

COMMON CORE

RL 2 Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text. **RL 10** Read and comprehend literature, including stories. **L 4b** Identify and correctly use patterns of word changes that indicate different meanings.

DID YOU KNOW?

Eudora Welty ...

- was voted “Best All-Round Girl” in high school.
- was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1980.
- inspired the name of an e-mail program, “Eudora,” so named by a Web designer who loved her stories.

A Worn Path

Short Story by Eudora Welty

Meet the Author

Eudora Welty 1909–2001

Mississippi born and bred, Eudora Welty wrote about her fellow Southerners at a crucial time in U.S. history. When she first began publishing her stories in the late 1930s, vestiges of the Old South still colored daily life. But Welty lived long enough to see the changes wrought by the civil rights movement in the 1960s and the rise of the New South on the eve of the new millennium. All the while, she recorded the lives of ordinary people, depicting the family life that sustained them and the small acts of heroism that dignified them. She was a modernist who believed in love, a Southerner who had faith in tolerance and change, and a successful, unmarried woman at a time when single women in Mississippi were not allowed to buy a house. At first dismissed as a regionalist and even a “feminine” writer, Welty lived long enough to see her fiction recognized for its artistic vision and universal appeal. Through it all, she accepted the changes with her characteristic sense of humor, modesty, and grace.

A Photographer’s Eye Nourished by books and a close-knit community of family and friends, Welty lived most of her life in the house her father built in Jackson, Mississippi. Although she wrote stories even in childhood and attended

college, her education as a writer didn’t seriously begin until 1933, when she landed a job as a publicity agent with the federal government’s Works Progress Administration (WPA). Interviewing and photographing all kinds of people throughout Mississippi during the Great Depression—one of the most impoverished regions during the poorest time in the nation’s history—was an eye opener for Welty and gave her the first “real germ” of her writing. Her early stories, such as “Why I Live at the P.O.” and “A Worn Path,” are like photographs, capturing a specific moment that reveals something significant about a person and at the same time a greater truth about the human condition.

A Long, Productive Life Welty received numerous awards and honors for her works, including a Pulitzer Prize for her novel *The Optimist’s Daughter* (1972) and an O. Henry Award for “A Worn Path.” Her award-winning memoir, *One Writer’s Beginnings* (1984), was a runaway bestseller. Despite being very articulate about her writing, sitting graciously through countless interviews, and receiving large numbers of young fans at her home, Welty remained a very private person who always maintained that “a fiction writer should let writing speak for itself.”

Author Online

Go to thinkcentral.com. KEYWORD: HML11-1048



A Worn Path

Eudora Welty

BACKGROUND This story takes place in rural Mississippi in the 1930s, an era in which segregation laws and racism, combined with the economic devastation of the Great Depression, restricted most Southern blacks to lives of rural poverty and hardship. Eudora Welty saw the need and inequality surrounding her. She based this story on an old woman she observed crossing a field: “I thought, she is bent on an errand. And I know it isn’t for herself. It was just the look of her figure. . . . She was a black woman. But then I suppose it would be more likely to be a black woman who would be in such desperate need and live so remotely away from help and who would have so far to go.”

It was December—a bright frozen day in the early morning. Far out in the country there was an old Negro woman with her head tied in a red rag, coming along a path through the pinewoods. Her name was Phoenix Jackson. She was very old and small and she walked slowly in the dark pine shadows, moving a little from side to side in her steps, with the balanced heaviness and lightness of a pendulum in a grandfather clock. She carried a thin, small cane made from an umbrella, and with this she kept tapping the frozen earth in front of her. This made a grave and persistent noise in the still air, that seemed meditative like the chirping of a solitary little bird. **A**

Analyze Visuals ►

What thematic ideas might you ascribe to this painting? Identify the elements of the painting that suggest these ideas.

meditative (mĕd’ĭ-tā’tĭv)
adj. engaged in serious thought or reflection

- A UNIVERSAL THEME**
What details in lines 1–9 suggest that Phoenix is in for a long journey? As you read, keep in mind other **archetypal** journeys you know of.

Brooding Silence (date unknown),
John Fabian Carlson. Smithsonian
American Art Museum, Washington,
D.C. © Smithsonian American Art
Museum, Washington, D.C./Art
Resource, New York.



