

Short Story Questions 2011

Answer the **questions** below AND explain the **philosophical issues/questions** raised in the text. Do you agree? Why? You can find these questions on the website under Philosophy Unit. Use **example/quotes** from the text to support your answers.

“Good Country People”

***Begin by researching O’Connor’s philosophy Southern Gothic style. (See #9)**
Don’t forget to complete 46-60 on multiple-choice test.(Get handout in class.)

1. Consider the character’s names. What do they tell us about the characters? Of what particular significance is Joy’s decision to change her name to Hulga?
2. Are Mrs. Freeman’s daughters, Gynese and Carramae, important to the story? What would be lost if they were left out?
3. How is the title of the story ironic? How does it relate to the theme of the story?
4. One day Mrs. Hopewell picks up a book Hulga has been reading and finds a passage her daughter has underlined:
“Science, on the other hand, has to assert its soberness and seriousness afresh and declare that it is concerned with solely with what-is. Nothing—how can it be for science anything but a horror and phantasm? If science is right, then one thing stands firm: science wishes to know nothing of nothing. Such is after all the strictly scientific approach to Nothing. We know it by wishing to know nothing of Nothing. (p. 353)
What is Mrs. Hopewell’s reaction to the passage? How does the passage relate to what happens between Hulga and Manley Pointer later in the story?
5. Mrs. Hopewell loves clichés. Make a list of as many of her favorite truisms as you can find. Then evaluate your list. What do you learn about Mrs. Hopewell? Do the clichés seem to relate to the story’s theme in any way? What effect do the clichés have on Mrs. Hopewell’s audience (her daughter, Mrs. Freeman, Manley Pointer)?
6. Do you sympathize with any of the characters in this story? If not, are you unsympathetic to all of them all of the time? Explain by referring to specific episodes.
7. Choose one short section and analyze its humor. For example, you might look at the description of Mrs. Freeman’s three expressions, which opens the story. Or you might consider the conversation between Mrs. Freeman, Mrs. Hopewell, and Hulga concerning Gynese’s preference for being married by a preacher. (bottom of p. 356)
8. What does Hulga learn about herself and about other people through her encounter with the Bible salesman?
9. Who is in need of redemption? Who is the character used by God to help redeem them? How?
10. What religious values are evident in the story? What does O'Connor suggest about these values?
11. Now take Multiple-choice test based on the first section of the text.

“A Good Man is Hard to Find”

Questions for Discussion

1. What tone does the epigraph set for the story? Reconsider it after you've read the story. How does your interpretation change?
2. What can you infer about the grandmother by reading the opening paragraph? What does she represent in the story? Consider the role she plays in her family as well as how she might embody a different era in the culture of the South. What does the grandmother mean when she tells The Misfit, “Why you're one of my babies. You're one of my own children” (para. 136)?
3. In what ways is the family in this story fairly typical in terms of the tensions and conflicts most families experience? How does O'Connor introduce comedy by depicting these differences between and among generations and relationships?
4. The main characters in a story usually have names. In this story, however, several main characters—The Misfit, the grandmother, and the children's mother—are unnamed. What is the purpose of not giving these characters names, referring to them only by their roles? How might leaving these characters unnamed connect to a theme of the story?
5. When Red Sammy says to the grandmother, “A good man is hard to find” (para. 43), what does he mean? Why did O'Connor choose this particular line for the story's title? Also consider why, in the final scene, the grandmother repeatedly tells The Misfit that she knows he is a “good man.”
6. Discuss instances in which the grandmother's nostalgia for the past seems warranted and others in which it becomes limiting, even threatening. You might begin by considering some of the following: her desire to paint a picture of the “pickaninny” in the doorway, her story about Mr. Teagarden, her story of the house with the secret panel.
7. O'Connor has said that the short-story collection that included this story is about “original sin.” What role does religion, specifically Christianity, play in this story? How do the grandmother's traditional views on salvation and prayer differ from The Misfit's? What does he mean when he asserts that Jesus has thrown “everything off balance” (para. 134)?
8. Were you surprised by the violence in the story? Why do you think O'Connor chose to leave the murders of everyone but the grandmother “off stage” rather than describing them directly? What is the impact of providing details about the shooting of the grandmother and describing her lifeless body?
9. How does The Misfit explain his behavior to the grandmother? Why does he shoot her precisely when he does? How do you interpret his assertion that “she would of been a good woman . . . if it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life” (para. 140)? What does The Misfit understand about the grandmother's character?

