

# The Rocking-Horse Winner

Short Story by D. H. Lawrence

### COMMON CORE

**RL 1** Cite evidence to support inferences drawn from the text. **RL 2** Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account. **SL 1c-d** Pose and respond to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue.

### DID YOU KNOW?

D. H. Lawrence . . .

- was also an accomplished poet, painter, and playwright.
- lived in poverty for much of his life, as his censored books were deemed “unsellable.”
- was buried first in France and then in New Mexico.

### Meet the Author

## D. H. Lawrence 1885–1930

Today, D. H. Lawrence is widely regarded as an imaginative genius. In his own time, however, his explicit depictions of male–female relationships and exploration of the dark sides of the human psyche garnered outrage and censorship. One of the most controversial writers of the early 20th century, Lawrence, whose racier works were banned for much of his lifetime, now occupies a prominent place in literary history.

**A Miner’s Son** Lawrence spent his formative years in a Nottinghamshire coal-mining village. Growing up, he endured poverty, poor health, and constant strife between his mother—a former schoolteacher—and his father—an uneducated miner who drank. “Nothing,” he later remarked, “depresses me more than to come home to the place where I was born, and where I lived my first 20 years.” Despite this aversion, Lawrence returned to his hometown often in his fiction.

**Birth of a Writer** As a child, Lawrence formed a deep emotional bond with his mother. Wanting her son to be educated and refined, she encouraged him in school. Compelled by financial hardship to seek employment at age 16, Lawrence took a job in a surgical goods factory. In 1908, he earned a teaching certificate, but he

abandoned his teaching career four years later when he became seriously ill in the wake of his mother’s death. After his recovery, Lawrence was determined to try and make his living as a writer.

**Groundbreaker** According to his own account, Lawrence began writing on a “slightly self-conscious Sunday afternoon, when I was 19.” By the time he was 26, he had published his first book, *The White Peacock* (1911). He then embarked on a series of novels reflecting his belief that industrialized society was damaging to the human psyche because it emphasized reason over emotion and intuition. These works not only fought against restrictive social and moral conventions but also broke many literary conventions of the day.

**The “Here and Now” of Life** Despite the censorship of his work, chronic poverty, and advancing tuberculosis, Lawrence continued to write prolifically until his death in 1930, completing masterpieces such as *Women in Love* (1920) and *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (1928). He and his wife, Frieda, lived all over the world. Later in his life, Lawrence wrote that “the magnificent here and now of life in the flesh is ours, and ours alone, and ours only for a time. We ought to dance with rapture that we should be alive.”

Author Online

Go to [thinkcentral.com](http://thinkcentral.com). KEYWORD: HML12-1152



## ● TEXT ANALYSIS: THEME

The **theme** of a story—an underlying message about life or human nature that the writer wants readers to understand—is often what makes that story linger in your memory. In fiction, writers almost never directly state their themes. Instead, they develop them using literary elements. As you read, ask yourself the following questions. What theme or themes do your answers suggest?

- What ideas does the **title** highlight?
- What are the **characters'** dominant **traits**? What are their **motivations** for acting as they do?
- What is the main **conflict**, and how is it resolved?
- In what ways is the **setting** important to the story's action?

## ● READING SKILL: DRAW CONCLUSIONS

In this story, luck plays a significant role in the characters' lives, though Lawrence does not always explicitly state that role. To **draw conclusions** about the role of luck, you must combine information stated in the text; your **inferences**, or logical guesses; and your own prior knowledge. As you read, use a chart to note information and your inferences about the three main characters. Consider what they indicate about each character's experiences with and conceptions of luck.

<i>Character</i>	<i>Information</i>	<i>Inferences</i>
<i>Paul</i>		
<i>Paul's mother</i>		
<i>Oscar</i>		

## ▲ VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

Knowing the following boldfaced words will help you explore Lawrence's story of luck—and the lack thereof. Use context clues to determine the meaning of each word.

