

The use of name significance in their eyes were watching god

[Literature](#), [American Literature](#)



With their significance ranging from one's place of origin to one's occupation, last names have been used to distinguish and describe individuals for centuries. In the novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Zora Neale Hurston, the author, experiments and utilizes name significance as a means of characterization. Throughout the course of the novel, Janie Mae Crawford, the main protagonist, goes through three marriages. Each of her husbands, Logan Killicks, Jody Starks, and Vergible "Tea Cake" Woods, boast significant names that reflect their personalities and their treatment of Janie. Using this unique form of characterization, Hurston is able to portray Janie's values and ideals by comparing them with those represented in her husbands' names. Hurston uses name significance to demonstrate the conflicting personalities of Janie Crawford and Logan Killicks. When Janie is but sixteen years old, Nanny, her grandmother, pressures her into marrying Logan Killicks. Nanny, approaching death, simply desires to assure Janie's security by marrying her off to a wealthy man. However, in doing so, Nanny ignores her sentiments altogether. Accordingly, Janie, who previously believed that "husbands and wives always loved each other" (21), never comes close to loving Logan, who she describes as "some ole skullhead in de grave yard" (13). She soon concludes that "some folks never was meant to beloved and he's one of 'em" (24). In addition to the lack of adoration, they appear polar opposites and while Janie desires to get in touch with nature and find her own voice as a woman in the world, Logan simply concerns himself with working and getting through life one day at a time. As their marriage progresses, he increasingly tries to domesticate Janie's free spirit and make her work on the farm like a mule. Accordingly, all of these

differences and fallacies are reflected in the name Logan Killicks. The words log killer can easily be derived from this name. For Janie, who identifies with nature and desires “ to be... any tree in bloom,” this presents a conflict (11). As Logan is essentially a log killer and an opposing force to nature, he serves as a foil to Janie and threatens her wellbeing and happiness. Consequently, it is evident that by selecting the name Logan Killicks, Hurston desires to reveal Logan’s mean-spirited personality while strengthening Janie’s character. Although Janie’s second husband, Jody Starks, initially embodies some of Janie’s beliefs, he soon comes to reject them. When Janie runs away from Logan Killicks with Jody Starks, she does so because she feels that although Jody does not represent “ sun-up and pollen and blooming trees... he sp[eaks] for far horizon... change and chance,” qualities that Janie deems vital (29). However, as Jody becomes mayor of Eatonville and ascends on a power trip, these whimsical and capricious ideals soon disappear. What takes their place is oppression, jealousy, and domination. When analyzing his name, it is evident that the word stark is an essential clue. Stark means “ harsh, grim, or desolate.” These adjectives adequately describe Janie’s marriage with Jody, one marked by a lack of passion and domestic disturbance. The word stark also means “ rigid dead,” which fits very appropriately as on his deathbed, Jodie shows both mental and physical “ rigidness.” When visiting Jody, Janie unleashes years of repressed angst and verbally assaults him. She targets his stubbornness in particular and tells of how Jodie “ changes everything but nothin’ don’t change [him] – not even death,” representing Jodie’s emotional “ rigidness” (87). When Jodie dies, he is described as having “ cut off his breath and left his hands in a pose of

agonizing protest,” depicting a scene of physical “rigidness” (87). Hurston, in effect, chooses the adjective stark for its rich denotations and uses it to fortify Janie’s character by contrasting it to Jody’s personality. After the death of Jody Starks, Janie Crawford finds an ideal relationship with Vergible “Tea Cake” Woods, a young man whose values are represented in his name. Unlike the other residents of Eatonville, Tea Cake is unique, adventurous, and eccentric. He and Janie instantly develop a distinct, profound relationship. After their first encounter, she tells of how it “seem[s] as if she ha[s] known him all her life” (99). Like Janie, Tea Cake is enamored with nature and together, they move to the Everglades, a natural region with “ground so rich that everything [goes] wild” (129). Once married and settled, they live in such harmony that Janie experiences “a self-crushing love” and “her soul craw[s] out from its hiding place” (128). This coheres to Hurston’s use of name significance as the name Vergible “Tea Cake” Woods can easily be interpreted to mean virgin woods. Unlike log killer, virgin woods coincides with Janie’s passion for trees and nature. Furthermore, his alias, “Tea Cake,” reflects on his romantic personality, as he is “as sweet as all dat [tea cake]” (97). Whereas the names of Logan Killicks and Jody Starks reflect their difference with Janie, Vergible “Tea Cake” Woods’ highlights the similarities and further distinguishes Janie’s character. In her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Zora Neale Hurston, uses name significance as a means of characterization. She does so to great effect and by utilizing this technique, she is able to portray the values and ideals of Janie Mae Crawford and her husband’s. The names Logan Killicks, Jody Starks, and Vergible “Tea Cake”

Wood, all contain profound significance and with their incorporation into the novel, Hurston creates a unique and profound method of characterization.