Questions on Style and Structure

1. How does O'Connor use foreshadowing in "A Good Man Is Hard to Find"? What effect did the foreshadowing have on your first reading of the story? When you read about The Misfit in the first paragraph, did you think that you would meet him?
2. Take another look at the allusion the grandmother makes to *Gone With the Wind* in paragraph 24. What deeper meaning can you find in her joke about the plantation? How does this joke affect your reading of the story?
3. "'In my time,' said the grandmother, folding her thin veined fingers, 'children were more respectful of their native states and their parents and everything else. People did right then. Oh look at the cute little pickaninny!'" she said and pointed to a Negro child standing in the door of a shack" (para. 18). What is ironic about this passage? How does the grandmother define "did right"? What evidence suggests a contrast between the character's and the author's perspectives of what it means to "do right"?
4. What is the purpose of the scene at Red Sammy's barbecue place? Consider the conversation between the grandmother and Red Sammy about the difficulty of finding a "good man." How does this scene develop the story's themes as well as plot?
5. Contrast the description of the grandmother's outfit with the rest of the family's traveling attire (paras. 12, 69). What do the characters' clothes tell us about them? What is significant about The Misfit's appropriation of Bailey's parrot shirt (paras. 122–23)?
6. Explain how the setting shifts once the family takes a detour off the main road. Why is this shift important to the story's plot? How does the shift in setting contribute to the shift in the story's tone?
7. Why do you think O'Connor chose to capitalize "ACCIDENT!" in the children's dialogue? After the accident, a slow-moving car appears on the horizon, "a big black battered hearse-like automobile"(para. 70). Why might the author have chosen not to use commas between these adjectives?
How do the punctuation and alliteration contribute to the effect of this description?
8. The Misfit's words are often given a phonetic rendering:
 - "I pre-chate that, lady." (para. 92)
 - "The boys want to ast you something." (para. 94)
 - "I'll look and see terrectly." (para. 101)
 - "Nome." (para. 107)
 - "I . . . seen a man burnt alive oncet." (para. 109)
 - "I don't want no hep." (para. 121)What effect does this use of dialect have on your understanding of The Misfit's character? What other characters in the story speak in dialect, and what does it say about them?
9. Examine the following similes used in "A Good Man Is Hard to Find":
 - "whose face was as broad and innocent as a cabbage" (para. 2)
 - "her big black valise that looked like the head of a hippopotamus" (para. 10)
 - "His jaw was as rigid as a horseshoe." (para. 49)
 - "She could hear the wind move through the tree tops like a long satisfied insuck of breath." (para. 108)

- “the grandmother raised her head like a parched old turkey hen crying for water”(para. 133)

“A Very Old Man With Enormous Wings”

1. Define *miracle*, *supernatural*, *monster*, *angel*, and *freak*? What is the significance of the episode of the woman who comes with the traveling show? What does society do with the monsters? miracles? the very old man in this story? Trace the treatment and reaction to the very old man and the spiderwoman throughout the story. What does it say about humankind?
2. Consider the attitudes expressed toward the old man. Have you heard similar attitudes expressed in your community toward foreigners or those who are different? Is it possible that the very old man is an angel? Explain the miracles he performs. Are these miracles supernatural? Divine?
3. What is the Church’s response to the old man? Is Marquez being satirical? Does the church know how to deal with the man? Why? Why not? Is this a comment about organized religion? Explain.
4. The story is subtitled “A Tale for Children.” Do you think children are the primary audience for this tale? What elements in the story resemble a fairy tale? What about the subtitle suggests that Marquez is not only being intentionally misleading but also cynical? Explain faith and how it differs in children and adults. Who has more faith? Why?
5. Compare “A Very Old Man With Enormous Wings” to the Daedalus-Icarus myth, and its treatment in W.C William’s poem and Breughel’s painting “Landscape with the Fall of Icarus.” *Read the poem and view the painting in book or online (Museum Des Beaux Arts). Any connections to ideas raised in the story?
6. Why do you think Garcia Marquez and other writers utilize fantastic and imaginative element to convey their ideas about perspectives on human experience? Why do you think such fiction is characterized as a type of “magic realism”? Give examples in the text of “magic realism.”

“Gimpel The Fool”

1. The rabbi tells Gimpel, “It is written, better to be a fool all the days of your life than for one hour to be evil. You are not a fool. They are fools.” Is the rabbi right? Or is Gimpel a fool? What is the biblical definition of wisdom?

2. Gimpel always defers to his faith and trust in people rather than listening to his reason, even when it is obvious to him that he is being deceived. Is, as the rabbi tells Gimpel, belief in itself beneficial? Does a good man live (only) by his faith?
3. Gimpel says, "I resolved that I would always believe what I was told. What's the good of not believing? Today it's your wife you don't believe; tomorrow it's God Himself you won't take stock in." Answer Gimpel's question: What's the good of not believing? Is Gimpel's argument a valid one?
4. How does Gimpel arrive at this conclusion: "Whatever may be there, without ridicule, without deception. God be praised: there even Gimpel cannot be deceived." Discuss.
5. Ultimately, Gimpel says "there were really no lies." What does he mean? Do you agree with him?
6. What are your impressions of Gimpel? Is he at least partially responsible for the town's treatment of him? Do you admire or pity him?
7. Why does Gimpel accept the continual abuse? How does this abuse shape him and his philosophy?
8. Consider Gimpel's relationship with the rabbi. How does the rabbi's advice affect Gimpel's approach to life?
9. Analyze the tone of the story. Is the way Gimpel relates the story as important as *what* he relates? Consider his rhetorical questions and his use of understatement.
10. Through the course of the story, Gimpel develops a philosophical approach to life. What is Gimpel's philosophy? Does the story seem to advocate his philosophy?
11. Compare Gimpel to Hawthorne's protagonist in "Young Goodman Brown." How are they alike by the end of the stories? How are they different? How do visions affect each?
12. What do you think the ways Gimpel acts and responds? What do you think of the reasons he provides for why he acts as he does and believes what he does.

*****Next- See Questions/Documents on website for selections below:**

- **Plato's "The Cave"-(Group in class)**
- **Kafka's *Metamorphosis*-Partners at home**
- **Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*-Different partners at home**