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English 4

### The Lack of Names in *The Road*

In *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy, none of the characters are ever given a name.

Everyone is referenced by their appearance or relation to another character: the boy, the man, the wife, the roadrat, the man who was struck by lightning. This was a stylistic choice by McCarthy to show the situation the characters are in without explicitly stating it.

McCarthy wrote the book in this way because it is another way to show that society is gone. We use names to refer to people so that we all know who is being spoken about. But in a world without any form of society, there is no need for names because you will never speak to anyone else. The man and boy have only spoken to each other and the roadrat. In their limited interactions with others, they would never ask for each others' names because they would be too worried about the dangers that come with speaking to others on the road. Because of this, they never use the names of other people, only a description of them. This shows that society has fallen because society, in its simplest form, is a group of people living together. The man and the boy will never live with other people because it is too dangerous. Without the laws keeping society together, society was broken and is now beyond repair.

The characters in *The Road* have been reduced to their simplest forms. They are only the boy and the man. This is similar to how we think of wild animals. We think of wild animals only by what they are: the cat, the dog, the squirrel, etc. We only give them names if we know them,

but the man and boy will never know anyone else because it would be too dangerous. The man and the boy have to treat other people like wild animals as well because any interaction could be dangerous. They must hide or avoid them in some way so that they stay safe. This is evident by the man's dream in the beginning of the book, where he dreams of a, "creature ... with eyes dead white," and a, "brain that pulsed in a dull glass bell," (pages 3-4). This is not a real creature, but rather that idea that the man has of the people around him. He believes that they are like predators trying to hunt him and the boy. Everyone around them is the same as a wild animal to the man. However, the man and the boy are no different from those around them because they are also like wild animals. From any other point of view than their own, they could also be the predators that the man sees others as.

The lack of names in *The Road* is a stylistic choice by McCarthy to give more insight into what the characters' world is like. They can never get to know anyone else because it is too dangerous, so they are forced to see others as nothing more than they appear as. They will never know the names or identities of those around them because the fall of society has made it too dangerous to interact with others. The man and the boy are forever stuck being just "the man" and "the boy" to all others around them.