

The importance of dreams



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Throughout the history of black American culture, the pursuit of dreams has played a pivotal role in self-fulfillment and internal development. In many ways an individual's reactions to the perceived and real obstacles barring the path to a dream define the very character of that person. This theme has been quite evident in black literary works regardless of time period or writing style. For example, in both *Fences*, by August Wilson, and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, by Zora Neale Hurston, dreams enhance the plot and message of the story, though the two stories develop under different circumstances. The importance of dreams in character development is one common thread that unites *Fences* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, two stories penned by authors similar only in their racial backgrounds. While *Their Eyes Were Watching God* focuses little on the dreams of men, the author's attitude toward this subject is clear from the very first paragraph of her novel. She claims that men's dreams are "mocked to death by Time", implying that men are so inherently passive that they have less control than the "tide" over their own desires (Hurston 1). Logan Killicks and Joe Starks provide physical representations of this opinion. Logan's dream seems to be to find a beautiful woman to love. While his marriage to Janie fulfills this wish, the reader witnesses Logan's inability to hold on to Janie; Janie soon leaves Logan with no control and little hope. Joe, too, fails to succeed, but he is shiftless in another way. While he perseveres in accomplishing his dreams, he spends his life pursuing the wrong dreams. Janie accuses him of not seeing or understanding a "whole heap uh things" he "could have"; how true it is! (Hurston 86) Rather than accepting the facts of life and making plans around them, Joe unrealistically expected everyone and everything to conform to his desires. Tea Cake is the one male who does accomplish his

dreams. However, his unique personality explains his success. Tea Cake has priorities and knows exactly what will make him truly happy, and he does not give up on his dreams, no matter how unrealistic they may seem. Even though he “ ain’t got no business” getting “ familiar”(Hurston 105) with Janie, he comes back “ day after day” (Hurston 111) because he realizes that Janie will make him happy. Hurston’s observations of the actions of the male characters in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* provides crucial commentary on how different characters react to adversity. In *Fences*, as well, the reader understands Wilson’s view that weak characters, usually men, will allow excuses and roadblocks to interfere in the attainment of their dreams. Troy best typifies the kind of behavior that succumbs to bitterness and inaction rather than persisting in a dream. His defeatist attitude shows in his relations with his son; he tells his son that football “ ain’t gonna get” him “ nowhere” (Wilson 8). Because Troy’s dream to play professional baseball never materialized, he tells Cory to learn something that “ can’t nobody take away” (Wilson 35). However, Troy’s life revolves around baseball; while he may not have played professional ball, it is clear that baseball gave him something priceless. Still, Troy is so upset about his failed dreams that he blames all his failures on others and becomes one-dimensionally focused on tangible goals. He drives those who love him away. In the other male characters of the play the same trends of hopelessness and lack of effort are evident. Wilson clearly demonstrates the self-inflicted pain that Troy and others suffer as a result of the frustrations of their desires. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God* Hurston provides the antithesis of this male weakness through the strong perseverance of Janie in fulfilling her dreams. At the beginning of her novel, Hurston comments that the “ dream is the truth”;

women “ act...accordingly” (Hurston 1). This contrasts greatly with her indictment of the condition of man. The reader witnesses throughout the novel Janie’s great internal strength as well as her flexibility in accomplishing her goal of finding true love. While she certainly meets failure in the shape of Logan and Jody, she eventually does find happiness because of her resilience. Through two failed marriages she still manages to hold on to her ideal of the “ blossoming pear tree” (Hurston 11). Her dreams may have changed in form, but remained the same in substance; as she put it, her “ old thoughts” simply needed “ new words”(Hurston 32). Joe died too proud to acknowledge his mistakes, but Janie made her horrible experiences little more than a “ sobbing sigh” (Hurston 192) due to her endless search and eventual discovery of “ peace” (Hurston 193). Janie displays enviable qualities of optimism, a sense of self-worth, and dedication in the pursuit of her dreams. August Wilson also counters his weak male characters in *Fences* with the strong female presence of Rose. Rose’s dreams center around a hope for a stable, loving family, something that she lacked as a child. Rose sacrifices everything to “ hold on” to her family because she realizes how important her strength is to the rest of the family (Wilson 61). She even mothers the child that Troy has with another woman because she knows how much that child will need love. Rose denies herself of her “ wants and needs” because her ultimate dream is to build a foundation and a future; she recognizes that this is the most important priority in her life (Wilson 71). While her path is not always easy, Rose sticks to it because she knows exactly who she is and what she wants. She does not condone Troy’s actions, even warning him that he is “ livin’ on borrowed time”, but she recognizes that his mistakes should not ruin her dream. Rose shows traits of

motivation and adaptability that allow her to accomplish her dream in spite of her circumstances. In both *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Fences* references to dreams continually appear. It seems logical that the concept of dreams and their attainability would be frequently addressed in writings of black American authors; after all, blacks have always encountered numerous difficulties in accomplishing anything that whites would never face. In *Fences* especially racial barriers play a great role in the impossibility of dreams; however, *Fences* also demonstrates that how an individual reacts to adversity can greatly influence his or her life. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* provides a more universal analysis of whether dreams can be achieved; Janie faces less barriers because of her race than she does because of the people surrounding her. An interesting aspect of *Fences* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is that the women do display much greater hope and dedication than do the men. One possible argument for this could be that women have historically played a subordinate role to men while also having more responsibilities; because of this, women are forced to ignore many hardships and continue in their dreams while men can simply give up. Regardless of this, it is fascinating to observe how many parallels there are between *Fences* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* regarding dreams. The two books little resemble each other on a purely literal level because Wilson and Hurston use such unique writing styles; however, the message and opinions of the two are remarkably similar. The crucial importance of dreams in one's life plays a key role in both *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, by Zora Neale Hurston, and *Fences*, by August Wilson. The two stories, differing in characterization, setting, and plot, have similar themes of the necessity of discovering one's true desires and living by the standards of those dreams.

Zora Neale Hurston and August Wilson are continually recognized simply as “black authors”; perhaps these similarities in content will lend some meaning to the term.