

Study Questions on “A Good Man Is Hard to Find”

1. Describe the dominant character traits of the grandmother, using details from the story to support your answer. What trait seems to you to be the most significant, the most important for understanding her personality?
2. Aside from the fact that the Misfit is a psychopathic killer and the grandmother is an annoying, little old lady, in what other ways are they different? The Misfit is an empiricist, one who needs a wide variety of experiences and one who needs definite, experiential proof before he will believe anything. Cite some examples of this trait, paying special attention to his thoughts about religion.
3. Assuming that the grandmother is the protagonist, what is her central conflict? The moment of crisis—the point of highest uncertainty—probably occurs in these lines: “Maybe He didn’t raise the dead,” the old lady mumbled, **not knowing what she was saying** and feeling so dizzy that she sank down in the ditch with her legs twisted under her.” Since the point of view is limited omniscient, we know her thoughts and feelings and know that she is not manipulating and scheming here. The moment of climax occurs just a little bit later: “His voice seemed about to crack and **the grandmother’s head cleared for an instant**. She saw the man’s face twisted close to her own as if he were going to cry and she murmured, ‘Why you’re one of my babies. You’re one of my own children!’” (If those two points are the crisis and the climax, then what is her central conflict? Explain how she is a dynamic character, using details from the work to support your answer.
4. Look at the grandmother’s pose in death, paying special attention to the description of the sky, which has been building as a symbol, neither sunny (happy, good) nor cloudy (sad, bad). Explain how the resolution of the grandmother’s central conflict appears to have resulted in redemption for the grandmother. If, indeed, the grandmother is redeemed by her final action, explain the irony of the title. Who exactly is the good man who was hard to find?
5. How does O’Connor build suspense in the story? What does she mean when she says, “much of my fiction takes its character from a reasonable use of the unreasonable” and that “belief...is the engine that makes perception operate”? How do those philosophies contribute to the building of suspense in the story?
6. In your opinion, what is the theme of this story? How does your opinion compare to O’Connor’s? Does theme serve suspense? Does suspense serve theme? Or does one have nothing to do with the other? Explain.