

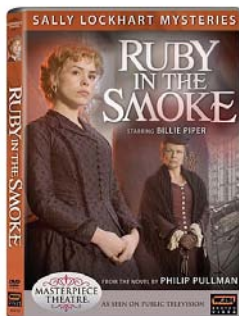
Discussion Questions

- 1** As she seeks to unravel a mystery that will forever change her life, Sally Lockhart faces formidable enemies. Why does Mrs. Holland view Sally as an obstacle to achieving her goals? What does Hendrik Van Eeden mean when he presents Sally with a chilling ultimatum? Why does natural ally Matthew Bedwell unwittingly become one of Sally's greatest threats? What does Samuel Selby have to lose from Sally's tireless investigation?
- 2** At the heart of *The Ruby in the Smoke* is one young woman's struggle to determine her own future. As author Phillip Pullman comments, "the story is set in 1872, on the very cusp of the modern world, and the series that starts with *The Ruby (in the Smoke)* goes on to touch some modern concerns: feminism, socialism, new technologies, new forms of social relations." What barriers stand in Sally Lockhart's way? How do her guardians view her fearless independence? Why does Sally's lawyer, Mr. Temple, resist her business instruction? How do Rosa and Frederick Garland show their faith in Sally's skill? How might Sally's prospects differ if the novel were set in England today? Does the film successfully portray Sally's struggle to reconcile her ambition with her "proper" place in Victorian society?
- 3** Through Sally Lockhart's dedicated sleuthing, *The Ruby in the Smoke* charts the insidious nature of addiction. According to Frederick Garland, how does the British government profit from cultivation and sale of opium? How does Mrs. Holland use narcotics to uncover Matthew Bedwell's secret? What happens to Sally when she visits the enigmatic Madame Chang? How do the novel's protagonists react when they encounter addiction? How might they react today? How is the drug both Sally's most horrifying challenge and her only hope to unlock the mysteries of her past?
- 4** When she takes leave of her only living relative, Mrs. Rees, Sally seeks out a community of her own. What role do Sally's new companions play in her personal and professional success? Why does her relationship with Frederick Garland simultaneously exhilarate her and leave her feeling like a child? What does she have in common with Trembler, the Garland's trusted associate? Is this handled similarly in the book and the film?
- 5** On the surface, *The Ruby in the Smoke* appears to be a classic tale of good versus evil. How does a closer read force us to reexamine this conclusion? What lies behind Mrs. Holland's single-minded obsession? Does her revelation toward the film's end inspire the viewer's sympathy? How is Adelaide at once a tragic figure and complicit in

Mrs. Holland's malevolence, both victim and victimizer? Why does Major Marchbanks evoke both pity and disgust? In trying to protect Sally, how does Mr. Lockhart leave her vulnerable to harm? Where is the line between intention and action in *The Ruby in the Smoke*?

- 6 Consider the jewel at the heart of *The Ruby in the Smoke*. What does the majestic Ruby of Agrapur represent to its pursuers? How are its holders affected when they stare into its depths? Why does Sally tell Mrs. Holland that the only way to end the cycle of "death and unhappiness" is to put the ruby completely out of reach? What is Mrs. Holland's response to Sally's disposal of the gem different in the novel and in the film? What do you think the author is trying to say about value and worth?
- 7 Philip Pullman uses the geography of Victorian London to great effect in *The Ruby in the Smoke*. How do his descriptions of Wapping heighten our sense of impending doom? How does water isolate the city's inhabitants, not just physically, but psychologically? In what ways does the freedom of Burton Street contrast with the refined sensibility of Peveril Square? How does the city assist Sally and her friends in fulfilling their mission and, at the same time, block their progress at every turn?

The Ruby in the Smoke, by Philip Pullman, was first published in 1985. For more about the MASTERPIECE film *The Ruby in the Smoke* and related features, visit <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/ruby/index.html>.



You can purchase *The Ruby in the Smoke* DVD on shoppbs.org. Enter the code BOOKANDFILM to receive a 15% discount.

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