1. Sadly, the inheritance she expected did not **materialize**.
2. A frightened horse will often **career** wildly down the road.
3. He seated himself in the saddle and rode the **steed**.
4. Must I **reiterate** what I said before?
5. His resemblance to his sister is positively **uncanny**.



Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.

# 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 story you're about to read explores the connection between money and happiness.

**DEBATE** With a small group, discuss whether money is the key to contentment. Are there other factors or achievements that are more important than wealth, or is it impossible to concentrate on anything else when money is a problem? Is it possible to be happy without money? After you have come to a consensus, square off against another group to debate whether money can buy happiness.



# The Rocking-Horse Winner

D. H. Lawrence

**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 bonny<sup>1</sup> 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  
10 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.

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  
20 prospects, these prospects never **materialized**. There was always the grinding sense of the shortage of money, though the style was always kept up. **A**

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,

## Analyze Visuals ►

How would you describe the domestic scene depicted by this painting?

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

- A DRAW CONCLUSIONS**  
What information about the mother is explicitly stated in lines 1–21? What additional traits can you **infer** from these lines?

1. **bonny**: pretty.



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.

30 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!" **B**

It came whispering from the springs of the still-swaying rocking-horse, and even 40 the horse, bending his wooden, champing head, heard it. The big doll, sitting so pink and smirking in her new pram,<sup>2</sup> could hear it quite plainly, and seemed to be smirking 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. **C**

"Mother," said the boy Paul one day, "why don't we keep a car of our own?" 50 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."

60 "*Filthy lucre*<sup>3</sup> 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."

### **B** GRAMMAR AND STYLE

Reread lines 30–38.

Lawrence creates suspense and foreshadows future events through his use of **effective sentence types** and **repetition** of key phrases. Note the repeated **exclamatory sentence** in these lines.

### **C** THEME

Note details about the story's **setting** in lines 30–48. What ideas are suggested by the house's "whispers"?

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

3. **filthy lucre** (lōō'kəɹ): 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.

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

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

The boy watched her with unsure eyes.

“Why?” he asked.

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

70 “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?”

“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.”

“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. **D**

80 “Well, anyhow,” he said stoutly,<sup>4</sup> “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.

“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.

90 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 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.

100 “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. **E**

“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.

#### **D** DRAW CONCLUSIONS

Summarize Paul’s mother’s definition of *luck*. How does she characterize it, and why does she believe she’s unlucky?

**career** (kə-ri’r) *v.* to move at full speed; to rush wildly

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

#### **E** THEME

Why is Paul so furiously determined to find luck? Consider what message his **motivation** points toward.

4. **stoutly**: bravely; firmly.

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.

110 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.<sup>5</sup> His 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.

120 “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.

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

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

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

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

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 batman<sup>7</sup> he had been, was a perfect blade of the “turf.”<sup>8</sup> He lived in the racing events, and the small boy lived with him. **F**

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?”

140 “Well—I don’t want to give him away—he’s a young sport,<sup>9</sup> 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.

#### **F** DRAW CONCLUSIONS

How does Oscar’s attitude in lines 110–135 contrast with Paul’s? What does this suggest about how important the races—and luck—are to each character?

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.

7. **batman:** in Britain, a soldier who acts as an officer’s servant.

8. **blade of the “turf”:** someone very knowledgeable about horseracing.

9. **sport:** good fellow.



Portrait of Caspar Goodrich (1887), John Singer Sargent. Oil on canvas. © Mr. and Mrs. C. Michael Kojanian. Image courtesy of Brooklyn Museum of Art.

“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  
150 Hampshire.

“Honor bright?”<sup>10</sup> 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?”

160 “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,<sup>11</sup> 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?”

COMMON CORE L 4

### Language Coach

**Multiple Meanings** The word *parried* literally means “turned aside a blow or thrust of a sword.” What do you think it means in line 147?

10. **Honor bright:** an expression meaning “on your (or my) honor.”

11. **shillings:** former British coins worth 1/20 of a pound.



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

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

170 “All except twenty pounds,”<sup>12</sup> 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.

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

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

180 “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.”

