

“My Name” from *The House On Mango Street*, 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, song 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 Mexican, 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 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.

Directions: After reading the model essay by Sandra Cisneros, use the following prompts to guide you as you discuss the following questions with a cultural partner – a Moroccan with whom you can speak honestly and openly.

Both of you should answer these questions about your own names in your discussion with each other. Please take notes and be prepared to discuss in class:

1. What is the story behind your first/given name? Who named you? How and why was it chosen for you?
2. What people, places, events, things or ideas do you associate with your name? What does your name mean to others?
3. If you go by a nickname, did you choose it or did others? What is the story behind it?
4. What do you know about the history of your last name? Do you feel a connection to an ancestor who also had your last name?
5. How does your name represent and reflect who you are? What might/does your name mean to others? What does it hide?
6. How has your name identity evolved through your life?