

Prompt: For this assignment, please choose the story that you did not already address the first discussion assignment.

After reading this story, what is the most prominent, lingering question that you have about it? Such questions are the starting points of serious essays. Was there some incongruity, conflict, action or speech that was never clearly explained? What question "hung in the air" after you set the story down?

In at least one full paragraph, please pose and address this question. (You are not expected to "answer" the question in any conclusive way.)

Lingering Questions from "A Good Man Is Hard to Find"

In Flannery O'Connor's short story "A Good Man Is Hard to Find", I was left wondering why the author chose to write about an entire family—a father, mother, grandmother, two children and an infant—being murdered through what was essentially a completely random event. The outcome was so surprising that I had to stop to consider how and why things could have ended in such a way. Somewhere the author provided a connection between a typical and boring family vacation in Florida to an encounter with three escaped convicts who would quickly become executioners.

Rereading certain passages gave me a new understanding of where some of these connections were made. Though the events at the beginning seem almost altogether removed from those at the end, the Grandmother is concerned enough with this prisoner on the loose called The Misfit that his eventual appearance is not entirely out of place. She mentions him in the very beginning, "Here this fellow that calls himself The Misfit is a loose from the Federal Pen and headed toward Florida and you read here what it says he did to these people" (226), and while stopping for food, "Did you read about that criminal, The Misfit, that's escaped?", to which another woman replies, "I wouldn't be a bit surprised if he didn't attack this place right here" (229). There is also the smallest amount of tempting fate by taking a dirt road that "looked as if no one had traveled on it for months" (231) with the knowledge of The Misfit's recent escape.

As to why the author would write so gruesome a tale, I noticed that the members of this family are not very good people, showing only selfish and inconsiderate behavior throughout the story. From the very beginning the grandmother is conniving to get them to vacation where she wants to go instead: "The children have been to Florida before. You all ought to take them somewhere else for a change so they would see different parts of the world and be broad. They never have been to east Tennessee" (227). The children also behave badly in similar ways and constantly make inappropriate and rude remarks to others. Few details are given about the mother and father, but they do nothing to contradict a portrait of a family which lacks concern for one another and is always disrespectful towards others. While their fate was terrible, I believe that the author was conveying the idea that their bad behavior is what ultimately led to their demise.

Re: A Good Man is Hard to Find (by Terra Jones)

it does however provide evidence that could possibly back up the theory that the grandmother was hinting to the concept of The Misfit being her "child" in order to connect with the criminal to avoid apparent death by reaching out in a motherly-instinctual way as well as a religious way.

I think that this last idea that you mention is a good description of what was going on between the Grandmother and the Misfit.

I took the final part of the story to mean that the Grandmother was simply being frantic in her attempts to appeal to this man—whom she had only just met and more importantly knew to be "aloose from the Federal Pen" (226)—to find some way to escape the situation alive. She was such a shallow person, however, that in her last moment of desperation she proposed the outlandish notion that he might be her own child. This is an important development because it came only moments after her only son Bailey and his family were murdered. Interestingly, this final attempt to have her life spared followed a number of other hollow conversations, including "not shooting a lady" and "praying to Jesus Christ to atone for past sins" (235-236). Essentially, she was just doing whatever she could for herself until the very end, and was only minutely concerned with what was happening to everyone else in the meanwhile.

One last point: I found it natural to assume that the rest of the family was also as selfish and shallow as the Grandmother, given the many examples of the ways John Wesley and June Star behaved. Hardly any details were given about the Mother, and only a few about the Father, but there is nothing that suggests they acted differently than the Grandmother and the two children. I took this to mean a couple of things: 1) they were behaving in the same or similar ways when they were taken out to the woods to be killed, and 2) the Misfit and his crew could have murdered a much nicer family than this one, so the ending could have been worse.

Re: Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been? (by Tisha Monks)

The first time I read it I asked myself what is Arnold instead of who.

I've read this short story a number of times now and, at this point, my interpretation is that Arnold Friend represents everything in the world that Connie will experience as she matures into a woman and sets out on her own. Presently she craves attention from boys, but she is also protected by her innocence and the fact that she is still more a child than an adult. As soon as that protection fades away—that is, as she grows into an adult and begins making her own decisions and living with them—her experiences with boys/men and life in general will change dramatically. The key here, I believe, is that society still has a certain role and set of expectations for women, and Connie is both unknowing of (and unconcerned with) such things.

Perhaps it was vanity ("she had a... habit of craning her neck to glance into mirrors" and "she knew she was pretty and that was everything") that made her an easy target, the seed was already planted, maybe she just needed a little water, so to speak.

This is pretty much in line with the point I was trying to make. She is inviting these kinds of things to happen to her. Arnold Friend just happens to represent all of that "bad stuff" in one place or one person.

I was also wondering, and maybe someone can help me, if Arnold symbolizes some sort of evil and Connie, some sort of good, what does Ellie Oscar symbolize?

Honestly, I don't think there is any good portrayed in this story. Connie is naïve and innocent, but that's about as close to "good" as things ever get. She never makes any decisions that one can consider to be "good"—in fact she only makes bad decisions the entire time. In this story Connie is just your stereotypical careless, stupid teenager. Arnold Friend can certainly be considered evil, but maybe not as much as he would be if he were tricking some other teenage girl with more scruples (then again, someone like this would also be less responsive to his tricks).

As for Ellie, I haven't figured out very much about his role in the story. Given the many allusions made to Arnold being the Devil, it might be assumed that Ellie is a "helper" of some sort. But in this story he's just listening to music and helping things look more right to Connie by hanging in his buddy's car and looking tough. It does, however, lend an idea that Ellie could help Arnold take what he wants from Connie—his presence does make her more vulnerable.