

Activity Plan to Help Build Community



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- Aim: To explore culture and personal identity through our name stories.
- Motivation: What does a name say about a person? If you could change your name to anything, what would it be?
- Presentation:
1. Read Sandra Cisneros's "My Name" and take notes.
 2. Content – Discuss cultural issues inherent to her name.
 - * Is this story really about a name?
 - a. Linguistic dichotomy — English/Spanish
 - * How does the fact that the story is written in English emphasize the “language politics” of a nine-year-old girl?
 - b. Gender expectations — weak women who must marry
 - *What is the speaker's purpose in revealing the reality of the women in her family?
 - *Does Esperanza have the power to really baptize herself and become a different category of “woman”? Is Zeze the X gender neutral?
 - c. Cultural hybridity — “Mexican,” “American,” “Chinese”
 - *To which culture does the speaker belong?
 - d. Legacy — inheriting grandma's place by the window
 - *Is there evidence that Esperanza has already inherited this place?
 - e. Private/public self — sister can be Nenny at home; Esperanza wants to have a “stage name” like “Zeze the X.”
 - * Is the name part of the public or the private self?
 - f. Cultural nostalgia — father's “sobbing” songs; “and the story goes she never forgave him”
 - *How does the “fogginess” of these memories make the story more or less believable?

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3. Craft — Discuss how Cisneros conveys these meanings.
*How does the craft transform potential “tangents” into essential descriptors?
 - a. Sentence variety (“a muddy color” masquerades as a complete sentence)
 - b. Voice (she weaves between the voice of a child and a wistful adult)
 - c. Sensory images (songs like sobbing; women sitting their sadness on an elbow; soft vs. thick names)
 - d. Figurative language (grandma is a chandelier; tin syllables)
 - e. Lapses into pretend dialogue (yes — Zeze the X will do)

Guided practice: Draft your own name story. Use it to tell about **your** culture. Try to use some of the techniques employed by Cisneros.

Closure: Share name story drafts in small groups or as a whole class.