

Full Text “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.

Name:

Date:

Before Reading
Journal Prompt

PREVIEW

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Answer all of the questions that follow: How do you feel about your first name? Do you have a strong connection to your name? Is it important to you? Do you have any nicknames? If you could choose a new first name, what would it be and why would it be a better fit for you? Would you change your middle name too? Last name? Explain.

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Reading Questions

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1. Esperanza’s name means hope in English. Why is this ironic?

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2. What three negative descriptions does Esperanza say her name means in Spanish?

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4. Why doesn’t Esperanza like her name?

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5. What is the tone of the story? Cite evidence to support your answer.

6. Why does Esperanza reject the notion that being born in the Chinese year of the horse brings misfortune to women?

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7. Why would not marrying someone make you “so wild”?

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8. What is the symbolism of a window in this story?

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9. Why did the author choose the word “baptize”?

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10. What is symbolic about Esperanza’s desire to change her name?

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11. How does Esperanza portray Mexican culture during this time period (1960s) in addition to her great-grandmother’s era? How does this compare to society today?

12. What is one theme or message from the story?

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13. Has anyone ever commented on your name (or someone you know)? What did he or she say? How did that comment make you feel?

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14. Do you think people judge others based on their name? Why or why not?

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15. Who is a relative you admire? What attributes do you wish to inherit from them, and which attributes do you wish to change?

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After Reading

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Part I Directions: Research your name's meaning, origin, and more using the chart below.

YOUR FIRST NAME: _____

Meaning or translation(s):	
Variations, other versions, or similar names that your name may be derived from:	
History, origin, and etymology:	
People who share your name (this could include people you know in real life, people in history, fictional characters, celebrities, etc.):	
Popularity and/or trends around the world:	
Chinese Zodiac Sign and the meaning (look up what year you were born to see what animal is your Chinese Zodiac sign):	

Part II Directions: After you research what your name means, explain whether your name suits you or not. Your response should be detailed and thorough (a minimum of five complete sentences).

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Suggested Lesson Procedure for Teachers

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1. Assign students the journal prompt before reading “My Name” by Sandra Cisneros.

2. Read the short story “My Name” by Sandra Cisneros. I recommend first playing the audio version of the story as a whole class. Then, direct students to read the story silently to themselves while making annotations in the margins. The story should only take them about **3-5 minutes** to read.

Here is the link I used to listen to the story: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=82k5b3JUXB8>

4. Assign the reading questions to your students. Students may complete this independently or in pairs. When students are done, review the answers as a class.

5. Assign students the after reading activity. Allow students at least 30 minutes to complete this activity during class. This activity requires technology as each student will need to research the origin of their own name.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to email me at
chompingatthelit@gmail.com

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Journal Prompt**

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Answers will vary.

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Reading Questions

1. Esperanza's name means hope in English. Why is this ironic?

Esperanza is not hopeful nor is she optimistic.

2. What three negative descriptions does Esperanza say her name means in Spanish?

Esperanza says her name means "too many letters," "sadness," and "waiting."

3. Give an example of figurative language from the story and explain its meaning/significance.

Answers will vary. Examples include:

- "It is like the number nine" = simile meaning Esperanza's name is odd
- "A muddy color" = metaphor meaning her name is dirty or unwanted
- "A wild horse of a woman" = metaphor for a woman who is "untamed" and free
- "As if she were a fancy chandelier" = simile meaning Esperanza's great-grandmother was treated like a shiny object
- "So many women sit their sadness on an elbow" = personification meaning women never address their feelings of dissatisfaction out loud, instead they lean on their elbow and look out the window to deal with their sadness internally
- "As if the syllables were made out of tin" = metaphor meaning the syllables or pronunciation of Esperanza is hard to say for people; when tin is bent at room temperature, it makes a high-pitched creaking sound known as the "tin cry"
- "My name is made out of a softer something like silver" = simile comparing how silver is much more appealing and smooth compared to tin; silver does not tarnish and is coveted by people

4. Why doesn't Esperanza like her name?

Esperanza's name is difficult to pronounce and spell—especially compared to other American names in school. She doesn't feel like her name represents who she is.

5. What is the tone of the story? Cite evidence to support your answer.

The tone is earnest and melancholy. Esperanza struggles to find her place in the world. She uses words like "sadness," "muddy," and "sobbing"—all which depict her despair. She talks about the great-grandmother she wishes she met and the names she wishes she could have—this shows her sincere and genuine attitude.

6. Why does Esperanza reject the notion that being born in the Chinese year of the horse brings misfortune to women?

Esperanza rejects the idea that women born in the year of the horse have bad luck because horses are intelligent, strong animals which should mean that women who are born in the year of the horse are also confident, smart, and strong. However, because Mexican and Chinese cultures do not reward women who are independent, it is said that the Chinese Zodiac sign of the horse is “bad luck” for women. Esperanza rejects the idea that it’s “bad” for women to be strong; she sees it as a positive attribute.

7. Why would not marrying someone make you “so wild”?

There is sexism present during the time her great-grandmother lived which emphasized that women who were unmarried were “troublesome” or “wild.” Women who were not married were not easy to manipulate or control which allowed society to unfairly label them as “wild.”

8. What is the symbolism of a window in this story?

The window symbolizes a greater life outside of the home that women who were forced to marry long for. Outside of the window symbolizes freedom, whereas inside the window symbolizes confinement or an inescapable prison.

9. Why did the author choose the word “baptize”?

Baptism is a Christian sacrament of admission and adoption. It may be performed by sprinkling or pouring water on the head. Baptizing has the connotation of being reborn in addition to the literal meaning of “give a name to.” It is significant that Esperanza references a tradition practiced by Christianity as she longs to be more accepted by her peers in America. She wants to be “reborn” with a new name and allow people to know her true self that she has previously kept secret.

10. What is symbolic about Esperanza’s desire to change her name?

Wanting to change names shows that Esperanza is lost as a person. Esperanza believes that getting a new name will take away from how society feels about her and that people will not judge her as much. It is more than a name to her, it’s about changing who she is in the eyes of society.

11. How does Esperanza portray Mexican culture during this time period (1960s) in addition to her great-grandmother’s era? How does this compare to society today?

Women were treated as inferior to men in Mexican culture during the time period her great-grandmother was alive. Her great-grandmother was physically forced to marry a man she did not love or want to be with. Esperanza’s long-dead great-grandmother spent her whole life sitting sadly by her window. Esperanza portrays her current culture

full of women who are still trapped by domestic duties, but Esperanza hints that she does not have to suffer that same fate, nor does she intend to. In America, women still fight for equal wages, but have more rights than the decades before; for example, women are no longer dependent on men to work or earn a living. (For example, in America during the 1960s, women finally gained the right to open their own bank account. Before 1974, women were not legally permitted to obtain a mortgage without a male cosigner.) Today, the negative stigma of unmarried women has been discarded for the most part.

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12. What is one theme or message from the story?

- Language is powerful and impacts the way people treat others and define themselves.
- Many people search and struggle for self-definition and their place in society.
- You can transcend your heritage and gender without following the footsteps of your ancestors.

13. Has anyone ever commented on your name (or someone you know)? What did he or she say? How did that comment make you feel?

Answers will vary.

14. Do you think people judge others based on their name? Why or why not?

Answers will vary.

15. Who is a relative you admire? What attributes do you wish to inherit from them, and which attributes would you change?

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