



# Read to Me News

From Your Library & Idaho's Read to Me Program

## What's In a Name?

In most cultures names hold special meaning. They have the potential to reveal who we are and where we came from. Names are rarely given to children randomly, but rather are carefully chosen by their parents to honor family members, to imbue their children with a certain characteristic, and sometimes simply because the name itself possesses a certain beauty.

Naming customs vary from culture to culture. In many Jewish families it is traditional to choose a name that begins with the same letter as the family member who most recently passed away. In some cultures, children are given both an official name and a nickname at birth.

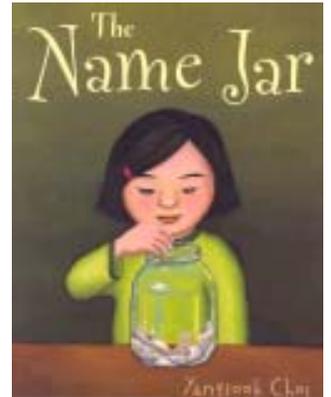
Members of the African American Gullah Community give their children both an English (American) name and a basket name. The word *basket* refers to the fact that the baby was given the name during the time spent in the cradle or basket. This basket name is usually chosen based on the circumstances of the baby's birth. For example, if the child was born on a Friday, the basket name could be *Friday*. In many cultures people are given the opportunity to choose a new name for themselves. In many Catholic cultures, for example, people chose a confirmation name, usually a saint's name.

People have strong opinions and feelings about names. Names are often a source of teasing. Having a name that is unique or uncommon can be a great source of embarrassment, but it also can be a great source of pride. Encourage your child to talk about why they like a certain name or why they find another strange or awkward.

- See page two for more ideas and activities

## Book of the Month

*The Name Jar*,  
by Yangsook Choi

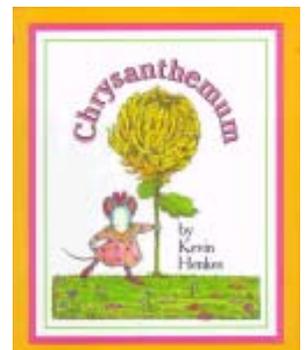
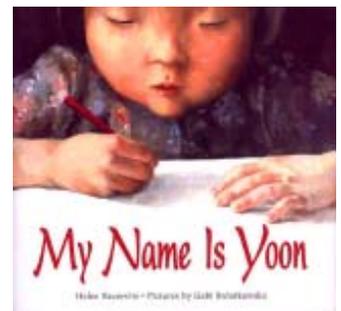


After Unhei moves from Korea to the United States she is teased by the children on the bus for her Korean name. When she reaches her classroom and is asked her name, she tells her classmates that she has not yet decided on one. To be helpful the children put their suggestions into a "name jar." Eventually she decides to keep her own name.

To read more about the author and learn more about her other books, visit [www.yangsookchoi.com/](http://www.yangsookchoi.com/).

### More Books about Names

- *My Name Is Yoon*, by Helen Recorvits
- *Andy, That's My Name*, by Tomie dePaola
- *A Porcupine Named Fluffy*, by Helen Lester
- *The Name Quilt*, by Phyllis Root
- *A Perfect Name*, by Charlene Costanzo
- *Four Boys Named Jordan*, by Jessica Harper
- *Chrysanthemum*, by Kevin Henkes



## What's in a name, continued

Together with your child, research the meaning of their first or middle name using any of these web sites -- [www.behindthename.com](http://www.behindthename.com), <http://www.hispaniconline.com/lstyles/family/babynames.html> (Latino first names).

Research the meaning of your last name (surname) using any of these web sites: <http://surnames.behindthename.com/>

Here's a few more web sites that may be fun to explore with your child:

**Baby Names** - <http://babynamer.com/>  
Learn more about the popularity of your name. The site includes names rising in popularity, those being used less, most frequent boys' and girls' names by year and state, etc.

**Social Security Administration** - <http://www.ssa.gov/OACT/babynames/index.html>  
The ten most popular baby names for every year since 1880 are included here.

**Find out Your Chinese Name** - <http://www.mandarintools.com/chinesename.html>

**Names from Many Cultures**  
<http://www.weddingvendors.com/baby-names/>

**Spanish Baby Name**  
<http://www.donquijote.org/culture/babynames/>

### Things to Talk About

- What do you like about your own name?
- Would you like to change it? Why or why not?
- Why do you think some people have middle names?
- Ask your child, "Do you think you would change if your name changed?"
- Talk about nicknames? Do members of your family have nicknames? How did they get started?
- After reading *The Name Jar*, talk with your child about ways to help someone who is new to this country feel welcomed and respected.

## More Activities!

Talk about why your child was given their name. Help your child write a story about how they got their name. Start the story with, "My name was my first gift from my parents . . ."

In the *Bantu Culture of Congo (Zaire, Africa)*, children are often given a "spirit" or secret name that no one else knows. Ask your child what they would name their spirit.



Talk about a "basket name" (see page 1) you may have given your child based on the day they were born. What day of the week were they born? What season was it? What was the weather like?

Do a Name Acrostic with your child. Taking each letter of child's name, list a special quality about your child that begins with that letter. See the example for Tad:

**T**errific  
**A**lways kind to animals  
**D**etermined

*Many of the ideas on this handout came from [www.cmhouston.org/Proj\\_Accel/New\\_files/Whats\\_In\\_a\\_Name\\_Teacher\\_Version.pdf](http://www.cmhouston.org/Proj_Accel/New_files/Whats_In_a_Name_Teacher_Version.pdf)*

## Celebrate Uniqueness!

Enjoy the uniqueness of everyone in the family. Encourage children to take pride in something they might feel sensitive about, such as having an unusual name, getting glasses or braces, having hair that is too curly or straight, or feet that are too big or too small.

Celebrate the accomplishments, individual talents, and newly-learned skills - and the unique specialness of each family member!