

Hello...My Name is...

“What’s in a name? A rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*

“...because it is my name! Because I have no other. You have my life; you will not have my name!”

Arthur Miller, *The Crucible*

“...but he who filches (steals) from me my good name takes that which helps him not and leaves me poor indeed.”

Shakespeare, *Othello*

Names have history, symbolism, and tradition. They reflect interesting facts about our ancestors. Surnames (last names) were not needed hundreds of years ago when people lived in small towns and everyone knew everyone else. As cities grew, however, so did the confusion about which person was being referred to in conversation; thus, last names were invented. Surnames came originally from four sources: 1) father’s name with “son” attached, known as patronymic 2) place names 3) occupation 4) personal or physical characteristic. You will get to play a matching game to determine some of these names. You will also have the opportunity to explore the origin and meaning of your name and to write about your findings and feelings about your name. I have several well-worn reference books about names in the room, and you can find information on line as well. Gather information about the following and any other interesting areas you want to explore:

1. What is your complete name?
2. Into what category do you think your name falls?
3. What is the nationality of your name (s) and what do all your names mean?
4. Is there anything unusual about your first name—spelling, pronunciation, reason for being given it...?
5. What is the story about your name...who gave you your names and why? Were you named for a special person, place, tradition, sound, etc.? Was your name hard to be decided on? Any cool circumstances surrounding your name?
6. How do you feel about your name? Would you choose another name for yourself? How many people share your name and how do you feel about sharing your name?

7. Discuss any nicknames or pet names you have now or have had.

Then, using as much of the information you gathered as you need, along with any additional stories and feelings about your name that you have, write a brief essay (no more than a page or page and a half double spaced) about your name and your feelings about it. You may follow the model of Sandra Cisneros' essay about her name if you wish. It is taken from her book of memoirs, *The House on Mango Street*, which I recommend you read. Be sure you have a beginning paragraph, a body paragraph or two, and a cool conclusion. As well as organization, strong verbs, and details, I'm really looking for your writing voice in this essay. Is it serious, whimsical, cynical, reflective...? What is Cisneros' writing voice in her piece? This essay will become part of your Wanna Piece of Me, so you get to "double dip" again.

My Name

by Sandra Cisneros

In English my name means hope. In Spanish it means too many letters. It means sadness. It means waiting. It is like the number nine. A muddy color. It is the Mexican records my father plays on Sunday mornings when he is shaving, songs like sobbing. It was my great-grandmother's name and now it is mine. She was a horse woman too, born like me in the Chinese year of the horse—which is supposed to be bad luck if you're born female—but I think this is a Chinese lie because the Chinese, like the Mexicans, don't like their women strong.

My great-grandmother. I would've liked to have known her, a wild horse of a woman, so wild she wouldn't marry until my great-grandfather threw a sack over her head and carried her off. Just like that, as if she were a fancy chandelier. That's the way he did it. And the story goes she never forgave him. She looked out the window all her life, the way so many women sit their sadness on an elbow. I wonder if she made the best with what she got or was she sorry because she couldn't be all the things she wanted to be. Esperanza. I have inherited her name, but I don't want to inherit her place by the window.

At school they say my name funny as if the syllables were made out of tin and hurt the roof of your mouth. But in Spanish my name is made out of a softer something, like silver, not quite as thick as sister's name Magdalena, which is uglier than mine. Magdalena, who at least can come home and become Nenny. But I am always Esperanza.

I would like to baptize myself under a new name, a name more like the real me, the one nobody sees. Esperanza as Lisandra or Maritza or Zeze the X. Yes. Something like Zeze the X will do.

Let's talk for a minute or two about how she put this together to reflect her voice and feelings. What organizational pattern does she seem to use? What background about her name has she incorporated? What transitional elements does she use to make her essay "hang together"? What are the best phrases in your opinion? How can she get away with using so many sentence fragments? How do you think you want to write your essay? I'll share a few more samples.