

“My Name”
by Sandra Cisneros

Excerpted from *The House on Mango Street*

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 her whole 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.

Analysis Questions. Answer below in space provided.

1. What is the point of view in this story? Why is it an effective type of narration given the story's content and tone?
2. How does the narrator establish a conflict between her Mexican identity and the English-speaking country she lives? (Consider when she mentions Mexicans or Spanish versus when she mentions English, school, and her classmates.) How is her name tied to her cultural and racial identity?
3. According to Chinese Zodiac, these are common traits of people born during the Year of the Horse: stubborn, independent—don't take advice, social, and clever. Where in the story does the narrator show these traits?
4. Esperanza is named after her great-grandmother. In what ways does she admire her great-grandmother? What parts of her great-grandmother's life and personality does Esperanza want to avoid? What does having "a place by the window" mean?
5. Esperanza never directly describes herself in this chapter, yet the reader is still left with a sense of who she is as a character. How would you describe this character as a person? Use examples from the chapter to explain and support your answer.

Directions: Your assignment is to write your own “My Name” story. It needs to be at least 4 paragraphs long. This is a piece of creative writing, so not every single paragraph needs to be 4 or more sentences long. The topic is your name. Your purpose is to inform the reader about your name. You will follow the format that Cisneros used in her story. You must include figurative language (hyperbole, metaphors, similes, personification, etc.) in each paragraph. Use the description of your name to help reveal your personality, your hopes, your fears, etc.

Format

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-1 paragraph about your name’s meaning. Follow Cisneros’ format: share what it actually means and then define it using figurative language.

-1 paragraph about the color of your name

-1 paragraph about how your name sounds

-1 paragraph about why you want to keep your name, or why you want to change it and what you’d change it to

Here are some questions to consider before you begin writing:

Do you know why your parents chose your name? Who chose it? Does it have a special meaning in another language?

Do you have a nickname? How did you get that nickname? How do you feel about it?

If you could change your name, what would you change it to? Would a name change make you feel differently about yourself? Why?

Has anyone ever commented on your name? What did he or she say? How did that comment make you feel?

Do you think your name causes people to treat you a certain way? How? Give examples.