

Discussion Questions

1. How do Maggie's actions—past and present—reflect the historical context that she lives in?
2. If you plucked Maggie from 19th-century Ireland and deposited her into the 21st century, how would her choices differ?
3. In the book, Maggie does not seem to fear the supernatural things around her as much as we might. How does this purposeful choice by the author tie into the historical context of the book?
4. Was there a specific moment that particularly frightened or disturbed you? If so, why? How does it relate to your modern experiences? Does this history reflect the current political climate where you live?
5. In keeping with traditional Irish storytelling, no character is inherently bad—or good—as every protagonist could be another person's antagonist. How did this unusual aspect of Irish storytelling shape your view of characters like Lady Catherine and Teddy?
6. In a similar vein, some of the “good” characters, like Cormac and Maggie herself, also made choices that could be considered antagonistic. How did you reconcile these thought processes and decisions as a modern reader, unfamiliar with these aspects of traditional Irish storytelling?
7. As a character, Cormac could be seen as a green-flagged cheerleader, but the author might argue that he is the conductor and catalyst of events in the book. Discuss.

8. In the timeline of the past, we see a snapshot of what life was like at the Big House and for those who lived on and worked the land. Compare and contrast between the classes and their status. In what other ways are these differences portrayed in the book?
9. In Lord Charles's journal, could comparisons be drawn between how the Anglos viewed the native Irish and excessive fear of that which they don't understand? Discuss.
10. In the book, Maggie's goal is to honor her family in a way that will allow their memories to live on—by acquiring land. This need perpetuated the Irish psyche for generations after the Great Hunger, spurring those who successfully landed in America (alive and healthy enough to be admitted) to take the fool's journey west to settle the land the government offered. How did this trauma shape countries like the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia?
11. The Great Hunger was the culmination of centuries of war and the hope that joining Great Britain would finally afford the Irish people stability—and personhood—within the borders of the Commonwealth. After reading this book, how would you describe this great deception and its aftermath?
12. Ingrained in the Irish consciousness, folklore—the Other Crowd (fae and the like), elementals, the Old Gods and Goddesses—and the superstitions surrounding it permeate the modern Irish psyche to this day. In your country, do superstition and tradition play a role in how your culture was shaped? If so, how do these nods to your elders play a role in your everyday life?