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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.



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.”

190 “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.”

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.

200 “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?”

*The Start*, Alfred James Munnings. © Christie’s Images/Corbis.



“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  
210 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 Singhalese. And since that time, it’s been pretty steady, all things considering. What do you say, Master Paul?”

220 “We’re all right when we’re sure,” said Paul. “It’s when we’re not quite sure that we go down.”

“Oh, but we’re careful then,” said Bassett.

“But when are you *sure*?” smiled Uncle Oscar.

“It’s Master Paul, sir,” said Bassett in a secret, religious voice. “It’s as if he had it from heaven. Like Daffodil, now, for the Lincoln. That was as sure as eggs.”<sup>14</sup>

“Did you put anything on Daffodil?” asked Oscar Cresswell.

“Yes, sir. I made my bit.”

“And my nephew?”

Bassett was obstinately silent, looking at Paul.

230 “I made twelve hundred, didn’t I, Bassett? I told uncle I was putting three hundred on Daffodil.”

“That’s right,” said Bassett, nodding.

“But where’s the money?” asked the uncle.

“I keep it safe locked up, sir. Master Paul he can have it any minute he likes to ask for it.”

“What, fifteen hundred pounds?”

“And twenty! And *forty*, that is, with the twenty he made on the course.”

“It’s amazing!” said the uncle.

240 “If Master Paul offers you to be partners, sir, I would, if I were you: if you’ll excuse me,” said Bassett.

Oscar Cresswell thought about it.

“I’ll see the money,” he said.

They drove home again, and, sure enough, Bassett came round to the garden-house with fifteen hundred pounds in notes. The twenty pounds reserve was left with Joe Glee, in the Turf Commission deposit.<sup>15</sup>

“You see, it’s all right, uncle, when I’m *sure*! Then we go strong, for all we’re worth. Don’t we, Bassett?”

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14. **as sure as eggs:** absolutely certain; shortened from the expression “as sure as eggs is eggs.”

15. **Turf Commission deposit:** a bank in which bettors keep money for future bets.

“We do that, Master Paul.”

“And when are you sure?” said the uncle, laughing.

250 “Oh, well, sometimes I’m *absolutely* sure, like about Daffodil,” said the boy; “and sometimes I have an idea; and sometimes 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.

260 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.

270 “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 *hate* 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,<sup>16</sup> 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.

280 It’s awful, that is! I thought if I was lucky—”

“You might stop it,” added the uncle. **G**

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

“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.”

290 “All right, son! We’ll manage it without her knowing.”

**reiterate** (rē-ĭt’ə-rāt’)  
v. to repeat

**G DRAW CONCLUSIONS**

Why do you think Oscar not only allows Paul to continue gambling but also becomes a partner in the venture, even though it makes him “nervous”? What does this decision reveal about his character?

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

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

They managed it very easily. Paul, at the other's suggestion, handed over five thousand pounds to his uncle, who deposited 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  
300 against it. He was very anxious to see the effect of the birthday letter, telling his mother about the thousand pounds.

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.<sup>17</sup> 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 only made several hundreds, and she was again dissatisfied. She so wanted to be first in something, and she did not  
310 succeed, even in making sketches for drapery advertisements.

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 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.

"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  
320 a long interview with the lawyer, asking if the whole five thousand could not be advanced at once, as she was in debt.

"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.

"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.<sup>18</sup> I'm sure to know for *one* of them," said Paul.

So Uncle Oscar signed the agreement, and Paul's mother touched<sup>19</sup> the whole five thousand. Then something very curious happened. The voices in the house  
330 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 Eton, his

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

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

19. **touched:** took.

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!" **H**

It frightened Paul terribly. He studied away at his Latin and Greek with his tutor. But his intense hours were spent with Bassett. The Grand National had  
340 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.

"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,  
350 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!"

"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  
360 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.

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

"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!"

#### **H** THEME

Why do you think the voices get louder after Paul's mother receives the 5,000 pounds? What point might Lawrence be making?

“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.