10 She wore a dark striped dress reaching down to her shoe tops, and an equally long apron of bleached sugar sacks, with a full pocket: all neat and tidy, but every time she took a step she might have fallen over her shoelaces, which dragged from her unlaced shoes. She looked straight ahead. Her eyes were blue with age. Her skin had a pattern all its own of numberless branching wrinkles and as though a whole little tree stood in the middle of her forehead, but a golden color ran underneath, and the two knobs of her cheeks were illumined by a yellow burning under the dark. Under the red rag her hair came down on her neck in the frailest of ringlets, still black, and with an odor like copper.

Now and then there was a quivering in the thicket. Old Phoenix said, "Out
20 of my way, all you foxes, owls, beetles, jack rabbits, coons and wild animals! . . . Keep out from under these feet, little bob-whites.¹ . . . Keep the big wild hogs out of my path. Don't let none of those come running my direction. I got a long way." Under her small black-freckled hand her cane, **limber** as a buggy whip, would switch at the brush as if to rouse up any hiding things.

On she went. The woods were deep and still. The sun made the pine needles almost too bright to look at, up where the wind rocked. The cones dropped as light as feathers. Down in the hollow was the mourning dove—it was not too late for him.

The path ran up a hill. "Seem like there is chains about my feet, time I get this
30 far," she said, in the voice of argument old people keep to use with themselves. "Something always take a hold of me on this hill—pleads I should stay."

After she got to the top she turned and gave a full, severe look behind her where she had come. "Up through pines," she said at length. "Now down through oaks."

Her eyes opened their widest, and she started down gently. But before she got to the bottom of the hill a bush caught her dress.

Her fingers were busy and intent, but her skirts were full and long, so that before she could pull them free in one place they were caught in another. It was not possible to allow the dress to tear. "I in the thorny bush," she said. "Thorns, you doing your appointed work. Never want to let folks pass, no sir. Old eyes
40 thought you was a pretty little *green* bush."

Finally, trembling all over, she stood free, and after a moment dared to stoop for her cane.

"Sun so high!" she cried, leaning back and looking, while the thick tears went over her eyes. "The time getting all gone here." **B**

At the foot of this hill was a place where a log was laid across the creek.

"Now comes the trial," said Phoenix.

Putting her right foot out, she mounted the log and shut her eyes. Lifting her skirt, leveling her cane fiercely before her, like a festival figure in some parade, she began to march across. Then she opened her eyes and she was safe on the other side.

50 "I wasn't as old as I thought," she said.

COMMON CORE L4b

Language Coach

Suffixes A suffix is a word part that appears at the end of a root or base word to form a new word. The suffix *-let* means "small." Words with *-let* include *booklet*, *droplet*, and *owlet*. What does *ringlet* (line 18) mean?

limber (līm'bər) *adj.*
bending or moving easily;
supple

B UNIVERSAL THEME

Reread lines 34–44 and explain what you think the thorny bush might **symbolize**. What does Phoenix's way of dealing with this obstacle suggest about her character?

1. **bob-whites**: game birds that are a type of quail.

But she sat down to rest. She spread her skirts on the bank around her and folded her hands over her knees. Up above her was a tree in a pearly cloud of mistletoe. She did not dare to close her eyes, and when a little boy brought her a plate with a slice of marble-cake on it she spoke to him. "That would be acceptable," she said. But when she went to take it there was just her own hand in the air. **C**

So she left that tree, and had to go through a barbed-wire fence. There she had to creep and crawl, spreading her knees and stretching her fingers like a baby trying to climb the steps. But she talked loudly to herself: she could not let her
60 dress be torn now, so late in the day, and she could not pay for having her arm or her leg sawed off if she got caught fast where she was.

At last she was safe through the fence and risen up out in the clearing. Big dead trees, like black men with one arm, were standing in the purple stalks of the withered cotton field. There sat a buzzard. **D**

"Who you watching?"

In the furrow she made her way along.

"Glad this not the season for bulls," she said, looking sideways, "and the good Lord made his snakes to curl up and sleep in the winter. A pleasure I don't see no two-headed snake coming around that tree, where it come once. It took a while to
70 get by him, back in the summer."

