

Eudora Welty Goes to the Movies

Several of Eudora Welty's stories have been made into films: "Why I Live at the P.O.," "The Hitch-Hikers," "The Key," "A Worn Path," "The Wide Net," and The Ponder Heart. Both fiction and film are compelling art forms, but what can be accomplished in each form is quite distinct from the other. Book groups reading the stories in conjunction with viewing the films might focus their discussions upon the difficulties film makers face in translating stories to film and might consider how effective these artistic translations have been.

1. How faithful is the film version of "Why I Live at the P.O." to Welty's story? Is its very faithfulness a problem? Is pacing an issue? The film attempts to use Welty's first person narrator. Does it do so successfully?
2. The film version of "The Key" makes numerous changes in plot and characterization in an effort to translate the story. What are these changes? How successful are they?
3. What scenes from the Welty story have been omitted in the film version of "A Worn Path"? Does this omission help the film to keep to a crisp pace? What is lost through the omissions? How does the film's depiction of Phoenix's visit to Natchez and the doctor's office tally with the story's? How does it differ from the story's?
4. Does the film version of "The Wide Net" deal with the story's concern with the nature of marriage, with the issues of responsibility and freedom within marriage? Does the film capture the story's humor? Why or why not?
5. What sort of problems does the plot of Welty's story "The Hitch-Hikers" pose for a film maker? How was her focus on Harris's inner life conveyed on screen? Does setting play a symbolic role in both the story and the film? Is the guitar a symbol in both?
6. To what extent does the film version of The Ponder Heart reflect the novella's depiction of the small-town South in the 1950s? What does the novella have to say about the nature of racial segregation in the small-town South of that era? How does the film deal with this issue?

Check the <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/americancollection/ponder/tguide.html> web site for questions about the relationship of novella and story versions of The Ponder Heart.