

IDENTITY

My Name

By Sandra Cisneros

Pre-Reading: Knowledge Rating Scale

Term	I have no idea what this means.	I think I know the meaning; I've heard this word before.	I know this word and can use it in a sentence.	Definition
hope				
muddy				
sobbing				
sack				
fancy				
chandelier				
inherit				

Pre-Reading: Anticipation Guide

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Opinion
I know what my name means.					
I know how I got my name.					
I know when I was born.					
I think that being born on a particular day, or in a particular month or year has great significance.					
I think "birth order" (how you rank in your family) is very important.					
I like my name. It suits me.					
Other people don't pronounce my name correctly.					

During Reading: Highlighting

My Name

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, 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 all her 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.

After Reading: Act Out

1. The author says that her name is like “the Mexican records my father plays on Sunday mornings when he is shaving, songs like sobbing.” Demonstrate what the father does and what it sounds like.
2. How does the author show the reader that her great-grandmother was a “wild horse of a woman?” Act out what the great-grandfather did to the great-grandmother.
3. The author says, “so many women sit their sadness on an elbow.” Demonstrate what that looks like.

After Reading: Discussion

1. How do these “scenes” from the story help the reader understand Esperanza’s emotional attitude toward her name?
2. What do you think about your name? Where does it come from? What does it mean?

After Reading: Internet Search

1. Look up your name on the Internet. Make a class chart of where your names come from and what they mean.
2. Look up the Chinese Zodiac on the Internet. What’s your animal sign? Do you think the animal characteristic has anything to do with your personality? What animal do you think you are most like?

After Reading: Write/Draw/Collage

Write a short story, a poem, a metaphor for your name and what you feel about it. Add a drawing and some pictures to create a collage. Include an animal that you think “represents” you. If you have a camera, take your picture and add it to your creation.

After Reading: Debrief

1. How did these activities help you understand the story? Which one did you like best?
2. What connections can you make between Esperanza, yourself, your classmates, and others?

Perfection

Perfection is a trifle dull. It is not the least of life's ironies that this, which we all aim at, is better not quite achieved.
W. Somerset Maugham

Skinny legs, bigger breasts
Is all they want to see
Tiny waists and thinner arms
The opposite of me.
The pressure to be perfect
Is slowly closing in
An utter suffocation
That doesn't seem to end.
Society is telling me
Beautiful is thin
And if I choose to starve myself
Perfection's what I win.
Shoving something down my throat
Will get me what I want
Bring me closer to that goal
Of a body I can flaunt.
Society is telling us
Beauty is a prize
Measured in the size of your breasts
In weight and clothing size.
But let me tell you here and now
No good will come from that
It seems okay at first
But soon becomes a trap.
A disease that clouds the mind
And believes what is untrue
Believes you're never good enough
No matter what you do.
Here is one beauty that I know
It's the greatest prize of all
It's learning to accept yourself
Imperfections, flaws, and all.
The beauty that really matters
Lies in our heart, our soul, our core
Because when you love what's inside
You love what's outside even more.

Brittany Steward

Read the poem. Make notes on ways in which your culture, your friends, or your family members demand perfection from you. Do you accept any of these? Do you resist? How do students respond to demands for society's ideals in schools?



What Words Describe You?

accommodating	likable
active	logical
adventurous	messy
affectionate	mixed up
agreeable	neat
blunt	nice
bold	nonconfrontational
brooding	nosy
calm	observant
careful	open
cautious	opinionated
challenging	optimistic
compassionate	orderly
competitive	outgoing
confrontational	patient
controlling	peaceful
cooperative	persuasive
curious	pessimistic
cynical	powerful
daring	precise
decisive	pushy
deep	quiet
determined	relaxed
diplomatic	reserved
direct	resilient
disciplined	sarcastic
distracted	sassy
easygoing	self-assured
efficient	sensitive
emotional	serious
empathetic	shallow
energetic	shy
excitable	silly
fair	steady
flexible	stubborn
focused	supportive
forceful	sympathetic
forgiving	tenacious
friendly	timid
funny	thorough
generous	thoughtful
goofy	tolerant
happy	trusting
helpful	trustworthy
imaginative	unassuming
impulsive	unconventional
independent	watchful
inquisitive	weird
kind	willful
lazy	

Make a Good First Impression



Like it or not, first impressions are very important, because once an opinion is formed about you, it's tough to change it. A bad first impression can follow you like a shadow, but so will a good first impression. If you give off a positive, friendly, upbeat image to the people you meet, that image feeds on itself and often leads to great experiences.

