!"

"But you know you needn't worry, mother, don't you?" the boy repeated.

450 "I should be awfully glad to know it," she said wearily.

"Oh, well, you *can*, you know. I mean, you *ought* to know you needn't worry," he insisted.

"Ought I? Then I'll see about it," she said. ●

Paul's secret of secrets was his wooden horse, that which had no name. Since he was emancipated from a nurse and a nursery-governess, he had had his rocking-horse removed to his own bedroom at the top of the house.

"Surely you're too big for a rocking-horse!" his mother had remonstrated.

460 "Well, you see, mother, till I can have a *real* horse, I like to have *some* sort of animal about," had been his quaint answer.

"Do you feel he keeps you company?" she laughed.

"Oh yes! He's very good, he always keeps me company, when I'm there," said Paul.

So the horse, rather shabby, stood in an arrested prance in the boy's bedroom.

The Derby was drawing near, and the boy grew more and more tense. He hardly heard what was spoken to him, he was very frail,

● DRAW CONCLUSIONS

Review lines 437-453. Underline details that indicate Paul's mother is starting to think about something other than money. What can you infer from this?

Character



Information





and his eyes were really uncanny. His mother had sudden strange
470 seizures of uneasiness about him. Sometimes, for half an hour, she
would feel a sudden anxiety about him that was almost anguish.
She wanted to rush to him at once, and know he was safe.

Two nights before the Derby, she was at a big party in town,
when one of her rushes of anxiety about her boy, her first-born,
gripped her heart till she could hardly speak. She fought with the
feeling, might and main,²⁰ for she believed in common sense. But
it was too strong. She had to leave the dance and go downstairs
to telephone to the country. The children's nursery-governess
was terribly surprised and startled at being rung up in the night.

FOCUS QUESTIONS

What causes Paul's mother to check on her son's well-being?

FOCUS QUESTIONS

480 "Are the children all right, Miss Wilmot?"

"Oh yes, they are quite all right."

"Master Paul? Is he all right?"

"He went to bed as right as a trivet.²¹ Shall I run up and look
at him?"

"No," said Paul's mother reluctantly. "No! Don't trouble. It's
all right. Don't sit up. We shall be home fairly soon." She did not
want her son's privacy intruded upon.

"Very good," said the governess.

It was about one o'clock when Paul's mother and father drove
490 up to their house. All was still. Paul's mother went to her room
and slipped off her white fur cloak. She had told her maid not
to wait up for her. She heard her husband downstairs, mixing a
whisky and soda.

And then, because of the strange anxiety at her heart, she stole
upstairs to her son's room. Noiselessly she went along the upper
corridor. Was there a faint noise? What was it?

She stood, with arrested muscles, outside his door, listening.
There was a strange, heavy, and yet not loud noise. Her heart
stood still. It was a soundless noise, yet rushing and powerful.
500 Something huge, in violent, hushed motion. What was it? What
in God's name was it? She ought to know. She felt that she knew
the noise. She knew what it was.

20. might and main: with all her strength.
21. as right as a trivet: in fine condition.

Yet she could not place it. She couldn't say what it was. And on and on it went, like a madness.

Softly, frozen with anxiety and fear, she turned the door handle.

The room was dark. Yet in the space near the window, she heard and saw something plunging to and fro. She gazed in fear and amazement.

Then suddenly she switched on the light, and saw her son, in
 510 his green pajamas, madly surging on the rocking-horse. The blaze of light suddenly lit him up, as he urged the wooden horse, and lit her up, as she stood, blonde, in her dress of pale green and crystal, in the doorway.

"Paul!" she cried. "Whatever are you doing?"

"It's Malabar!" he screamed in a powerful, strange voice. "It's Malabar!"

His eyes blazed at her for one strange and senseless second, as he ceased urging his wooden horse. Then he fell with a crash to the ground, and she, all her tormented motherhood flooding upon
 520 her, rushed to gather him up. Ⓢ

But he was unconscious, and unconscious he remained, with some brain-fever. He talked and tossed, and his mother sat stonily by his side.

"Malabar! It's Malabar! Bassett, Bassett, I *know!* It's Malabar!"

So the child cried, trying to get up and urge the rocking-horse that gave him his inspiration.

"What does he mean by Malabar?" asked the heart-frozen mother.

"I don't know," said the father stonily.

530 "What does he mean by Malabar?" she asked her brother Oscar.

"It's one of the horses running for the Derby," was the answer.

And, in spite of himself, Oscar Cresswell spoke to Bassett, and himself put a thousand on Malabar: at fourteen to one.

The third day of the illness was critical: they were waiting for a change. The boy, with his rather long, curly hair, was tossing ceaselessly on the pillow. He neither slept nor regained

Ⓢ DRAW CONCLUSIONS

Reread lines 509–520. Underline the descriptions of Paul just before becoming unconscious. What can you infer about him?

Character



Information



Reading Skill: Draw Conclusions

Based on the information and inferences you recorded as you read, what conclusions can you draw about the role of luck in the lives of Paul, his mother, and Oscar? For each character, is luck a positive, a negative, or a neutral force? Support your conclusions with evidence from the story.

Character	Effect of luck	Explanation
Paul		
Paul's mother		
Uncle Oscar		

Can MONEY buy happiness?

Review your list of things you feel would make you happy (p. 396). After reading "The Rocking-Horse Winner," do you feel you should replace any items on your list? Explain why or why not.

Vocabulary Practice

Write S or A to indicate whether the words in each pair are synonyms or antonyms.

1. materialize/vanish _____
2. career/slacken _____
3. steed/stallion _____
4. reiterate/repeat _____
5. uncanny/ordinary _____

WORD LIST

career

materialize

reiterate

steed

uncanny

Academic Vocabulary in Writing

approach

assume

environment

method

strategy

Was Paul's family's house a healthy **environment** for him and his sisters to grow up in? Explain what was harmful about his mother's **approach** to child-raising. Include at least two Academic Vocabulary words in your response. Definitions of these terms are listed on page 381.

Assessment Practice

DIRECTIONS Use "The Rocking-Horse Winner" to answer questions 1–6.

- Which of these characters is not greedy?
 - Paul
 - Paul's mother
 - Paul's father
 - Paul's uncle
- Paul's mother spends a great deal of money in order to —
 - ensure a happy future for her children
 - contribute to the community's well-being
 - create the appearance of prosperity
 - prove that she and her husband are smart and talented
- Paul's mother shows that her desire for money can never be satisfied when she —
 - buys expensive Christmas presents for the children
 - secretly takes a job in town
 - shows no joy when reading the lawyer's letter
 - tells Paul he must go to the seaside
- What element in the story symbolizes Paul's obsessive and harmful focus on luck?
 - his rocking horse
 - his eyes
 - the secrets he keeps
 - the house's whispering
- What can you infer about Uncle Oscar's feelings toward Paul?
 - He does not care deeply about Paul's well-being.
 - He wants to provide the love that Paul never got from his parents.
 - His only interest in Paul is as a source of winning tips.
 - He makes Paul the center of his social and emotional world.
- Which is the best statement of the theme of this story?
 - Children need love in order to grow to be happy adults.
 - Those who win at gambling lose in the game of life.
 - Lust for money leads to unhappiness and even tragedy.
 - Expecting luck to solve your problems is the height of foolishness.