



Discussion Questions

The Ruby in the Smoke by Philip Pullman

Source: Madison Public Library and Multnomah Co., OR

1. In the first two chapters, the author presents many mysteries. Name some of them.
2. Sally has a recurring nightmare. What clues do you have that the dream comes from a memory of her early childhood and not just from her imagination?
3. What do you think Matthew Lockhart (Sally's father) meant when he told her to "keep her powder dry"?
4. Do you get the impression that all parents in 1870's England gave their teenagers a pistol as Matthew Lockhart did for his daughter when she turned fourteen, and taught her how to use it? Why do you think he decided to arm his teenage daughter?
5. What do you think the author means by the metaphor about the spider and the web in chapter two? How does the author's description make you feel?
6. How does the author's use of letters and newspaper articles add to the story? How does the author reveal information as the novel moves along without revealing the solution of the mysteries?
7. Why do you think the author made Matthew Bedwell (the opium addict) and Nicholas Bedwell (the reverend) twins instead of just brothers? Are the twins similar? Are they completely different?
8. Authors always choose their characters' names carefully. Matthew Lockhart and Matthew Bedwell have the same first name. Do these two characters have anything in common? Are they alive in any ways? Also consider the name Lockhart for both Matthew and his daughter, Sally. What does the name make you think of, and what might the name suggest about those two characters?

9. Compare Sally and Adelaide. How does each of them respond to being in danger? Sally often gets help to solve the mysteries surrounding her father's death. Does Sally ever seem like a "damsel in distress," helpless, or unable to think quickly and get herself out of danger? How about Adelaide? What do you think might account for the difference in their responses to a sometimes dangerous world?
10. Usually in a novel the main character changes as s/he experiences the events of the novel. In what ways has Sally Lockhart changed by the end of the novel? In what ways is she the same?
11. Do you have any guesses as to what happened to Adelaide at the end of the book? Do you think she escaped from Mrs. Holland? Why or why not?
12. Were you able to predict any part or parts of the solution to the mystery? If so, which parts were you able to predict and what clues tipped you off as you were reading?