If there are people who act negatively toward you, think back to the first impression you gave them, and see if that may have influenced them. In fact, look closely at your first impressions. How do you present yourself to people? Are there things you can change? Here is a checklist of things that help make a good first impression. Look at the list for ideas, and use whatever you can to improve your first impression.

_____ A friendly attitude (extend a hand first; introduce yourself; have an open, inviting manner)

_____ A pleasant facial expression (smile; project warmth and sincerity; make eye contact)

_____ Good manners (address older people by the appropriate title, such a Mr. or Miss; use polite words; be respectful to others; don't interrupt when others are talking)

_____ A pleasant speaking manner (speak clearly and confidently; look at the person to whom you're speaking; avoid sarcasm, puns, and inside jokes; curb use of slang)

_____ Proper physical appearance (be clean; keep clothing neat; care for your skin and hair; have good posture and carriage)



Are there other ways to make a good impression? Think about it, and jot down any ideas that you might come up with.

Source: Carlson, R. (2002). *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff for Teens Journal*. NY: Hyperion.

“Make a Good First Impression” Vocabulary List

(first) impression

opinion

positive

negative

friendly

upbeat

image

checklist

improve

pleasant

project

sarcasm

puns

curb

carriage

jot down

Free Write

What Image Do You Portray?

How do you think people see you? How does what you wear, your body language and facial expressions influence how others see you? How do you think various people “see” you (i.e., peers, family members, strangers, co-workers, classmates, etc.)?

Yesterday

Yesterday knew all the answers
Or I knew my parents did.

Yesterday I had my Best Friend
And my Second Best Friend
And I knew whose Best Friend I was
And who disliked me.

Yesterday I hated asparagus and coconut and parsnips
And mustard pickles and olives
And anything I'd never tasted.

Yesterday I knew what was Right and what was Wrong
And I never had any trouble deciding which was which.
It always seemed so obvious.¹

But today. . .everything's changing.
I suddenly have a million unanswered questions.
Everybody I meet might become a friend.
I tried eating snails with garlic sauce—and I liked them!

And I know the delicate² shadings³ that lie between
Good and evil—and I face their dilemma.⁴
Life is harder now. . .and yet, easier. . .
And more and more exciting!



ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Jean Little was born in Taiwan in 1932. She later became a poet and a teacher of handicapped children. This selection is from a collection of her poems entitled *Hey World, Here I Am!*



--Jean Little



¹ **obvious** easy to understand

² **delicate** not easy to recognize

³ **shadings** small difference in degree

⁴ **dilemma** a difficult choice

“Yesterday” Vocabulary List

- | | |
|-------------|-----------------|
| yesterday | parents |
| best friend | dislike |
| asparagus | coconut |
| parsnips | mustard pickles |
| olives | obvious |
| snails | delicate |
| shadings | dilemma |

“Yesterday” After Reading Activity: Create a Dot Graph

Post a large piece of chart paper. Draw a line down the center. Label the left “Yesterday I Liked” with a picture of a little kid. Label the right “Today I Like” with a picture of a teenager. Have students share what they liked when they were little and make a list. Then, ask students to share what they like now. Give students two sticky dots. Have them place a dot next to their favorite activity as a child and their favorite activity today.

“Yesterday” After Reading Activity: Create a Poem

What are some things you were sure about, or liked or disliked, “yesterday?” What are some things that have changed for you “today?” Fill in the chart for yourself, then write a poem.

Yesterday	Today
	

My Identity

In-Group Identity List

Make a list of all the “groups” you belong to. This is private. You will be asked to find one thing you have in common with a classmate, and one thing that makes you different.

Think about your list. Are any associated with the following aspects of identity?

- race, ethnicity, culture
- age
- core values – the beliefs and things you care about
- general emotional state, personality and ideas you care about the most, attributes, temperament
- gender, sexual orientation
- friendship, partner relationship, family
- physical appearance, abilities
- avocational passions, hobbies, leisure, limitations, illnesses
- past or current socio-economic status
- past or current work status or profession
- intellectual qualities, interests
- country of origin, regional or community affiliation
- learning preferences
- past or current educational status
- political affiliation
- sense of humor
- any groups to which you belong by birth, family background, choice
- experiences of personal trauma



Is there anything you left off—too private to write down?