She passed through the old cotton and went into a field of dead corn. It whispered and shook and was taller than her head. "Through the maze now," she said, for there was no path. **E**

Then there was something tall, black, and skinny there, moving before her.

At first she took it for a man. It could have been a man dancing in the field. But she stood still and listened, and it did not make a sound. It was as silent as a ghost.

"Ghost," she said sharply, "who be you the ghost of? For I have heard of nary² death close by."

80 But there was no answer—only the ragged dancing in the wind.

She shut her eyes, reached out her hand, and touched a sleeve. She found a coat and inside that an emptiness, cold as ice.

"You scarecrow," she said. Her face lighted. "I ought to be shut up for good," she said with laughter. "My senses is gone. I too old. I the oldest people I ever know. Dance, old scarecrow," she said, "while I dancing with you."

She kicked her foot over the furrow, and with mouth drawn down, shook her head once or twice in a little strutting way. Some husks blew down and whirled in streamers about her skirts.

Then she went on, parting her way from side to side with the cane, through
90 the whispering field. At last she came to the end, to a wagon track where the silver grass blew between the red ruts. The quail were walking around like pullets,³ seeming all dainty and unseen.

C MONITOR

Reread lines 51–56. What is happening in these lines? **Clarify** the meaning by considering the trials Phoenix has faced thus far, as well as how she feels at this point in her journey.

D UNIVERSAL THEME

Examine the images in lines 62–64. What **mood** do they help create? Explain.

E GRAMMAR AND STYLE

Welty uses a variety of sensory **details** to make Phoenix's journey riveting for readers. Reread lines 71–73, noting how the **verbs** *whispered* and *shook* conjure sights and sounds in your mind.

2. **nary**: not any.

3. **pullets**: young hens.



Snowy Woods at Dusk (date unknown), Dennis Sheehan. Oil, 20" × 16". Courtesy of Susan Powell Fine Art, Madison, Connecticut.

"Walk pretty," she said. "This the easy place. This the easy going." **F**

She followed the track, swaying through the quiet bare fields, through the little strings of trees silver in their dead leaves, past cabins silver from weather, with the doors and windows boarded shut, all like old women under a spell sitting there. "I walking in their sleep," she said, nodding her head vigorously.

In a ravine she went where a spring was silently flowing through a hollow log. Old Phoenix bent and drank. "Sweet-gum⁴ makes the water sweet," she said, and
 100 drank more. "Nobody know who made this well, for it was here when I was born."

The track crossed a swampy part where the moss hung as white as lace from every limb. "Sleep on, alligators, and blow your bubbles." Then the track went into the road.

Deep, deep the road went down between the high green-colored banks. Overhead the live-oaks⁵ met, and it was as dark as a cave.

A black dog with a lolling tongue came up out of the weeds by the ditch. She was meditating, and not ready, and when he came at her she only hit him a little with her cane. Over she went in the ditch, like a little puff of milkweed.

F UNIVERSAL THEME

Consider Phoenix's statement in line 93. What does her familiarity with each leg of this trek, in addition to the story's **title**, suggest about her journey?

4. **sweet-gum**: a tree of the witch hazel family.

5. **live-oaks**: oak trees of a type that has evergreen foliage.

Down there, her senses drifted away. A dream visited her, and she reached her
110 hand up, but nothing reached down and gave her a pull. So she lay there and
presently went to talking. “Old woman,” she said to herself, “that black dog come
up out of the weeds to stall you off, and now there he sitting on his fine tail,
smiling at you.”

A white man finally came along and found her—a hunter, a young man, with
his dog on a chain. **G**

“Well, Granny!” he laughed. “What are you doing there?”

“Lying on my back like a June-bug waiting to be turned over, mister,” she said,
reaching up her hand.

He lifted her up, gave her a swing in the air, and set her down. “Anything
120 broken, Granny?”

“No sir, them old dead weeds is springy enough,” said Phoenix, when she had
got her breath. “I thank you for your trouble.”

“Where do you live, Granny?” he asked, while the two dogs were growling at
each other.

