

"a worn path" by  
eudora welty essay  
sample



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The story "A Worn Path" by Eudora Welty tells the account of Phoenix Jackson, an elderly African American woman who lived in the Mississippi. Her account was about her journey from her quiet rural life to town in order to get the medicine for her beloved grandson who, two years ago, accidentally swallowed lye. His injury did not fully heal, and from time to time, his throat would swell so much that it made him difficult to swallow and breathe. To some, the story might seem only very simple—it's just an old lady going to the doctor to get her grandson's medicine, nothing much to read, it's boring, no climax at all. That may be true if we do not consider the rich symbolisms, themes, and other issues. This seemingly simple story tells more than just the trek of an old woman to acquire a medicine for her grandson, but of the great insights from a simple quiet rural life of an old woman who's enveloped with and sense of responsibility toward her grandson, who might be the only person in her life and her life itself. The story was written and first published in 1941 in *Atlantic Weekly*; thus, we can assume that the story happened in the same year.

That same year, as we all know, the world entered into the World War II. Despite the worldwide clamor and conflict, Phoenix Jackson's life was marked with peace and simplicity. She seemed not to care of the ongoing World War that was then happening; rather, her life seemed to revolve around her grandson whom, as we can see, she loved so much. The story also talks about poverty. The year 1941 was not only marked by the start of the Second World War but also of poverty that was a reality to many—particularly to blacks and to the people from the rural Southwest where Mississippi is located. We can also assume that, at her age, Phoenix Jackson

might have been born in the age of American slavery of the blacks (Wetly par. 56). Another sign of poverty is how Phoenix Jackson was describe as wearing red rags on her hair and an apron made form sugar sacks (ibid. pars. 1 and 2). The attendant at the clinic also classified Phoenix Jackson's case as "charity" when she saw her coming into the clinic and when she gave Phoenix Jackson the medicine (ibid. pars. 68 and 90). The story also presents the subtle racism that blacks receive from the whites.

Although in the entire story, we cannot read anything that suggests bigotry toward the Phoenix Jackson, there are scenes where we can infer that the whites treated her in such a condescending way. In paragraph 45, we can read the white hunter's remarks "I know you old colored people! Wouldn't miss going to town to see Santa Claus!" His use of the word colored is one of the subtle ways people label the other race as inferior. Not only that, this remark also implied that the white hunter trivialized her trek to acquire the medicine for her grandson. In paragraphs 52-54, we can read the hunter pointing his gun toward Phoenix hoping she'd be scared. This scene of the story shows us how the whites regard the blacks. Phoenix Jackson was also referred to as "Granny" and "Aunt Phoenix" by the hunter and the clinic attendant respectively instead of calling her the more formal "Mrs. Jackson" (ibid. pars. 35 and 73). Over the years, whites have called blacks as "Granny," "Aunt," and "Uncle" as a way of subtly denying their dignity and individuality (Rawson 19).

Among the many themes of the story, Phoenix's love and responsibility to her grandson was the most observed. Phoenix Jackson went all through the obstacles she had to face in order to acquire the medicine for her grandson—

who, as we can assume, in the boundary of life and death from his swollen throat. She showed genuine maternal instinct and and sincere concern for one that might have meant the entire world to her. In the story, we can also see Phoenix Jackson's self-sacrifice. She readily gave up all the idea of going back and staying home because of her old age, the distance from their remote niche to the clinic where she was to get the medicine, and the danger that she might face on her way to the clinic. Her perseverance is also another highlight. On paragraph 54, she said that she is bound to go on her way; this implies that no matter how hard and worn the path may be, she would still go on. Other themes of the story that can also be seen in the modern day world today are lie, guilt, and duty. Lie is shown both by Phoenix Jackson and the hunter.

The hunter lied to Phoenix about not having any money, and Phoenix lied, in a sense, by taking the nickel that had fallen from the hunter's pocket (Wetly par. 54). Guilt was shown by Phoenix right after as she deemed herself worthy to be shot for the act by saying " No, sir, I seen plenty go off closer by, in my day, and for less than what I done (ibid. par. 55). However, the hunter showed no guilt for his earlier act of pointing the gun at Phoenix—an act that should have elicited guilt. Another instance where guilt was shown was when the clinic attendant gave Phoenix another nickel; this seems to be her way of compensating an earlier offensive statement " Are you deaf?" to Phoenix (ibid. pars. 71, 93-95). Her act of giving the nickel also shows " duty."

In paragraph 93, she stated, " It's Christmas time, Grandma." This simply statement is enough to tell us that her action was not fueled by love but by "

duty" since Christmas is supposed to be a time of gift giving. The same can be said with the woman who tied Phoenix's shoelaces—that she did it out of duty of Christmas season rather than genuine concern for the elderly (ibid. pars. 60-64). The title itself, " A Worn Path," suggests the arduous journey of our life. The story allegorically referred to life as the journey itself through a worn path. The obstacles that Phoenix Jackson faced alludes to the real-life hardships, temptations, lies, aggressions, and the like that we all face. Despite its simplicity, Eudora Wetly's " A Worn Path" does show us some of the greatest of life's reality.