

Name and Identity

LEARNING TARGETS

Appreciate the role of the name in identity.
Become aware of the cultural variations in naming.

PREPARATION

Sent letter to parents. (See sample.)

Note : Many children do not live with both of their biological parents. Be alert to any special considerations or sensitivities that might be necessary.

Have a collection of books about names available from a library.

GETTING STARTED

Ask the students what they found out about their own names. Make notes on the board when major elements are mentioned: named for family member, named for famous person, last name of father/mother/combination, ethnic origin of family name, etc.

DEVELOPING UNDERSTANDING

Explain that in American families, we usually have three names: first or given name, middle name, and family name. (Note: Teach students that the given name is the first name they have. We will use the term “given name” for clarity. To say that the first name comes last, etc. becomes confusing.) Usually when a girl marries, she takes her husband’s last name and her own family name is called her “maiden” name. Provide an example of someone that the class knows. Write the three names on the board and indicate how the woman’s name changes with marriage. Explain that some women keep their own family names such as when a couple uses a hyphenated version of the man’s and the woman’s family names. Usually in American culture, the children carry the father’s last name.

Refer to a book about naming for additional examples of variations. The following information is from WHO TALKS FUNNY? by Brenda S.Cox, Linnet Books, North Haven, Connecticut, 1995.

In Vietnam, the family name comes first. The middle name is “Thi” for girls and “Van” for boys. The given name is last. The children take their father’s family name. When a woman marries, she usually keeps her family name.

In Arab countries, the family lineage on the father’s side is important. A child has a given name first but the father’s name is next followed by the grandfather’s name. A family name may come last. Sometimes the child is called by the relationship to the father: Ibn Sa’ud (son of Saud). In the Bedouin culture, the mother is called by her son’s name: Abu Nassar (mother of Nassar). If only daughters are born, the mother keeps her own name. It is only with the birth of the first son that her name changes.

Old Irish names with O’ before the family name meant “son of” as Mac or Mc indicated in Scottish family names. Some English family names actually included “son” in the name: Robinson, Martinson, Stevenson.

Russian names are interesting, too. First is the given name, then the father’s given name with “Vich” ending for boys and “Vna” ending for girls, then the family name. A daughter uses the family name with the addition of a final a. “Natasha daughter of Peter of the Dolgov family would be Natasha Petrovna Dolgova. Her brother Ivan would be Ivan Petrovich Dolgov.” (Cox, p.97)

In some Asian countries, age is so important that it is included in the name. In Burma, a person has two names. They are like our first and middle names. Usually, there is no family name. Marriage does not change names. The prefixes put in front of the names indicate age and sex such as “ma”(sister for girl) or young woman, “daw”(aunt) for older woman, “maung”(brother) or “ko”(older brother) for a boy or young man, and “U”(pronounced oo) for an older man. A younger boy would address an older boy named Htun as Ko Htun, but an older man would call the same boy Maung Htun. The prefix U actually means “uncle,” so the Burmese diplomat U Thant (Secretary General of the United Nations, 1962-1972) was “Uncle Thant.” Thant was his first name. He was called Maung Thant as a young man.

In Malayalam and other languages of India, a person goes by his own first name and then his father’s first name. The family name is rarely used. A girl who gets married goes by her first name followed by her husband’s first name. When Lakshmi, daughter of Ram, marries Biju, her name changes from Lakshmi Ram to Lakshmi Biju (Cox, p. 98).

Chinese and Koreans have the father’s family name come first and then the given name. When a woman marries she keeps her name. Each generation in a Korean family has a special word incorporated into each person’s name which indicates the generation. For example, all the brothers and sisters in the family may have “Jin” in their names while all their children’s names may have “Han.”

ACTIVELY ENGAGING THE LEARNER

Using the Names Worksheet, have the students reconstruct their names using the patterns of the listed countries.

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Explain that our identities are closely tied to our names. Introduce the biography poem format if your students are not familiar with it. Sometimes called a bio-poem, the form has varying numbers of lines and particular information. (A master for a transparency is at the end of this lesson.) Create a bio-poem using your name as a sample so that students may understand how to form their versions. Remind the students to copy the words introducing the lines that have three dots in them.

- Line 1: first name
- Line 2: four words to describe you or “named for...”
- Line 3: brother or sister of... or son or daughter of...
- Line 4: loves... (three ideas or people)
- Line 5: needs... (three ideas)
- Line 6: gives... (three ideas) (continued)
- Line 7: fears... (three ideas)
- Line 8: would like to see...
- Line 9: wishes to...
- Line 10: resident of...
- Line 11: last name

ASSESSMENT

Review the Names Worksheet and Bio-Poem for accuracy.

EXTENSION

Students can celebrate their names through creating an artistic representation of their names: illustrate bio-poems, color arrays around the name, patterns from the names, design stamps to use with stamp pads, etc.

NAMES Worksheet

Your full name _____

1. Vietnamese: family name, "Thi" for girls/"Van" for boys, and given name.
2. Arabic: given name, father's given name, grandfather's given name, family name.
3. Irish: given name, middle name, last name is father's given name with O'.
4. Scottish: given name, middle name, last name is father's given name with Mac.
5. Russian: given name, father's given name with "Vich" for boys and "vna" for girls, then the family name (Remember to add the "a" at the end of the family name for girls).
6. Burmese: given plus middle name, with prefix of "ma" for girls and "maung" for boys.
7. Korean: father's family name first, then your given name. Choose a generation word for you and your siblings. Incorporate the generation name into your name.
8. Malaysian: given name then father's given name.

Question:

What would your mother's name be?

(Remember that her given name with her father's given name remains until she marries, then, she has her given name with her husband's given name.)

Bio-Poem

Line 1: first name

Line 2: four words to describe you or "named for..."

Line 3: brother or sister of... or son or daughter of...

Line 4: loves... (three ideas or people)

Line 5: needs... (three ideas)

Line 6: gives... (three ideas)

Line 7: fears... (three ideas)

Line 8: would like to see...

Line 9: wishes to...

Line 10: resident of...

Line 11: last name

Dear Parents,

On Monday we will begin a new unit with a lesson on the meanings of our names and how our names were given to us. Please share this family information so that your child will be able to participate in our discussion.

Points to consider: who named your child, why that name was chosen, why the family name is what it is (perhaps a cultural indicator), the ethnic origin of the family name, any known meanings of the given or family name, changes that might have occurred in the family name's spelling (for example, during the family's immigration to America).

If your child was named after someone, a family member or famous person, provide a photo or information about that person.

The second lesson continues our study of identity by considering celebrations and traditions within a family. How does your family celebrate birthdays, anniversaries, weddings? Are there religious observances in your family? Christenings or Naming Parties? How do the children participate?

Perhaps your family has items that have been passed down through the generations. Share those with your child, telling of the origins and significance. Perhaps a family member has received an award or has a special skill or talent. Be sure that your child hears about these points of family pride and honor.

For some children, this study of names and origins may hold memories of sadness or loss and be painful. Please alert me to any considerations needed for your child.

Thank you for your help. Ask your child about our discussion of names and celebrations. They will have much to share with their families about our study.

Sincerely,