“Away back yonder, sir, behind the ridge. You can’t even see it from here.”

“On your way home?”

“No sir, I going to town.”

“Why, that’s too far! That’s as far as I walk when I come out myself, and I get
something for my trouble.” He patted the stuffed bag he carried, and there hung
130 down a little closed claw. It was one of the bob-whites, with its beak hooked
bitterly to show it was dead. “Now you go on home, Granny!”

“I bound to go to town, mister,” said Phoenix. “The time come around.”

He gave another laugh, filling the whole landscape. “I know you old colored
people! Wouldn’t miss going to town to see Santa Claus!”

But something held old Phoenix very still. The deep lines in her face went into
a fierce and different **radiation**. Without warning, she had seen with her own eyes
a flashing nickel fall out of the man’s pocket onto the ground.

“How old are you, Granny?” he was saying.

“There is no telling, mister,” she said, “no telling.”

140 Then she gave a little cry and clapped her hands and said, “Git on away from
here, dog! Look! Look at that dog!” She laughed as if in admiration. “He ain’t
scared of nobody. He a big black dog.” She whispered, “Sic him!”

“Watch me get rid of that cur,” said the man. “Sic him, Pete! Sic him!”

Phoenix heard the dogs fighting, and heard the man running and throwing
sticks. She even heard a gunshot. But she was slowly bending forward by that
time, further and further forward, the lids stretched down over her eyes, as if she
were doing this in her sleep. Her chin was lowered almost to her knees. The yellow
palm of her hand came out from the fold of her apron. Her fingers slid down and
along the ground under the piece of money with the grace and care they would
150 have in lifting an egg from under a setting hen. Then she slowly straightened up,

G MONITOR

Reread lines 106–115. How
can you tell when Phoenix
is experiencing actual
events or interacting with
real people and when she
has “drifted away” into
her own imagination?
Write two **questions** that
help you understand
what is real and what
is not.

radiation (rā’ dē-ā’ shən) *n.*
the movement of lines or
rays from a center point

she stood erect, and the nickel was in her apron pocket. A bird flew by. Her lips moved. “God watching me the whole time. I come to stealing.”

The man came back, and his own dog panted about them. “Well, I scared him off that time,” he said, and then he laughed and lifted his gun and pointed it at Phoenix.

She stood straight and faced him.

“Doesn’t the gun scare you?” he said, still pointing it.

“No, sir, I seen plenty go off closer by, in my day, and for less than what I done,” she said, holding utterly still.

160 He smiled, and shouldered the gun. “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.” **H**

“I bound to go on my way, mister,” said Phoenix. She inclined her head in the red rag. Then they went in different directions, but she could hear the gun shooting again and again over the hill. **I**

She walked on. The shadows hung from the oak trees to the road like curtains. Then she smelled wood-smoke, and smelled the river, and she saw a steeple and the cabins on their steep steps. Dozens of little black children whirled around her.

170 There ahead was Natchez shining. Bells were ringing. She walked on.

In the paved city it was Christmas time. There were red and green electric lights strung and criss-crossed everywhere, and all turned on in the daytime. Old Phoenix would have been lost if she had not distrusted her eyesight and depended on her feet to know where to take her.

She paused quietly on the sidewalk where people were passing by. A lady came along in the crowd, carrying an armful of red-, green- and silver-wrapped presents; she gave off perfume like the red roses in hot summer, and Phoenix stopped her.

“Please, missy, will you lace up my shoe?” She held up her foot.

“What do you want, Grandma?”

180 “See my shoe,” said Phoenix. “Do all right for out in the country, but wouldn’t look right to go in a big building.”

“Stand still then, Grandma,” said the lady. She put her packages down on the sidewalk beside her and laced and tied both shoes tightly.

“Can’t lace ’em with a cane,” said Phoenix. “Thank you, missy. I doesn’t mind asking a nice lady to tie up my shoe, when I gets out on the street.”

Moving slowly and from side to side, she went into the big building, and into a tower of steps, where she walked up and around and around until her feet knew to stop.

She entered a door, and there she saw nailed up on the wall the document
190 that had been stamped with the gold seal and framed in the gold frame, which matched the dream that was hung up in her head.

