

Allegories in "where
are you going, where
have you been?"
essay sample



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Allegories in “ Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?” Essay Sample

In “ Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?,” Joyce Oates constitutes the use of allegories to create a sense of suspense in the story. The story depicts the way society was in the 1960s. In this time period, there were a lot of controversies that cause a lot of frustration. Many stories written during the 1960s involved a lot of the same things that are in this coming-of-age story. The issues incorporated into “ Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?” were common even in reality. The allegories in Oates’ story represent the issue of innocence and temptation, good versus evil, and man overpowering woman.

Connie seems like an innocent fifteen year old girl when Arnold Friend shows up at her house. She is easily persuaded to talk to Arnold and gives in to the temptation to go for a ride with him. Arnold says a lot of sweet things to Connie to try and make her fall for his words. He tells Connie how beautiful she is and calls her names such as “ sweetheart” and “ honey.” Connie, being the naïve teenager that she is, believes him. Although he scared her, she gave in to his charm and went with him.

“ Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?” is a story that represents good and evil. Connie is essentially a symbol for good while Arnold is the evil. This story seems similar to the story of “ The Garden of Eden.” Arnold Friend manipulates Connie in the way that the Devil does to Eve in “ The Garden of Eden.” As stated above, Arnold persuades Connie to take a ride with him by sweet talking her. He even tries to impress her by telling her

that he is a part of her group of friends. He attempts to attract Connie by dressing younger and by listening to the same type of music she does. As Arnold is sweet talking Connie, he begins threatening her. Arnold tells Connie that there is nothing better for her to do than give in to him. Eventually, he starts to threaten her family. For example, on page 491 in paragraph 131, Arnold says, "...if you don't come out we're gonna have to wait till your people come home and then they're all going to get it." Also, on that same page in paragraph 134, he says, "...give me your hand, and nobody else gets hurt, I mean, your bald-headed daddy and your mummy and your sister in her high heels. Because listen: why bring them in this?" At this point, Connie is already scared. She decides to run inside and call the police. However, Arnold somehow persuades her that he is a good guy and is not going to harm her. Connie steps away from the phone and walks outside like he asked her to do and that is where the story ends.

An allegory that may not seem as obvious in this story is man versus woman. "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" symbolizes the view that men were more powerful than women in this time period. During the 1960s, men were often seen as being much stronger than women, and women did not dare stand up to men because of fear that they would be shunned. In this story, Arnold was not necessarily physically stronger than Connie, but he was stronger mentally. Because Arnold is so evil and clever, he convinces Connie to give in to his condescending demands. Arnold explains to Connie where he will take her and what they will do. He states this on page 492 in paragraph 154:

We'll go out to a nice field, out in the country here where it smells so nice and it's sunny. I'll have my arms tight around you so you won't need to try to get away and I'll show you what love is like, what it does. The hell with this house! It looks solid all right. Now put your hand on your heart, honey. Feel that? That feels solid too but we know better, be nice to me, be sweet like you can because what else is there for a girl like you but to be sweet and pretty and give in?

"Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" may be seen as a very controversial story since it involves an older man persuading a fifteen-year-old girl to go for a ride with him. The allegorical themes it presents are very powerful. The story shows that it is hard to resist the temptation from such a powerful source. Also, the war between good and evil is often stronger on one side than the other. In the 1960s, men often overpowered women and were usually in control of everything women did. The end of "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" is a cliffhanger and it makes you wonder what happened to Connie. She could have safely returned home, or she could have never made it home. Joyce Oates leaves it to you to decide Connie's fate.