Create a Collage

Think about your journey to who you are. Using your schooling experiences, language learning activities, any travel, family influences, and groups you belong to, create a collage about yourself.

Finding Ones Self

A young woman trying to be independent finally hit the wall one day and went to her mother, telling her about life and how things were so hard for her. She did not know how she was going to make it, and planned to give up. She was tired of fighting and struggling. It seemed to her that just as one problem was solved a new one arose. Her mother, having listened with empathy as only mothers can, took her to the kitchen, and began curiously to fill three pots with water.

In the first pot, she placed carrots, in the second she carefully placed eggs, and in the last she placed ground coffee beans. She let them sit and boil merrily without saying a word.

Twenty minutes later she turned off the burners. She fished the carrots out and placed them in a bowl then pulled the eggs out and placed them in a bowl. Finally, she sieved the coffee out and placed it in a bowl.

Turning to her daughter, she asked, "Tell me, what do you see?"

"Carrots, eggs, and coffee," she replied.

Her mother brought her closer and asked her to feel the carrots, which she did, noting that they had become soft. She then asked her to take an egg and break it.

After pulling off the shell, she exposed the triple extra hard-boiled egg.

Finally, her mother asked her to sip the coffee. The daughter smiled, as she tasted its rich flavor, smelled the aroma and then asked, "What's the point, Mom?" Her mother explained that each of these objects faced the same adversity—boiling water, but each reacted differently. The carrot went in strong, brittle hard and unrelenting; however after being subjected to the boiling water, it softened and became weak. The egg had been fragile, its thin outer shell protecting its liquid interior, yet after being exposed to the boiling water; its inside became greatly hardened. The ground coffee beans however, were unique. After they were placed in the boiling water they changed the tormentor (the water), which then became an attractive beverage rather than being discarded.

"Which are you?" she asked her daughter. "When adversity knocks on your door, how do you respond? Are you a carrot, an egg, or a coffee bean?"

It is an interesting question, isn't it? Think about yourself for a moment. Which are you likely to be? Are you like the carrot that seemed so strong, yet with pain and adversity, find yourself wilting and losing your strength? Perhaps, yet I hope not!

Will you be like the egg that starts out its life strong on the exterior, yet with a malleable heart that changes when the heat is on? Would you become hardened and cynical after a tragedy, a breakup, a financial hardship or some other trial? Would your external appearance look the same, but on the inside would your spirit become so affected, that you become bitter with a hardened heart? I don't think you would admit to that either!

So what about the coffee bean? When the hours are the darkest and trials are their greatest, do you elevate to another level. Would you like to be the coffee bean when the heat is on in your life? The bean actually changes the hot water, the very circumstance that brings the torment. When the water gets hot, it releases the fragrance and flavor of the bean. If you are like the bean, when things are at their worst, you might appear to 'change gears' and enhance the situation and people around you.

I think we would all like to be like the coffee bean, yet if we are honest with ourselves there is probably a bit of all three inside each one of us. Surely the important thing is to acknowledge how we react in various life situations, and try to play to our strengths whilst minimizing our weaknesses. Unlike the Carrot, the Egg and the Coffee Bean, we CAN change who we are.

For example, if you don't like hospital visiting, either don't go, and instead become a regular phone-a-friend, or keep your visits short and sweet, always attending with company to ease the pressure you feel.

Another stressor for many is the business meeting. When you examine the reasons why, oftentimes it is the thought of having to speak in front of colleagues, or being called to account on/for some project or another. Now I know what I am about to say is a gross simplification, but it might help, and I can claim to be a bit of an expert in this area. Always be prepared. Do your homework and arrive in plenty of time. That way you have mentally rehearsed what 'might' happen and have a ready answer or informed opinion when approached. Recognizing your weakness is the first step in correction and cure.

In my lifetime I have observed many 'Carrots' in action, admiring their apparent tenacity in their chosen career/lives/relationships, only later to find they had to bail out. I have also witnessed many hard-boiled 'Eggs' being created. People who appeared as initially attractive and have, as a result of life events, become cynical and difficult to approach.

Knowing a 'Coffee Bean' is indeed a pleasure. Their spirits radiate approachability and love. We all know people who are like this: people whom we might think of as 'old souls.' They are few and far between, and are the kind of people who will be lifetime friends, spreading their positive influence over our own lives, if we let them.

Remember, becoming what we want to be is as much about knowing what we don't want to be, as it is taking the positive action to succeed in our dreams.

Pastor Ian www.pastorian.com