

**Discussion Guide for  
The Heiress by Rachel Hawkins**

1. Discuss the portrayal of family dynamics within the McTavish family. How does the author depict the relationships between different family members? Are there any relatable elements or surprising twists in these relationships?
2. Did any of the characters in "The Heiress" remind you of people you know or situations you've encountered? How did these personal connections enhance or challenge your understanding of the story?
3. Articles and stories play a significant role in the novel, making the media almost a character itself. How did these external sources contribute to the atmosphere of the story? Did they add depth to your understanding of the characters and their world?
4. Each of Ruby's husbands reflects different periods in her life. How did their characters evolve over the course of the story, and how did Ruby's motivations for their eventual fates change?
5. The color red is a recurring motif in the novel. Identify the instances where it is mentioned and discuss what significance you attribute to the color in those scenarios.
6. Which character did you find yourself sympathizing with the most, and why? Were there any characters you struggled to empathize with, and if so, what aspects of their personalities or actions contributed to this?
7. How do the characters' individual secrets impact the dynamics within the McTavish family? Did it make you consider the role of secrets in your own family or relationships?
8. Discuss how wealth and privilege influence the characters' decisions and relationships in the book. Do you think the portrayal of wealth is realistic, and how might the story differ if the characters were from a different socioeconomic background?
9. Were there moments that took you by surprise, and how did they affect your reading experience? Did the twists enhance the overall narrative, or did they feel forced?

10. Names in the book, such as Ruby and Jules, are symbolic. Consider the significance of Grace's name and speculate on what Jules might name her and Cam's baby. How do these names contribute to the themes of the novel?
11. The novel explores the concept of nature versus nurture, particularly with characters like Ruby, Dora, and Cam. Did your perspective on this age-old debate shift after reading "The Heiress"? How do the characters navigate their identities in relation to their upbringing?
12. The McTavish name carries privilege, allowing the family to escape consequences multiple times. Discuss the theme of power and reckless freedom that comes with their wealth. How are the Darnells affected by the McTavishes' actions?
13. Consider the atmospheric elements of the Blue Ridge Mountains and Ashby House. How did the setting contribute to the overall mood of the story? Did it evoke any personal memories or feelings?
14. Examine the relationships between Jules and Camden, as well as other family members. How do these relationships evolve throughout the story, and did you find the portrayal of love, loyalty, and betrayal relatable?
15. If you were in Cam's position and received similar letters, how might you react? How did the letters contribute to your understanding of Ruby's character, and did they add depth to the narrative for you?
16. Cam worked hard to distance himself from his family, yet upon returning to Ashby House, he felt transported to his past. Can one ever fully escape their origins? How does Cam define himself in opposition to the McTavishes?
17. Why do you think Ruby created memorials for each of her husbands? Do you believe they serve as a form of penance or a strategic move to portray innocence? Share your interpretations.
18. Why did Ruby adopt Cam, and did her plan for him play out as she had hoped? Discuss the complexities of their mother-son relationship and the implications of adoption in the story.
19. Consider the theme of legacy and inheritance in the novel. How do the characters' experiences with wealth and family legacy resonate with your own views on inheritance or family history? Are there aspects you would handle differently?

20. The McTavishes view the family fortune and Ashby House as a source of power, while Cam sees it as a confining trap. Explore the dynamics of their different perspectives. Does the concept of "birthright" play a role in these varying views?
21. Consider the significance of the baby doll with one eye closed. How does this childhood anecdote involving Ruby and Nelle contribute to your understanding of Ruby's character and actions later in the story?
22. Jules refers to Ruby as a possible "witch" and questions if she's a "changeling." How does this version of Ruby relate to the definition of a "changeling" on page 5? Discuss the symbolism and implications of these terms.
23. Without revealing spoilers, consider the ending of the novel. How did the resolutions of various plotlines affect your overall satisfaction with the book? Were there any lingering questions or loose ends you wished were addressed differently?