H MONITOR

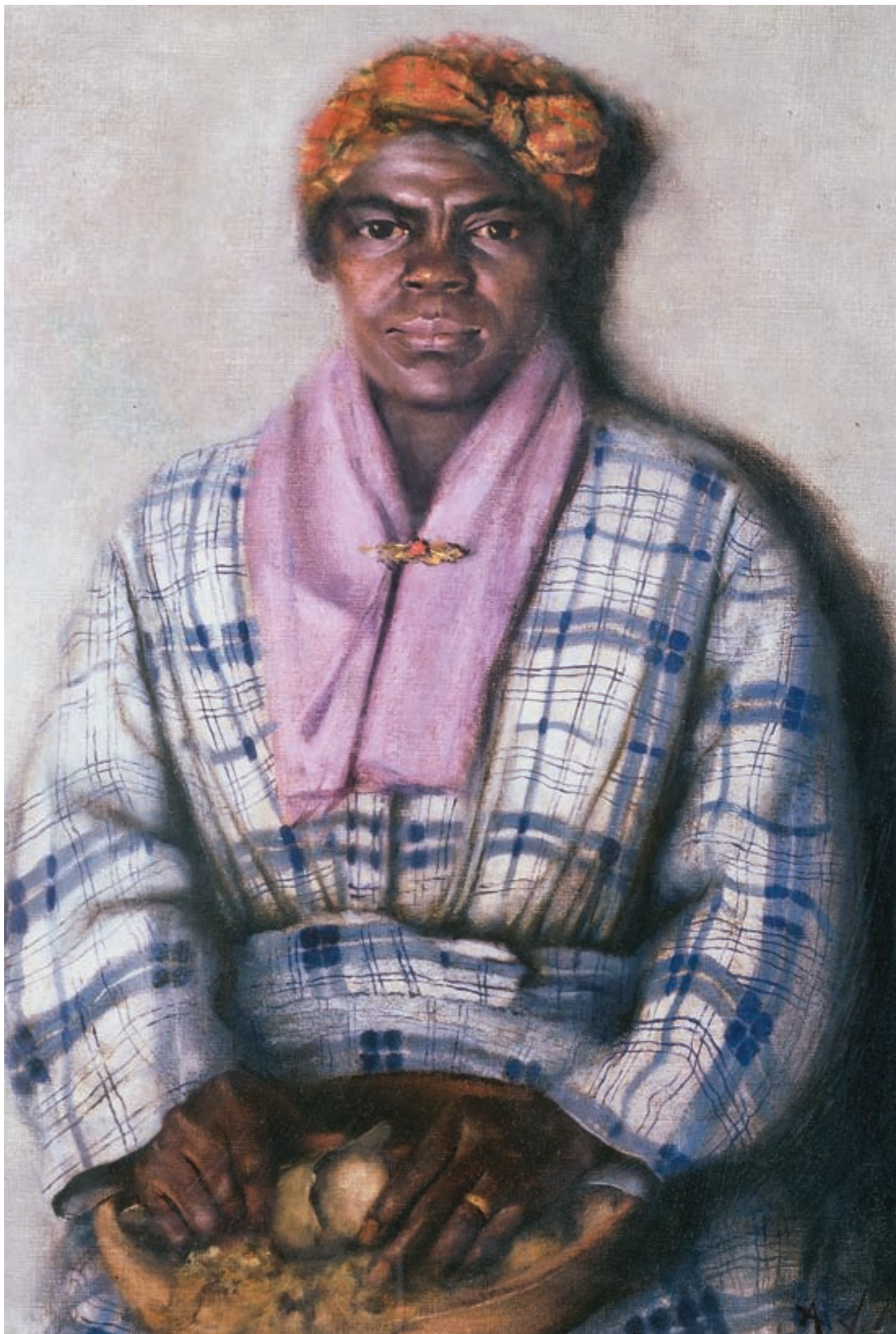
Keep the story’s **setting** in mind as you contemplate the way the hunter treats Phoenix. What does their interaction tell you about this time and place in history?

I UNIVERSAL THEME

Reread lines 114–166, and describe the **character traits** Phoenix exhibits during this episode with the hunter. How do her traits help her overcome this particular obstacle in her journey?

