

Deconstruction Questions: “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?”

1. Consider the significance of Connie’s habit of “craning her neck to glance into mirrors, or checking other people’s faces to make sure her own was all right,” and that she has a “shadowy vision of herself”?
2. Describe Connie’s sister June. Consider the significance of the fact that she is living at home and is “steady.”
3. Why does Connie wish that her mother was dead and “she herself was dead”?
4. Consider the significance of Connie “looking one way at home and another way when she was away from home.”
5. How do the descriptions of the drive-in as a “Sacred building that loomed out of the night to give them what haven and what blessing they yearned for” and that of the music “always in the background like music at a church service” contribute to the development of meaning in the story?
6. At the beginning of the story Connie wishes “she herself was dead,” but when she is at the drive-in, she “sucked in her breath with the pure pleasure of being alive.” Consider the significance of this change in attitude.
7. What are Arnold Friend’s first words to Connie? Consider the significance.
8. Compare the description of the drive-in after Connie’s girl friend’s father picks them up as darkened, empty and ghostly with the description when they arrived. Why the vivid contrast?
9. Consider the significance, “But all the boys fell back and dissolved into a single face, that was not even a face, but an idea, a feeling, . . .”.
10. How do the facts that none of the family bothered to go to church and that Oates sets most of the story on a Sunday contribute to the meaning?
11. “Connie sat with eyes closed in the sun, dreaming and dazes with the warmth about her as if this were a kind of love, the caresses of love and her mind slipped over onto thoughts of the boy she had been with the night before.” Describe Eddie and contrast his character to Arnold Friend’s.

12. Why is it significant that she lives in an “asbestos” house?
13. Why does Connie say, “Christ, Christ,” when Arnold pulls up in the driveway? Do you consider him a messianic archetype? a demonic archetype? Why or why not?
14. Consider the significance of the sounding of the horn “as if it were a signal Connie knew.”
15. Why is Arnold’s name significant? His age and appearance?
16. When do you begin to become uncomfortable with Arnold or suspect that he is up to no good? Is he sinister? What are the clues?
17. Consider the symbolism of the location where Connie stands during the first part of her conversation with Arnold Friend.
18. Describe Ellie’s role in the development of the story.
19. Consider the significance of Connie’s perception that “he had driven up the driveway all right but had come from nowhere before that and belonged nowhere and that everything about him and even the music that was so familiar to her was only half real.”
20. Consider: “His whole face was a mask.”
21. “The kitchen looked like a place she had never seen before.” Why is it significant that Arnold is cutting her off from her past?
22. Consider the significance: “If the place got lit up with fire, honey, you’d come runnin’ out into my arms . . . safe at home.”
23. Arnold implies that Connie can protect her family from harm if she were to go with him. How does this contribute to the meaning of the story?
24. Describe the scene where Connie attempts to call her mother and collapses and her fear turns to emptiness “. . . deep inside her brain was something like a pinpoint of light that kept going and would not let her relax.” What does that light represent?
25. “The place where you came from ain’t there any more, and where you had in mind to go is cancelled out. The place you are now – inside your daddy’s

house – is nothing but a cardboard box I can knock down any time. You know that and always did know it.” The house can be considered a metaphor. Explain.

26. Consider the significance : “She felt her pounding heart.... [and] thought that the first time in her life it was nothing that was hers, that belonged to her...” .

27. At the end of the story Connie has an out of body experience, “She watched herself push the door slowly open. . . ” Why?

28. Why is it significant that she is “moving out into the sunlight” into the “vast reaches of land on all sides of him – so much land that Connie had never seen before and did not recognize except to know that she was going to it.” Is she in danger? Why or why not? What does this vast expanse represent?

29. So, what happens to Connie? Why do you think Oates left the ending ambiguous?

30. This story brings to mind some traditional fairytales as well as other stories we have read. Consider the connections.