“I should be awfully glad to know it,” she said wearily.

380 “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.

“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.

390 “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, and his eyes were really uncanny. His mother had sudden strange 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 400 hardly speak. She fought with the feeling, might and main,<sup>20</sup> 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.

“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.<sup>21</sup> 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.

410 “Very good,” said the governess.

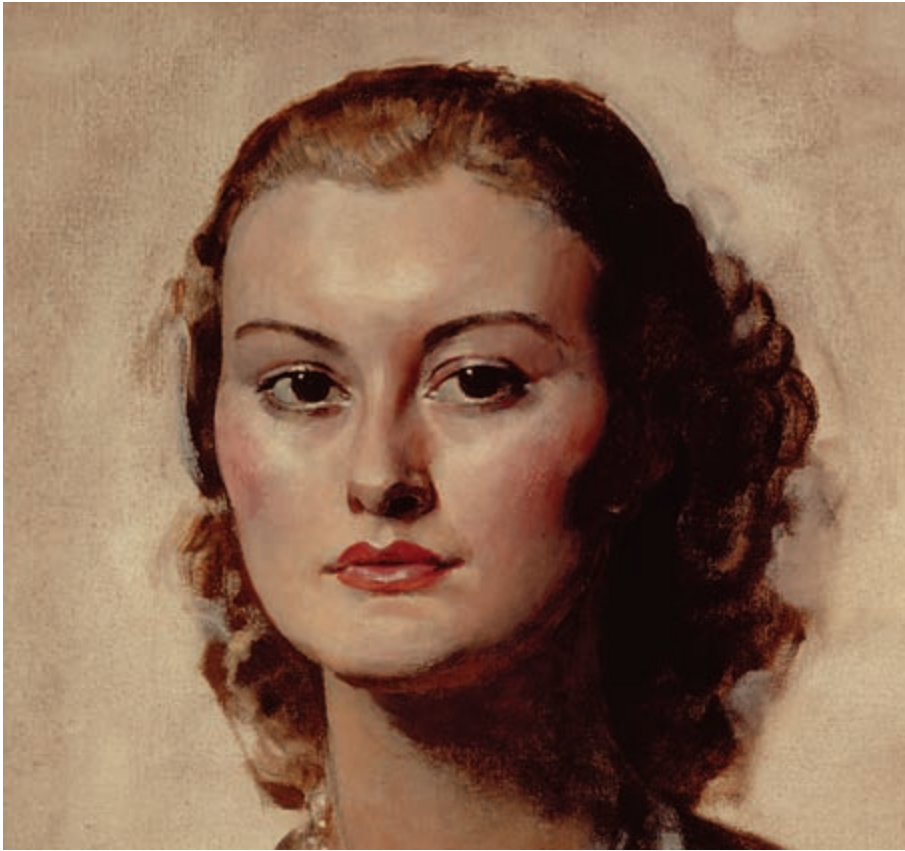
It was about one o’clock when Paul’s mother and father drove up to their house. All was still. Paul’s mother went to her room and slipped off her white fur cloak. She had told her maid not to wait up for her. She heard her husband downstairs, mixing a whisky and soda.

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?

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20. **might and main**: with all her strength.

21. **as right as a trivet**: in fine condition.



*Portrait of a Woman* (1935), Gerald Leslie Brockhurst. Oil on canvas, 51 cm × 41 cm. © Southampton City Art Gallery, Hampshire, United Kingdom/Bridgeman Art Library.

### ◀ Analyze Visuals

In what respect does this portrait reflect the mother's emotional state at this point in the story?

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  
420 noise, yet rushing and powerful. 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.

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 his green pajamas, madly surging on the rocking-horse. The blaze of light suddenly lit  
430 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 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!”

440 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.

“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  
450 neither slept nor regained consciousness, and his eyes were like blue stones. His mother sat, feeling her heart had gone, turned actually into a stone.

In the evening, Oscar Cresswell did not come, but Bassett sent a message, saying could he come up for one moment, just one moment? Paul’s mother was very angry at the intrusion, but on second thoughts she agreed. The boy was the same. Perhaps Bassett might bring him to consciousness.