Analyze Visuals ►

What elements of this portrait give the woman a look of inner strength and determination? Be specific.



Woman Peeling Apples (1924), Archibald J. Motley, Jr. Oil on canvas, 32 $\frac{1}{4}$ " \times 28". Art and Artifacts Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

“Here I be,” she said. There was a fixed and ceremonial stiffness over her body. “A charity case, I suppose,” said an attendant who sat at the desk before her. But Phoenix only looked above her head. There was sweat on her face, the wrinkles in her skin shone like a bright net.

“Speak up, Grandma,” the woman said. “What’s your name? We must have your history, you know. Have you been here before? What seems to be the trouble with you?”

Old Phoenix only gave a twitch to her face as if a fly were bothering her.

200 “Are you deaf?” cried the attendant.

But then the nurse came in.

“Oh, that’s just old Aunt Phoenix,” she said. “She doesn’t come for herself—she has a little grandson. She makes these trips just as regular as clockwork. She lives away back off the Old Natchez Trace.”⁶ She bent down. “Well, Aunt Phoenix, why don’t you just take a seat? We won’t keep you standing after your long trip.” She pointed.

The old woman sat down, bolt upright in the chair.

“Now, how is the boy?” asked the nurse.

Old Phoenix did not speak.

210 “I said, how is the boy?”

But Phoenix only waited and stared straight ahead, her face very solemn and withdrawn into rigidity.

“Is his throat any better?” asked the nurse. “Aunt Phoenix, don’t you hear me? Is your grandson’s throat any better since the last time you came for the medicine?”

With her hands on her knees, the old woman waited, silent, erect and motionless, just as if she were in armor.

“You mustn’t take up our time this way, Aunt Phoenix,” the nurse said. “Tell us quickly about your grandson, and get it over. He isn’t dead, is he?”

At last there came a flicker and then a flame of comprehension across her face,
220 and she spoke.

“My grandson. It was my memory had left me. There I sat and forgot why I made my long trip.”

“Forgot?” The nurse frowned. “After you came so far?”

Then Phoenix was like an old woman begging a dignified forgiveness for waking up frightened in the night. “I never did go to school, I was too old at the Surrender,”⁷ she said in a soft voice. “I’m an old woman without an education. It was my memory fail me. My little grandson, he is just the same, and I forgot it in the coming.”

“Throat never heals, does it?” said the nurse, speaking in a loud, sure voice to
230 old Phoenix. By now she had a card with something written on it, a little list. “Yes. Swallowed lye.⁸ When was it?—January—two-three years ago—”

Language Coach

Phrasal Verbs A phrasal verb contains a verb and a preposition or adverb. *Speak up* (“speak loud enough to be heard”) in line 196 has a different meaning than *Speak* does. Referring to a dictionary if necessary, define *Speak down to*, *Speak out*, and *Speak to*.

6. **Old Natchez Trace:** The Natchez Trace was an important wilderness road during the 18th and early 19th centuries, extending from Natchez, Mississippi, to Nashville, Tennessee.

7. **the Surrender:** the end of the Civil War, after which time slaves were free.

8. **lye:** a strong alkaline liquid used especially in making soap.

Phoenix spoke unasked now. “No, missy, he not dead, he just the same. Every little while his throat begin to close up again, and he not able to swallow. He not get his breath. He not able to help himself. So the time come around, and I go on another trip for the soothing medicine.” J

“All right. The doctor said as long as you came to get it, you could have it,” said the nurse. “But it’s an **obstinate** case.”

240 “My little grandson, he sit up there in the house all wrapped up, waiting by himself,” Phoenix went on. “We is the only two left in the world. He suffer and it don’t seem to put him back at all. He got a sweet look. He going to last. He wear a little patch quilt and peep out holding his mouth open like a little bird. I remembers so plain now. I not going to forget him again, no, the whole enduring time. I could tell him from all the others in creation.”

“All right.” The nurse was trying to hush her now. She brought her a bottle of medicine. “Charity,” she said, making a check mark in a book.

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

“I thank you,” she said.

250 “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.

