

The Monkey's Paw - Two Summaries

Summary 1

On a wet and windy night, John White, along with his wife and son, Herbert, await the arrival of an old friend, Sergeant Morris, who has been stationed in India for several years and has just recently returned home.

When the guest arrives, the conversation soon turns to the mysteries of India. Mr. White is fascinated by the discussion of far away places and ideas. During the conversation, we learn that Morris has brought back a very unusual artifact--the mummified paw of a monkey which carries with it a magic spell which can bring three different men three separate wishes.

Morris makes it very clear that though the wishes are always granted, the results always bring disaster. He explains that he had gotten the paw from its first owner--whose third and last wish was for death. Morris also explains that he himself had three wishes--thus leaving one more set of three wishes.

The Sergeant, feeling that the paw has done enough damage, throws it into the fireplace to burn. Mr. White grabs it from the fire, and Morris warns White that he should let it burn. Mr. White, though, keeps the paw and even forces Morris to accept a few dollars for it.

After dinner Sergeant Morris leaves. Herbert scoffs and makes fun of the idea that the paw can make wishes come true, but recommends that his father wish for twenty-five thousand dollars. Herbert, who works the late shift at a nearby dam, leaves for work, and Mr. and Mrs. White go to bed.

The next morning, while the Whites are fixing breakfast, a man from the dam comes to tell them that Herbert has been killed in an accident at work and that they are named as beneficiary on the insurance policy--a policy for twenty-five thousand dollars.

The Whites bury their son in a nearby cemetery. A few days later, the distraught Mrs. White remembers the monkey's paw and its two remaining wishes and insists that her husband wish Herbert back to life. Later there is a pounding at the front door, but the latch is stuck. Mrs. White, believing it is Herbert, hurries down to open the door. The door latch is stuck; an instant before Mrs. White can get the door to open, Mr. White grabs the paw and makes a final wish. He wishes his son dead and at peace. The knocking ceases.

Summary 2

The story centers on a monkey's paw which has magical powers. It gives to its owner three wishes. The monkey's paw is given to a family of three, father, mother, and son. They wish for some money, and the next day an employee of the company where the son is working arrives at the family's residence and tells the parents that their son has died in an accident and they will receive a monetary compensation, the exact amount they wished for. About a week later, the mother wishes that their son would return home alive. When knocking is heard at the door, the father realizes what has happened and before the mother can open the door, the father uses the last wish. The knocking stops and when the door is opened, no one is there.

The Monkey's Paw - Guideline Questions

Part 1

1. What sort of night is it? Why?
2. Describe the game of chess played by father and son. Do you see any further aspects in it?
3. What impression do you get of the mother- son relationship?
4. What are we told about Sergeant-Major Morris?
5. What spell did the old fakir put on the monkey's paw?
6. What did the fakir want to show? Do you agree with this?
7. How did Sergeant-Major Morris get the monkey's paw?
8. How many have wished so far?
9. Why did Sergeant-Major Morris keep it?
10. Why does he want to burn it now?
11. How do the Whites feel about it? Give examples?
12. What does the father wish for? Why?
13. How does he feel about wishing?
14. What happens when he wishes?
15. What do the son and the mother think?
16. How does the first wish affect the mood?
17. How does Herbert behave? Why?
18. How do you feel about the monkey's paw at this point?

Part 2

1. How do the Whites feel about the monkey's paw the following morning? Why?
2. Do they all feel the same way?
3. "Morris said the things happened so naturally....that you might attribute it to coincidence." Explain.
4. Give examples of Mrs White's ambivalence after Herbert has left for work?
5. What does she expect when she sees the stranger? Why?
6. What news does the stranger bring?
7. What is the compensation?
8. Has Mr White's first wish been granted? How do you interpret what happens?
9. This part is mainly seen from Mrs White's point of view, why?

Part 3

1. In what way has Mrs White changed in the third part?
2. What is the second wish?
3. Why is Mr White afraid of wishing a second time?
4. What is the third wish?
5. Do you think the second and the third wish have been granted?
Is it possible to identify the person / "thing" knocking at the door with any certainty?
6. In your opinion, is this story fantastic, or uncanny? Justify your opinion.
7. In your opinion what is the message of the story?

The Monkey's Paw - A Pupil's Comment

by John R. Anderson

I first read 'The Monkey's Paw' as a youngster in Junior High School. I was touched by how an elderly couple received the gift that everyone would want, three wishes, and how the gift turned into a curse.

I knew something was wrong from the beginning of the story when the previous owner tried to throw it into the fire. I also had a suspicion that though the paw granted wishes, it wouldn't work the way the person making the wish intended.

The couple, being older, quite naturally asked for money. And not a great deal, at that. They never realize that it would come as an insurance claim on the death of their son who was working in a factory. Grief-stricken, the wife insists that they wish he would come back. The husband finally agrees. When they hear a knock at the door, the wife runs to open the door. Afraid of what would appear, the husband wishes it would go away. The wife opens the door and sees nothing and hears only the wind.

What a scary story and what a rotten ending, right?

At the time I read it, my English teacher, Miss Downing, asked the class what we thought of the story. We all felt sorry for the couple. Should the couple have wished for something else with their first wish? Of course they should have, we all said. But of course, no matter what they asked for, it could have turned out as badly for them. And the previous owner had warned them it was a curse and not a blessing.

Miss Downing wasn't about to stop there. Next she asked, should they have asked for their son to come back to life? Of course, we all said. But not as a walking corpse.

Then came the biggest question of all. Should they have wished he wouldn't come back? Nearly everyone in class agreed with what the couple did. That was supposed to be the end of the lesson.

But I wasn't willing to give up that quickly. "They wished for the wrong thing," I said. Miss Downing was ready to move on and wasn't too pleased with me. "And how's that."

"They should have wished that the whole thing never happened and let the man burn the monkey's paw."

"I never thought of that," my teacher said.

Today, people would call this thinking outside the box. It doesn't require great brilliance, but you do have to try to imagine other alternatives than the ones that are presented to you.

The Monkey's Paw - Worksheet

- Why does the story start with the father and son playing chess?
Does the father's strategy at the chess game tell you anything about his personality?
If so, what does it tell you?
- Note any of the characters' actions you feel are significant on the chart below.
What conclusions can you draw about each of the characters from analyzing their actions?

Character	Action	Conclusion
Mr White	Yells about the foul weather and the poor condition of the road they live on	He is frustrated because he has lost chess and he is getting rid of his emotions
Mr White		
Mrs White		
Mrs White		
Herbert White		
Herbert White		
Major Morris		
Major Morris		

- Sergeant Major Morris describes the monkey's paw in this way: "It had a spell put on it by an old fakir, ... a very holy man. He wanted to show that fate ruled people's lives, and that those who interfered with it did so to their sorrow."
What does Morris' statement mean when you first read it? What does it mean after you have read the entire story? Is his comment significant? If so, why?
- Why does Major Morris throw the monkey's paw onto the fire and why do the Whites react so strongly?
- What happens to Herbert White?
- What do you think happened at the end of the story?
Why does Mr. White beg his wife not to let "it" into the house? What does he mean?
What is he afraid of? Who or what was outside the house?
- How does Jacobs set the mood and/or tone of the story? How does he build suspense?
Think about the way he uses silence as a way to create a mood. What does he describe at the end as the husband and wife lie in bed waiting for their wish to come true?