Three Girls
Joyce Carol Oates

Joyce Carol Oates: Biography

Joyce Carol Oates was born on June 16, 1938 in Lockport, New York. She has a younger brother, Fred, and a younger sister, Lynn Ann. She attended a one-room schoolhouse in Millersport, New York, and it was here that she developed her love for reading. When Oates was fourteen, she wrote her first short story, and she has continued to write ever since then. She went to college at Syracuse University, and was valedictorian of the class of 1960. In 1961 she received her M.A. from the University of Wisconsin, Madison. When she was twenty-six years old, Oates published her first novel, With Shuddering Fall. Since then, she has published many other novels, plays, poems, and short stories, including *them*, "Where Are You Going Where Have You Been?", and *We Were the Mulvaneys*.

Three Girls...
One snowy March day in Strand Used Bookstore in 1956, two young "girl poets" see Marilyn Monroe. Dressed in a "mannish" coat with her hair in a simple braid, no one else recognizes the actress except for these two giddy girl-poets.
Marilyn Monroe. a history up to 1956.

Originally Norma Jeane Mortenson, was born on June 1, 1926 in Los Angeles. She spent most of her childhood in foster homes and orphanages, until 1937 when she moved in with a friend. But when her friend had to move back east, Norma was faced with a choice—either marry or go back to the orphanage. So Norma married her neighbor, who soon went off to Navy. She began working in a factory where a photographer saw her said she had potential. Norma divorced her husband and got a contract with Twentieth Century Fox. Soon after, Norma Jeane dyed her hair blonde and changed her name to Marilyn Monroe. Years passed and Marilyn became an America icon. She was a successful but had acquired a “dumb blonde” label. By 1955, Marilyn was ready to pursue serious acting. She took a hiatus from Hollywood and moved to New York City to study under Lee Strasberg at his Actors' Studio. In 1956, Marilyn started her own motion picture company, Marilyn Monroe Productions.

“It's often just enough to be with someone. I don't need to touch them. Not even talk. A feeling passes between you both. You're not alone.”

~Marilyn Monroe
Plot. arrangement of events in story, organizing principle, story takes on meaning with a plot that is selected and ordered carefully, not always what happens next but why it happens and why it’s in that order.

Flashback. plot device used to present information prior to opening scene

En Media Res. when plot begins in the middle of a story, no buildup

Exposition. provides necessary background information, helps reader understand characters and circumstances, what has gone on before

Rising Action. plot begins gaining momentum, intensifies plot and conflict

Climax. moment of greatest emotional tension, usually turning point

Falling Action. or resolution, diminishing tensions and resolution of conflicts and plot

Foreshadowing. verbal or dramatic hints to what is to come later
Consider Freytag’s Pyramid:
Gustav Freytag was a Nineteenth Century German novelist who saw common patterns in the plots of stories and novels and developed a diagram to analyze them. He diagrammed a story's plot using a pyramid like the one shown here.

Please choose three questions to respond to:
1. How do you interpret the last sentence and how does it affect the rest of the story? Read the story again and find a few quotes that foreshadow this sentence.
2. Describe the significance of Marilyn Monroe and the bookstore. Why does the story revolve around Marilyn? Strand Bookstore is a somewhat sacred place for the two girls, why is it surprising to see Marilyn there? How does the saying "Don't judge a book by its cover" apply?
3. Discuss the plot of this story. What is the conflict here? Why does the Bedford use this story to discuss plot?
4. Describe Oates's syntax. How do her short and incomplete sentences affect the story? Is it at all poetic? What significance does that have?
5. Why do you think Three Girls is told in second person? How does this voice affect the story?