

Eudora Welty. From "A Worn Path"

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.

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 of my way, all you foxes, owls, beetles, jack rabbits, coons and wild animals! ... Keep out from under these feet, little bob-whites ... 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.

Define Each Word

pendulum: _____

grave: _____

meditative: _____

frail: _____

limber: _____

Write the Correct Word from the Vocabulary

1. Grandmother fell from the steps and broke her hip because her bones were so _____.
2. After the tragedy, the minister delivered his sermon in _____, solemn tones.
3. With the disturbing regularity of a _____, Chris would change his opinion about the principal's performance every week.
4. Marie proved that practicing yoga regularly had made her quite _____; she could sit on the ground and place both of her legs behind her head.
5. Ervin walked around campus in a thoughtful, _____ mood, scratching his head and barely noticing where he was going.

Comprehension and Discussion: Answer Each Question in Complete Sentences

1. How does the narrator describe Phoenix Jackson's physical appearance?

2. In paragraph 3, Phoenix says, "Out of my way, all you foxes, owls.... I got a long way." What does this statement suggest about her personality?