The gardener, a shortish fellow with a little brown mustache and sharp little brown eyes, tiptoed into the room, touched his imaginary cap to Paul’s mother, and stole to the bedside, staring with glittering, smallish eyes at the tossing, dying child.

460 “Master Paul!” he whispered. “Master Paul! Malabar came in first all right, a clean win. I did as you told me. You’ve made over seventy thousand pounds, you have; you’ve got over eighty thousand.<sup>22</sup> Malabar came in all right, Master Paul.”


“Malabar! Malabar! Did I say Malabar, mother? Did I say Malabar? Do you think I’m lucky, mother? I knew Malabar, didn’t I? Over eighty thousand pounds! I call that lucky, don’t you, mother? Over eighty thousand pounds! I knew, didn’t I know I knew? Malabar came in all right. If I ride my horse till I’m sure, then I tell you, Bassett, you can go as high as you like. Did you go for all you were worth, Bassett?”

“I went a thousand on it, Master Paul.”

“I never told you, mother, that if I can ride my horse, and *get there*, then I’m  
470 absolutely sure—oh, absolutely! Mother, did I ever tell you? I *am* lucky!”

“No, you never did,” said his mother. **1**

But the boy died in the night.

And even as he lay dead, his mother heard her brother’s voice saying to her: “My God, Hester, you’re eighty-odd thousand to the good, and a poor devil of a son to the bad. But, poor devil, poor devil, he’s best gone out of a life where he rides his rocking-horse to find a winner.” 

COMMON CORE L 4c, L 5b

### Language Coach

#### Denotations/

#### Connotations

The feelings and images associated with a word are its **connotations**.

Several words meaning “unwanted entrance” have different levels of negativity: *infringement*, *interruption*, *invasion*, and *intrusion* (line 454).

Use a dictionary to place these on a scale of 1–4 (1 being least negative).

#### **1** DRAW CONCLUSIONS

Recall that Paul did tell his mother that he was lucky at the beginning of the story (lines 80–89). Why do you think she answers as she does in line 471?

22. **eighty thousand:** the equivalent of about \$4 million in today’s dollars.

## Comprehension

1. **Recall** What “secret whisper” does Paul keep hearing in his house?
2. **Clarify** What happens when Paul rides his rocking horse?
3. **Summarize** Describe Paul’s final ride and the story’s conclusion.

## Text Analysis

4. **Analyze Character Reactions** In what way does Paul’s relationship with his mother lead to his obsession with luck? Citing evidence from the story, describe each of the following:
  - Paul’s mother’s view of herself and her family
  - what she teaches her son about luck
  - what Paul longs to do for her
5. **Analyze Symbol** Consider what happens when Paul rides his rocking horse. What might riding the horse symbolize? Explain your answer.
6. **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.
7. **Examine Imagery** A **controlling image** is a single image that extends throughout a literary work and shapes its meaning. Review the story, looking for lines in which Lawrence describes Paul’s eyes. What does this repeated image draw attention to? Cite evidence.
8. **Interpret Theme** Consider what happens in this story because of the adults’ desire for money. What theme about materialism is Lawrence communicating to the reader? What literary elements does he employ to convey this theme? Cite evidence.

## Text Criticism

9. **Critical Interpretations** Several critics have argued that every adult in the story except for the nurse contributes to Paul’s death. Do you agree with this interpretation? Explain why or why not, citing textual evidence to support your opinion.

*Can **MONEY** buy happiness?*

In what ways does money influence our emotions and actions? Why can’t money buy happiness?

### COMMON CORE

**RL1** Cite evidence to support inferences drawn from the text. **RL2** Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account.

# Vocabulary in Context

## ▲ VOCABULARY PRACTICE

Indicate whether the words in each pair are synonyms or antonyms.

