

Where are you going, where have you been j. c. oates' short story essay examples

[Family](#), [Parents](#)



Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been is a short literary fiction story by Joyce Carol Oates. This story first appeared in the Epoch Magazine the fall 1966 edition. It is a story about a 15 year old self absorbed girl named Connie. Connie lives with her mother, sister and a father who is hardly ever at home. Connie's mother often compares her to her sister and criticizes her and this makes her hate her mother. Her resentment towards her mother makes her avoid staying home and she spends most of her time with friends at the malls, movies and restaurants. Later on, she is picked up at her home with Arnold Friend and when she resists, he threatens to harm her family if she does not go with him. Connie is compelled and later on leaves with Arnold friend and meets his demands in order to save her family. Connie leaves with the stranger without thinking what awaits her. This story explores the life a teenager goes through with lack of guidance and parental love and the consequences of their actions.

Joyce Carol Oates Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been? is an excellent example of a literary fiction. It is a reflection of real life issues that young girls have to go through. Connie's life is a lesson to teenagers on how to live well with their parents and in the society at large. Oates explores the promiscuity of teenagers and the dire consequences of their actions. The story fictionalizes the actual actions of young teenage girls and the men who are ready to lure them and destroy their lives. Therefore, the author raises the awareness and thoughts addressing young girls' behaviors and societal issues through the story of the protagonist Connie.

In the story Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been? it is very clear that the nuances of a person's personality are shaped by external conditions and

not created from within. This is evidently justified by the inner conflict of the main character in the book *Connie*. Connie grows up in a family with a very unstable relationship and this ultimately results to her identity crisis. Her mother often criticizes her and compares her upon her sister and this forces her to search for her identity in the wrong places. Connie desired to be loved and guided by her father and to be appreciated by her mother which never happened and so she decided to get attention from somewhere else away from home. This makes her preoccupied with music, makeup and friends in order to look beautiful. This happens to many young girls in the society. Many teenage girls are forced to leave away from home due to isolation and alienation and this was the case for Connie. Connie hated her home and family because of the unstable relationship she had with them and the pressure she felt while at home. She was driven to spend her time at the restaurant to seek her identity and satisfaction as her mother never appreciates her. She had to find her happiness somewhere else and this later on ruined her life because if she was at home, Arnold could have never seen her and later come to abduct her. Many young girls in the society are always forced to stay away from home because of lack of attention from their parents and this ruins their lives.

The story *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?* has multiple interpretations from different perspectives. Every reader who comes across this story has his/her own argument about it. From the feminist perspective, they argue that the author portrays Connie as a young woman who has suffered the same experiences that other women suffer from in a patriarchal society. Connie grows up in a family whereby she is never given the parental

love she desires. She has an unpleasant relationship with her mother and sister yet her father is never home and if he is, reads a newspaper after work then goes to bed. Her mother is the main cause of her rivalry with her sister June as she praises more often than Connie. Connie's mother is always criticizing her and this can be seen through her mother's words " You think you're so pretty?" (Oates 25). The hatred between the protagonist Connie and her mother forces her to stay away from home all the time and at times; we see her wish that her mother was dead so as to end the disagreements between them. Because of lack of support from her parents, this teenager is forced to spend her time with boys and this leads to her abduction with a stranger ruining her life. The same happens to many young women in the society because if they lack parental love and guidance, they are forced to look for it somewhere else and the ultimate result of being away from home is always tragic just like Connie.

Connie had an identity issue that is why she was looking herself in the mirror all the time. She never understood who she was since she was constantly criticized by her own mother and the mirror was her only hope for being pretty. A good example of her identity crisis which most young girls in the society face is when she wants to go out with her friends. Connie looks herself in the mirror several times and feels that she is pretty which satisfies her to go to the public. The mirror contributes to her identity crisis and acts as her guide in her life because she cannot leave her house without confirming her looks in the mirror. Connie is not always sure of whom she is and this happens to many young girls in the society. This is seen when Eddie asked to go with her; she has mixed feeling because at first she refuses

saying that she cannot leave her friend alone “ can’t leave her alone” (Oates 78) but later she is seen leaving her alone and going with Eddie, this happens to numerous girls in the society. Therefore, *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?* is a reflection of the life young girls go through in the society.

Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been? story approaches the subject of teenage girls who are about to enter womanhood. Connie is a young self-centered girl who only cares about her looks all the time. Connie’s character is realistic as she represents many young girls in the society. As a whole, the situation with Arnold Friend depicted as an abductor demonstrates how an enormous group of teenage girls flaunt their lives to boys without thinking of the possible consequences. Just as Connie, many young girls in the society elope with strangers without any regrets of the possible tragic consequences. Therefore, *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?* provokes thought on real life situations of young girls in the society. Connie’s life story is very similar to what young girls are like in the society. The author hopefully wrote this story to make adolescent girls who read it think about how they act with strangers and learn how to live well with their families despite the situation at hand.

Works Cited

Oates, Joyce Carol. “ *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?*” New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1994.