“What’s in a Name?” Discussion Starters

1. Why does Gates include the quote from Trey Ellis’s essay that contains the list of

“bynames”? What is your general reaction to the list?

1. Gates says that he forgot this incident for over 30 years. Why do you suppose he forgot it?
2. How is the social status of the Gates family different from that of other African Americans in West Virginia? What does this incident reveal about the nature of the social status?
3. What does “one of those things” really mean?
4. Why does Gates’s family turn to a discussion of a “black superstar” after a “painful moment of silent” that occurs after “one of those things?
5. Why do you think Gates never looked Mr. Wilson in the eye again?
6. What is the ultimate purpose of Gates recounting this incident?
7. What is the significance and purpose of the title?
8. Does the dialogue enhance the narrative? If so, how?

“I Want a Wife” Discussion Starters

1. Choose those “duties” that you think still apply to today’s gender stereotypes. Why do you think these “roles” still exist?
2. According to Brady, what are a wife’s “social duties”?
3. Is Brady being unfair to men? Explain.
4. What is the overall tone of the essay? Find some quotes that help to establish that tone.
5. Brady repeatedly uses the phrase “I want a wife” instead of any number of other options (“she,” “a wife who,” “my wife would”); does this repetition achieve a significant effect?
6. What do you think of the wife Brady describes? What is Brady’s intent in writing this piece?