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

## ACADEMIC VOCABULARY IN WRITING

• approach • assume • environment • method • strategy

What can we **assume** about Paul's feeling toward his mother? How does Paul's mother **approach** his luck? Using at least two Academic Vocabulary words, write a paragraph describing one of the main characters in "The Rocking-Horse Winner."

## VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT: ANALOGIES

An **analogy** compares two things to clarify the less familiar one. Vocabulary analogies compare word pairs. The first example pair (below) reads, "*iridescent* is to *dull* as *uncanny* is to *familiar*." Even if you can't remember what *iridescent* means, you may remember that *uncanny* means "strange." Therefore, the second pair of words are opposites, or **antonyms**. That means the first pair are also opposites, and *iridescent* is an antonym of *dull*. The second analogy—"career is to *rush* as *overwrought* is to *nervous*"—shows two pairs of synonyms in which the first word in each pair has more extreme **connotations**. In other words, the emotion associated with the word is more intense.

### ANALOGY EXAMPLES

IRIDESCENT:DULL::uncanny:familiar  
CAREER:RUSH::overwrought:nervous

**PRACTICE** Choose the word that makes the relationship in the second pair most like the relationship in the capitalized pair. Use a dictionary if needed.

1. TACTLESS:DISCREET::loud: (a) riotous (b) quiet (c) gossipy (d) audible
2. IMPRESSIVE:SPLENDID::hot: (a) scalding (b) warm (c) frigid (d) outstanding
3. COMPEL:ATTRACT::condemn: (a) prosecute (b) defend (c) denounce (d) question
4. GRAVELY:JOKINGLY::frantically: (a) calmly (b) studiously (c) respectfully (d) hastily
5. OBSTINATELY:FIRMLY::icily: (a) warmly (b) coolly (c) stubbornly (d) angrily

### WORD LIST

career  
materialize  
reiterate  
steed  
uncanny

### COMMON CORE

L5 Demonstrate understanding of word relationships. L6 Acquire and use accurately general academic words and phrases.

Vocabulary Practice **THINK** central

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KEYWORD: HML12-1170

## Language

### ◆ GRAMMAR AND STYLE: Craft Effective Sentences

Review the **Grammar and Style** note on page 1156. Lawrence uses **repetition** of key phrases to create **suspense** in his writing. He heightens suspense through his use of effective **sentence types and structures** and **repetition** of key words and phrases. Lawrence frequently employs short interrogative and exclamatory sentences, such as the repeated exclamatory sentence “There *must* be more money!” which build suspense and foreshadow events to come. Consider how Lawrence’s use of effective sentences builds suspense in this passage:

*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. Something huge, in violent, hushed motion. What was it?* (lines 418–421)

Notice how the short sentences lend the passage a sense of urgency, while the interrogative sentence excites readers’ curiosity and fear about what will happen next.

**PRACTICE** Write your own paragraph about a character on the brink of a shocking discovery. Mimic Lawrence’s use of short sentences and effective sentence types. If possible, come up with a compelling word or phrase to repeat throughout your paragraph.

### COMMON CORE

**L 3a** Vary syntax for effect.  
**W 2b–c** Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas; develop the topic thoroughly by selecting concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples; use appropriate transitions to clarify the relationships among complex ideas.

### READING-WRITING CONNECTION



Expand your understanding of “The Rocking-Horse Winner” by responding to this prompt. Then, use the **revising tips** to improve your analytical essay.

#### WRITING PROMPT

**WRITE AN ANALYSIS** What could the adults in “The Rocking-Horse Winner” have done to prevent Paul’s death? Write a **three-to-five-paragraph essay** analyzing the steps each adult could have taken to save Paul. Be sure to discuss specific scenes from the story and explain what each character could have done differently.

#### REVISING TIPS

- Add more text evidence to demonstrate an understanding of the story’s plot.
- Make sure you offer insightful solutions to Paul’s problem and outline the specific steps leading to those solutions.
- Try to use different sentence types throughout your essay, and link the steps you note using appropriate transitions.

Interactive  
Revision



Go to [thinkcentral.com](http://thinkcentral.com).  
KEYWORD: HML12-1171