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SPARK

Choosing My Name

Grades 7–12

Type

Narrative

Social-Emotional Learning

In this Spark, students will further their understanding of how language can impact identity through the process of naming.

What Your Students Will Learn

Your students will analyze a poem for its literary techniques, using critical thinking skills.

What You Will Need

- Choosing My Name— Handout
- General writing supplies

What You Will Do

STEP 1 (10 minutes)

First, introduce Hawaiian author, Puanani Burgess' poem, "Choosing My Name." In this poem she explores her identity as a multi-racial, young woman growing up in Hawaii. She incorporates Hawaiian language into the poem to portray an image of her connection both to the land and her Hawaiian heritage. You will read the poem out loud, encouraging students to try and hear the subtext and determine how Burgess feels about each of her names. Pass out page 1 of the handout to students so they can read along with you, or make notes in the margins.

You will read the poem out loud twice: the first time pause to define the Hawaiian words as you come to them:

- kuroi = black
- 'aina = land
- piko = belly button
- kai = ocean

- po'e kahiko = ancestors

During the second reading, do not pause on the Hawaiian words, but ask students to underline important words, emotions, images, or stylistic devices on their copy.

After you have read the poem a second time, ask students to share their thoughts on the following questions:

- How does she feel about each name?
- Which words indicate her feelings?
- What is the cultural conflict in her family?
- How does she feel about being multi- cultural?
- What is the difference between her given names and the name she claims?

STEP 2 (15 minutes)

Next, pass out page 2 of the handout. Students will use lines of Burgess' poem to identify different names they have and use.

STEP 3 (10 minutes)

After students have finished brainstorming, give them time to free-write about the names they identified, or other names they might have that weren't prompted by the brainstorming questions.

STEP 4 (5 minutes)

Ask for volunteers to share any part of their free-write that they feel comfortable sharing.