

Deconstruction Questions: "A Good Man is Hard to Find"

Use these questions and activities to help you annotate and guide you through the story.

1. What is significant about the grandmother bringing up the Misfit at the beginning of the story?
2. Describe the mother. Why do you think O'Connor makes her a nonentity?
3. Why do you think O'Connor made the children so obnoxious? Would the result have been different had she characterized them differently?
4. Consider the grandmother's reasons for bringing Pitty Sing on the trip. What is ironic about her decision?
5. Consider the distinction between the grandmother's and children's view of the scenery. What does O'Connor accomplish by means of this distinction?
6. Why is the grandmother dressed so nicely for the trip? What does that tell us about her character?
7. Describe the atmosphere at Red Sammy's. What is the significance of the conversation between the grandmother and Red Sammy?
8. Consider the causes of the accident. Is it totally accidental or can it be attributed to bad choices as well?
9. The Misfit is a character of contradiction. In what ways?
10. Define the Misfit's experience of the world. To what extent can his criminality be attributed to the conditions of his life? Even though he is not in jail, is he a free man?
11. Consider what the Misfit means by, "Jesus thrown everything off balance"?
12. Explain the logic of the Misfit's position that "the crime don't matter ...because sooner or later you're going to forget what it was you done and just be punished for it." To what extent does the Misfit's description of himself apply to everyone? Keep in mind that the whole family is being punished with death for no ascertainable crime.
13. What is the effect of O'Connor's comparing the grandmother to "a parched old turkey hen crying for water"?
14. Explain the Misfit's statement, "She would have been a good woman ...if it had been somebody there to shoot her everyday of her life."
15. Contrast the Misfit's remark, "No pleasure but meanness," with his last words in the story.

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16. In an essay (located on the story's home page on my website), O'Connor states, "I often ask myself what makes a story work... and I have decided that it is probably some action, some gesture of a character... one which indicates where the heart of the story lies. ...This would have to be an action or a gesture which was both totally right and totally unexpected..."
Apply this statement to "A Good Man is Hard to Find."
17. O'Connor states, "I don't want to equate the Misfit with the devil. I prefer to think that, however unlikely this may seem, the old lady's gesture ...will be enough of a pain to him there to turn him into the *prophet he was meant to become*." Comment.
18. Many critics categorize "A Good Man is Hard to Find" as a parable. A parable is a short tale designed to illustrate a religious or philosophical truth. Do you consider this story a parable? What roles do the characters represent?