260 “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. ∞

J UNIVERSAL THEME

What have you learned about Phoenix’s **motivation** for making her perilous journey, and what can you **infer** about how often she makes it? Explain why Welty might have delayed revealing this information until the story’s end.

obstinate (ŏb’stə-nĭt) *adj.*
hard to control or treat

Language Coach

Word Definitions *Stiffly* (line 251) here means “awkwardly formal” or “not in a graceful manner.” How must Phoenix feel in lines 249–252?

THEME AND GENRE

Phoenix Jackson continues the tradition of the mythic hero who must go on a long journey and face difficult obstacles in order to reach a goal. This archetype is also the basis for many popular films today. The heroes of *The Lord of the Rings* and Harry Potter films, *WALL-E*, and *Spider-Man* all face serious challenges that test their strength, courage, and self-knowledge. Can you think of other works that share this same theme?

MEMOIR Always shy of biographers, Eudora Welty published her own memoir at the age of 74. This account of growing up in the South pays special attention to her development as a writer.

One Writer's Beginnings

Eudora Welty

The characters who go to make up my stories and novels are not portraits. Characters I invent along with the story that carries them. Attached to them are what I've borrowed, perhaps unconsciously, bit by bit, of persons I have seen or noticed or remembered in the flesh—a cast of countenance here, a manner of walking there, that jump to the visualizing mind when a story is underway. (Elizabeth

10 Bowen said, “Physical detail cannot be invented.” It can only be chosen.) I don't write by invasion into the life of a real person: my own sense of privacy is too strong for that; and I also know instinctively that living people to whom you are close—those known to you in ways too deep, too overflowing, ever to be plumbed outside love—do not yield to, could never fit into, the demands of a story. On the other hand, what I do make my stories out of

20 is the *whole* fund of my feelings, my responses to the real experiences of my own life, to the relationships that formed and changed it, that I have given most of myself to, and so learned my way toward a dramatic counterpart. Characters take on life sometimes by luck, but I suspect it is when you can write most entirely out of yourself, inside the skin, heart, mind, and soul of a person who is not yourself, that a character becomes in his own right another human being

30 on the page.



Eudora Welty, early in her career

Comprehension

1. **Recall** Why does Phoenix Jackson travel to the city of Natchez?
2. **Recall** What does she intend to do with the ten cents she collects?
3. **Summarize** What physical problems does Phoenix seem to have, and how do they affect her on her journey?

Text Analysis

4. **Monitor Comprehension** Look over the chart you filled in as you read. Identify a passage in the story that was challenging to understand. What clues in the text helped you **clarify** its meaning? Explain how they helped.
5. **Analyze Figurative Language** “A Worn Path” is rich with figurative language, especially **similes**. Skim the story, identifying examples of figurative language used to accomplish the following purposes. For each purpose, cite at least two examples.
 - give readers a clear mental picture of Phoenix’s appearance
 - highlight Phoenix’s main character traits
 - convey Phoenix’s feelings about her grandson
6. **Understand Symbolism** In mythology, a phoenix is an immortal bird that represents renewal. It sets its nest on fire every 500 years; from the ashes, the phoenix is reborn. Why might Welty have bestowed this name upon her main character? In what way does the name fit the person who bears it?
7. **Interpret Universal Theme** Consider the trials and triumphs Phoenix faces on her journey, and think about what motivates her to **endure** her arduous trek. In what way does this **archetypal** journey mirror life itself? Use your answer to this question to formulate a sentence that states the theme of the story. Then explain what makes this theme universal.

Text Criticism

8. **Critical Interpretations** This story’s ambiguity has fascinated readers for years. Many students have written Welty to ask if Phoenix’s grandson is really alive at the story’s end, or if Phoenix keeps making this journey though the boy is already gone. The author has replied, “It is the journey, the going of the errand, that is the story. . . . *Phoenix* is alive.” In your opinion, does Welty bring this story to a satisfying conclusion? Explain why or why not, citing details from the text as well as your reaction to Welty’s explanation.

COMMON CORE

RL 2 Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text. **RL 10** Read and comprehend literature, including stories.

What keeps us **GOING**?

Motivated by love for her grandson, Phoenix makes the difficult journey to town in spite of many obstacles. What motivates you to finish a difficult task?