Eudora Alice Welty was born in Jackson, Mississippi, the daughter of an insurance agent father and a retired teacher mother. Her family had moved to Mississippi from the Ohio Valley region, and Welty enjoyed an idyllic childhood spent in Mississippi with summers visiting relatives in the Midwest. While in high school, Welty published works in a national magazine before attending Mississippi State College for Women for an Associate degree, then transferring to the University of Wisconsin in order to finish her Bachelor’s degree in English. After earning that degree (1929), Welty enrolled at Columbia University but could not find full time work in New York City during the depression; due to finances, she returned home to Jackson (1931) where she would reside for the rest of her life.

Once home, Welty held a series of jobs to help support her mother, including working as a publicity agent for the Works Progress Administration (WPA). In 1936, Welty published her first short story, “Death of a Traveling Salesman,” in *Manuscript* magazine. After this success, she continued to publish in many prominent journals and magazines, including *Harper’s Bazaar* and *Atlantic Monthly*. Her first collection of short stories, *A Curtain of Green and Other Stories* (1941), was largely well-received. Her follow-up novella, *The Robber Bridegroom* (1942), brought her national attention. Soon, Welty was receiving encouragement from fellow Mississippi native William Faulkner.

Although she won a Pulitzer Prize for her novel, *The Optimist’s Daughter*, Welty is largely known as a master of short fiction. Her work engages Southern themes, often dealing with the problems of post-Reconstruction South. “A Worn Path,” originally published in *Atlantic Monthly*, is one of Welty’s most famous and most anthologized short stories. It transposes the hero’s journey (tales in which a hero sets off on an adventure and is changed at the end) on to a seemingly simple tale of an elderly African-American grandmother, Phoenix Jackson, retrieving medication for her sick grandson.

Please click the link below to access this selection:

http://xroads.virginia.edu/~drbr/ew_path.html

1. Do you think Phoenix Jackson’s grandson is still alive? Why, or why not?
2. What is the significance of her name, Phoenix? Why is this important in the context of the story?
3. How does Welty take the details of the mundane and transform them into the mystical?