

Worksheet 4.1. Answers: Hurston's Writing Techniques

The following are some possible answers to the worksheet. Students may find other, equally acceptable answers.

How does Hurston give the reader a sense of the community in which the story takes place?

- Dialect writing (*Students should give examples.*)
- Characters Walter and Elijah are among “loungers at the store,” a community gathering place for the folk group.
- Shared values of the folk group: condemnation of Spunk for taking another man's wife, even though they respect his strength and courage. (*“Ah like him fine but ‘tain’t right the way he carries on wid Lena Kanty, jus’ cause Joe’s timid ‘bout fightin’.”*)

Describe how Hurston delineates the character traits of each main character in the story. (Cite examples of folk speech; figurative language; symbolism; and other literary devices)

Spunk

- Confident and something of a show-off (*“big black Stetson set at the same rakish angle” which distinguishes him from the common dress of the folk group*)
- Courageous (*willing to ride the dangerous log-carriage at the sawmill; “he ain’t skeered of nothin’ on God’s green footstool.”*)
- Braggart (*“See mah back? Mah cloes cut clear through. He sneaked up an’ tried to kill me from the back, but Ah got him, an’ got him good, first shot,” Spunk said.*)
- Superstitious, susceptible to folklore about ghosts (*afraid of black bobcat; blames Joe’s ghost for pushing him*)

Joe

- Timid about fighting
- Weak in appearance (*“A round-shouldered figure in overalls much too large;” “shambled woodward”*)
- Sensitive to teasing (*goes after Spunk with only a razor because of comments from Elijah, indicating importance to Joe of being respected by the folk group*)
- Sad (*“One could actually see the pain he was suffering, his eyes, his face, his hands and even the dejected slump of his shoulders.”*)

Lena

- Defies the conventional behavior of the folk group (*“Theah they go, big as life an’ brassy as tacks.”*)
- Hardhearted (*Doesn’t seem to mourn Joe’s death; moves in with Spunk shortly afterwards; “Joe ain’t had time to git cold yit.”*)
- May or may not sincerely mourn Spunk (*“Lena’s lamentations were deep and loud. She had filled the room with magnolia blossoms that gave off a heavy sweet odor.” Student opinions will vary.*)

- Poor reputation in town for violating norms of the folk group (*treated Joe badly; “The women ate heartily of the funeral baked meats and wondered who would be Lena’s next.”*)

What is the atmosphere (mood) of the story?

Tense, ominous despite “folksy” nature of the setting

Cite examples from the text where Hurston creates this atmosphere or mood.

- Darkness (*“Dusk crept in from the woods. Ike Clarke lit the swinging oil lamp....”*)
- Predictions of death (*“Spunk will sho' kill him.”*)
- Knowledge that Spunk is armed (*“Joe ain't got the nerve to go up to Spunk with it knowing he totes that Army 45.”*)
- Presence of ghost in the form of black bobcat and push on the saw
- Gruesome nature of Spunk’s death (*falls on saw carriage; “He was spittin’ blood at ev’ry breath.”*)