

# Symbolism in "a worn path"



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Life is filled with different twists and turns, unexpected obstacles, and experiences never forgotten. Eudora Welty writes *A Worn Path* with a sense of symbolism that captures the struggles and pleasures of life. Welty uses symbolism as a bridge to connect the reader to their own inner battles and give *A Worn Path* a deeper meaning than that of an old lady walking through the woods. Phoenix Jackson is an older woman and is the main character of this short story, whose ragged clothing and wrinkled face shows that her life has been nothing but unforgettable experiences.

The thorn bush is one the first symbols that appears in the short story. Phoenix gets caught on the bush and instead of letting it hold her back on her journey, she continues to push through. Among the people that Phoenix Jackson meets along her trip, one of the more significant ones would be the young, white hunter with the black dog. The dialogue he uses with Phoenix Jackson is notably different than that that she uses with the people she meets in town, and he has an impression on her that hints towards her life and how she grew up. The third symbol is the paper windmill Phoenix Jackson buys for her grandson. While a minor symbol, it ties together the entirety of the story using simplistic symbolism to signal how selflessness is one of the keys to Phoenix Jackson's lifestyles. In Eudora Welty's *A Worn Path*, Welty uses minor symbols and significant characters to make an impression on the reader as they learn more about Phoenix Jackson and her lifestyle choices. Welty uses a thorn bush, a young hunter and his dog, and a paper windmill to tie together the idea that life is filled with all sorts of experiences that will shape your life in one way or another, no matter how major or minor they might be.

While walking on her journey into town, Phoenix Jackson gets her dress caught on a bush. She takes her time untangling herself from the thorns, and explains to herself that the thorns are “ just doing what they were made to”. The thorns on this bush symbolize the struggles that Jackson has faced throughout her life, or that everyone experiences at one point or another. When she mentions that the thorns are doing what they were made to do, it shows the reader that even the most inconvenient of times are meant to happen the way they do for one reason or another. “ Old eye thought you was a pretty little green bush”, says Jackson as she sits on the ground to untangle her skirt from the thorn bush. This phrase signals to readers that even though she expected an experience to be pleasant, things do not always happen as anticipated. The thorn bush is an obstacle that Phoenix Jackson must overcome in order to continue her journey. Though it is a small part of the story, the thorn bush is a major role in Phoenix Jackson’s journey because it symbolizes that not all obstacles appear to be trouble at first, or are more trouble than they need to be.

The young hunter with his dog comes during Phoenix Jackson’s journey and it is important to note that Welty points out his race: white. This brings in a number on conversations about the dialogue the hunter uses with Jackson and how it symbolizes race issues. The hunter comes across Phoenix Jackson, or “ Granny” as he calls her, with his dog while she’s in a creek. He sees that she is old and more than likely lost. The dialogue changes into a more assertive tone between the two when the hunter realizes how old and what race Jackson is. She might be crazy or homeless because of how ragged she is dressed. “ Well, Granny,” he said, “ you must be a hundred

years old, and scared of nothing. I'd give you a dime if I had any money with me. But you take my advice and stay home, and nothing will happen to you". Jackson confirms with the hunter that she has been around violence in her day, confirming that this symbol links back to racial issues and disturbances in the story. With Jackson being old enough to not say her age, this shows that she has experienced much of history.

The paper windmill is the last and smallest symbol that symbolizes life on Phoenix Jackson's journey down A Worn Path. The paper windmill is bought with two nickels, all Jackson has left of her money. She buys it for her grandson, who she made the journey for. The paper windmill symbolizes selflessness and generosity that should be given during a person's lifetime. Jackson went far out of her way and into town to purchase this paper windmill for her grandson with the last bit of money that she had. It shows that she cares more about her grandson's happiness than she does about how tedious and hard the journey might be, especially for someone her age. "I going to the store and buy my child a little windmill they sells, made out of paper. He going to find it hard to believe there such a thing in the world. I'll march myself back where he waiting, holding it straight up in this hand", says Jackson in one of the last paragraphs in the story. This quote proves that she is more concerned about pleasing her grandson and making sure he is entertained than she is about taking such a long journey away from home. While he thinks she went to go retrieve medicine, she will come back and surprise him with a gift.

Symbolism is seen throughout the entire short story of A Worn Path by Eudora Welty. However, some of the more important ones handle issues

such as obstacles, race, and happiness. The thorn bush symbolizes how life contains obstacles that are difficult, tedious, and sometimes hidden or masked. Jackson talks to the bush mentioning how she did not even see the thorns, and that is what makes them such an obstacle. The young, white hunter and his dog symbolize race issues that Jackson had experienced during her long life. Jackson is old enough to have seen violence in her neighborhoods growing up and the young hunter does not want any trouble for her so he demands her to go home and stay out of the way. The paper windmill symbolizes how love and happiness can overcome any obstacle in life that Jackson has to overcome. Despite a long journey for Jackson, the happiness that it would ultimately provide for her grandson made A Worn Path worth traveling. All of these symbols show how life is filled with different experiences and opportunities. Phoenix Jackson has made the most of her life through her worn and ragged looks described at the beginning of the story. Welty uses these symbols to show the trials and tribulations of life.