

Old Phoenix held the bottle close to her eyes, and then carefully put it into her pocket.

"I thank you," she said.

"It's Christmas time, Grandma," said the attendant. "Could I give you a few pennies out of my purse?"

"Five pennies is a nickel," said Phoenix stiffly.

"Here's a nickel," said the attendant.

Phoenix rose carefully and held out her hand. She received the nickel and then fished the other nickel out of her pocket and laid it beside the new one. She stared at her palm closely, with her head on one side.

Then she gave a tap with her cane on the floor.

"This is what come to me to do," she said. "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."

She lifted her free hand, gave a little nod, turned around, and walked out of the doctor's office. Then her slow step began on the stairs, going down.

[1941]

≡ THINKING ABOUT THE TEXT

1. Comment on the old woman's name; in a tale about a journey, it seems to have allegorical significance.
2. Phoenix meets a hunter on her trek. Comment on the significant details of their encounter.
3. Phoenix speaks directly to a number of things. What are they, and what allegorical significance might they have?
4. Welty has claimed that the most frequent question she was asked about this story was whether Phoenix's grandson is really dead. Her answer is that, either way, the meaning of this story would not be affected. What do you think she means?
5. Google "A Worn Path" and look at the scores of images associated with the story. Describe three of them, and explain why they are apt.

≡ MAKING COMPARISONS

1. Compare the errands of mercy of Phoenix and the doctor.
2. In "The Use of Force" the doctor says, "One goes on to the end" (para. 31). Compare the significance of this idea in both stories.
3. Both Phoenix and the doctor start their journey with the best of intentions. It may be that Phoenix's specific mission is in vain. It may also be that the doctor's mission has mixed results. Explain these ideas.