

"A Rose for Emily" Deconstruction Questions

Use these questions and activities to help you annotate and guide you through the story.

1. Consider the significance of the story's chronology.
2. What can we ascertain from the syntax of the opening sentence?
3. What is significant about the narrator's use of "we" to tell the story?
4. Why did the whole town come to Emily Grierson's funeral? Explain the difference in the motives of the men and women.
5. What is significant about the manservant who stays with Emily?
6. Consider the significance of the description of the house in the second paragraph – the squarish frame that had once been white, decorated with cupolas and spires and scrolled balconies – stubborn coquettish decay about the cotton wagons and the gasoline pumps – an eyesore among eyesores?
7. Consider the significance of the cemetery where they buried Emily among "ranked and anonymous graves of Union and Confederate soldiers."
8. Significance: ". . . Miss Emily had been a tradition, a duty, and a care; a sort of *hereditary* obligation upon the town, . . ."
9. Significance: Colonel Satoris "fathered the edict that no Negro woman should appear in the streets without an apron."
10. Significance: "Only a man of Colonel Satoris' generation and thought could have invented it (the repayment plan), and only a woman could have believed it."
11. Significance: "When the next generation, with its more modern ideas, became mayors and alderman, this arrangement created some little dissatisfaction."
12. What is the significance of the description of Emily, the thin gold chain, the tarnished gold head, her eyes "lost in the fatty ridges of her face" like two lumps of coal?
13. Significance: "So she vanquished them, horse and foot, just as she had vanquished their fathers thirty years before about the smell . . . will you accuse a lady to her face of smelling bad?"
14. Consider the significance of the Grierson's being thought of as a tableau. What is the meaning of the image in the "tableau" described in Section II?
15. How and why had Emily become "humanized"?
16. Consider the differences in her appearance. At the beginning of Section III, she is likened to the angels in the colored church windows. Consider the meaning of the religious imagery.

17. Consider the meaning of the name "Homer Barron." Why is Homer Barron considered an inappropriate companion for Emily?
18. Consider "Poor Emily."
19. When Emily is at the druggist, she is described again. Her face of flesh strained across the temples is likened to that of a lighthouse-keeper – later as a strained flag. Consider the significance of these images and the use of "strained" as a motif.
20. What did the ladies consider a disgrace to the town? What is significant about the Baptist minister's refusal to return after his interview?
21. How were the two female cousins "more Grierson" than Miss Emily had ever been?
22. What is significant about the description of Emily's hair as "iron-gray, like the hair of active men"?
23. Why was the servant never seen again?
24. Consider the meanings of the descriptions of dust (patient and biding – faint and invisible), the pillow yellow and moldy with age and lack of sunlight, faded rose color, rose shaded lights, silver so tarnished that the monogram was obscured, two mute shoes, discarded socks.
25. Some critics have suggested that "A Rose For Emily" symbolically represents the North and the South." In response to that suggestion, Faulkner stated in an interview in 1959, "The writer uses environment – what he knows – and if there's a symbolism in which the lover represented the North and the woman who murders him represents the South, I don't say that's not valid and not there, but it was no intention of the writer to say, 'Now let's see, I'm going to write a piece in which I will use a symbolism for the North and another symbol for the South,' that he was simply writing about people, a story which he thought was tragic and true, because it came from the human heart, the human aspiration, the human – the conflict of conscience with glands, with the Old Adam. It was a conflict not between the North and the South so much as between, well you might say, God and Satan." Comment.