

Discussion Questions for *The Blind Assassin* (2000)

1. Laura and Iris spend their childhood in Avilion, “a merchant's palace,” and, like princesses in a fairy tale, are virtually untouched by the outside world. What other elements reinforce the fairy-tale-like quality of their lives? What role does Alex Thomas play within this context? Does Iris's depiction of her life as an old woman also draw on the conventions of fairy tales?
2. How accurate is Iris's declaration, “Long ago I made a choice between classicism and romanticism. I prefer to be upright and contained—an urn in daylight”? What incidents show that Iris has ambiguous feelings about the roles she and Laura assume as children? Does Iris in fact have a romantic side that she keeps hidden? What cost does this exact?
3. Is Iris purely a pawn in a plan conceived by her father and Richard, or does she have reasons of her own for agreeing to marry Richard? In what ways does the marriage fulfill Iris's conception of her approach to life? What was Richard really after when he married Iris?
4. Iris comes under the influence of three very different women: Reenie, Callie Fitzsimmons, and Winifred Griffen Prior. How does each woman affect Iris's view of herself—and of womanhood in general? How do their lives and attitudes represent the social environment and class structure of the times?
5. Throughout her life, Laura is considered a special, unusual person, more sensitive than most. How does Laura exploit the impression she makes on other people? Are her motives and intentions always as innocent as people assume?
6. Several childhood experiences foreshadow Laura's fate, including her plunge into the river (p. 151) and her accusation that Mr. Erskine sexually molested her (p. 165). What do these incidents indicate about Laura's personality? To what extent is she shaped by circumstances beyond her control? Is Iris responsible for Laura's death? At what points could she have changed the course of events? In other words, to what extent is Laura (or even Iris) a victim?
7. While in a private girls' school, Laura asks the question, "Does God lie?" Explain what she meant. Was Laura a religious fanatic or someone just interested in God? Or, considering her likely trauma from sexual abuse, was she seeking an answer to the nature of evil?
8. How does the science fiction story constructed by the unnamed lovers mirror the story of the lovers themselves and the circumstances surrounding their affair? In what ways does it parallel events in Iris's life, both as a child and as an adult?
9. The era of the Great Depression was also an age of extreme fashion-consciousness among the wealthy. What role do clothes play in both the historical and the contemporary sections of the book? What do they reveal about the characters, and what do they conceal?
10. What are the various meanings of the title *The Blind Assassin*? Which characters act as blind assassins by uncomprehendingly causing the demise of other characters? Which characters take on “sacrificial” roles? What harm do they cause through their lack of vision?