

Aufgabenstellung

1. Summarize the text.
2. Analyze the author's use of language as a means of creating impressions of America (ll. 1 – 30).
3. Compare Tobias Wolff's and Marco Fogg's perceptions of the West.
4. Tobias wants to change his name, and Juliet Capulet says, "What's in a name...?" Discuss the relevance of names in this excerpt and in other texts studied in class. Also refer to your personal experience.

Material: Excerpt from Tobias Wolff's novel *This Boy's Life* (1990)

In this excerpt from his autobiographical novel the author describes a journey across the United States from Florida to Utah.

It was 1955 and we were driving from Florida to Utah, to get away from a man my mother was afraid of and to get rich on uranium. We were going to change our luck.

We'd left Sarasota in the dead of summer, right after my tenth birthday, and headed West under low flickering skies that turned black and exploded and cleared just long enough to leave the air
5 gauzy with steam. We drove through Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee, Kentucky, stopping to cool the engine in towns where people moved with arthritic slowness and spoke in thick, strangled tongues. Idlers with rotten teeth surrounded the car to press peanuts on the pretty Yankee lady and her little boy, arguing among themselves about shortcuts. Women looked up from their flower
10 beds as we drove past, or watched us from their porches, sometimes impassively, sometimes giving us a nod and a flutter of their fans.

Every couple of hours the Nash Rambler boiled over. My mother kept digging into her little grubstake but no mechanic could fix it. All we could do was wait for it to cool, then drive on until it
15 boiled over again. (My mother came to hate this machine so much that not long after we got to Utah she gave it away to a woman she met in a cafeteria). At night we slept in boggy rooms where headlight beams crawled up and down the walls and mosquitoes sang in our ears, incessant as the
20 tires whining on the highway outside. But none of this bothered me. I was caught up in my mother's freedom, her delight in her freedom, her dream of transformation.

Everything was going to change when we got out West. My mother had been a girl in Beverly Hills, and the life we saw ahead of us was conjured from her memories of California in the days
25 before the Crash. [...]

Something like that was supposed to happen to us. People in Utah were getting up poor in the morning and going to bed rich at night. You didn't need to be a mining engineer or a mineralogist. All you needed was a Geiger counter. We were on our way to the uranium fields, where my mother would get a job and keep her eyes open. Once she learned the ropes she'd start prospecting for a

25 claim of her own.

And when she found it she planned to do some serious compensating: for the years of hard work, first as a soda jerk and then as a novice secretary, that had gotten her no farther than flat broke and sometimes not that far. For the breakup of our family five years earlier. For the misery of her long affair with a violent man. She was going to make up for lost time, and I was going to help
30 her.

WE GOT TO Utah [...]. We were too late—months too late. Moab and the other mining towns had been overrun. All the motels were full. The locals had rented out their bedrooms and living rooms and garages and were now offering trailer space in their front yards for a hundred dollars a week,
35 which was what my mother could make in a month if she had a job. But there were no jobs, and people were getting ornery. There'd been murders. Prostitutes walked the streets in broad daylight, drunk and bellicose. Geiger counters cost a fortune. Everyone told us to keep going.

[...]

I didn't come to Utah to be the same boy I'd been before. I had my own dreams of transformation,
40 Western dreams, dreams of freedom and dominion and taciturn self-sufficiency. The first thing I wanted to do was change my name. A girl named Toby had joined my class before I left Florida, and this had caused both of us scalding humiliation.

I wanted to call myself Jack, after Jack London. I believed that having his name would charge me with some of the strength and competence inherent in my idea of him. The odds were good that I'd
45 never have to share a classroom with a girl named Jack. And I liked the sound. Jack. Jack Wolff. My mother didn't like it at all, neither the idea of changing my name nor the name itself. I did not drop the subject. She finally agreed, but only on condition that I attend catechism classes. Once I was ready to be received into the Church she would allow me to take Jonathan as my baptismal name and shorten it to Jack. In the meantime I could introduce myself as Jack when I started
50 school that fall.

My father got wind of this and called from Connecticut to demand that I stick to the name he had given me. It was, he said, an old family name. This turned out to be untrue. It just sounded like an old family name, as the furniture he bought at antique stores looked like old family furniture, and as the coat of arms he'd designed for himself looked like the shield of some fierce baron.

55 [...]

My mother was pleased by my father's show of irritation and stuck up for me. A new name began to seem like a good idea to her. After all, he was in Connecticut and we were in Utah. Though my father was rolling in money at the time – he had married the millionairess he'd been living with before the divorce – he sent us nothing, not even the pittance the judge had prescribed for my
60 support. We were barely making it, and making it in spite of him. My shedding the name he'd given

me would put him in mind of that fact.

from: Tobias Wolff, *This Boy's Life*, New York 1990, pp. 4 – 8.

Annotations:

I. 3	Sarasota	town on the West coast of Florida
I. 11	Nash Rambler	1950s car
I. 12	grubstake	here: amount of money saved up and kept for hard times
I. 20	Crash	the 1929 crash of the New York Wall Street Stock Exchange
I. 23	Geiger counter	a device for detecting and measuring radioactive substances
I. 24	to learn the ropes	to learn everything one needs to know to do a job
I. 27	soda jerk	bar mixer
I. 27f	flat broke	completely bankrupt
I. 32	Moab	town near the Colorado River; the name Moab is a Biblical name for a land just short of Paradise. It was founded by Mormon settlers in the 19 th century. The area is also the location of many Western films. Famous for uranium finds in the 1950s the area is mainly a tourist attraction today with access to several National Parks.
I. 36	ornery	quarrelsome, bad-tempered and difficult to deal with
I. 43	Jack London	American adventurer, tramp, sailor, gold-digger, writer and journalist (1876 – 1916)

Hilfsmittel

Den Prüflingen stehen einsprachige sowie für den schulischen Gebrauch geeignete zweisprachige Wörterbücher der Allgemeinsprache (Deutsch-Englisch/Englisch-Deutsch) zur Verfügung.