

Choosing My Name

“Choosing My Name” is a poem written by Hawaiian author, Puanani Burgess. It can be found in her book, *Growing Up Local: an anthology of poetry and prose from Hawai‘i*.

Choosing My Name

By Puanani Burgess

When I was born my mother gave me three names.
Christabelle, Yoshie, and Puanani.

Christabelle was my “English” name.
My social security name,
My school name,
the name I gave when teachers asked me
For my “real” name, a safe name.

Yoshie was my home name,
My everyday name,
the name that reminded my father’s family
that I was Japanese, even though
my nose, hips, and feet were wide,
the name that made me acceptable to them
who called my Hawaiian mother *kuroi*,
a saving name.

Puanani is my chosen name,
My *piko* name connecting me to the *‘aina*
and the *kai* and the *po’e kahiko*
my blessing; my burden,
my amulet, my spear.



Puanani Burgess. Credit: PBS Hawaii

Hawaiian Word Definitions

- *kuroi* = black
- *‘aina* = land
- *piko* = belly button
- *kai* = ocean
- *po’e kahiko* = ancestors

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Use Puanani Burgess' poem to help you think of three of your own names to write about. Answer the prompts in the blank spaces of the chart below.

<p>"When I was born my mother gave me three names."</p>	<p>What is the history of a name? Does your name have any history attached to it?</p>	
<p>"My social security name, My school name"</p>	<p>What is a "safe" name? Do you have a safe name?</p>	
<p>"My everyday name, the name that reminded my father's family"</p>	<p>What is the family story behind this name? What is a home name? Do you have a home name?</p>	
<p>"Puanani is my chosen name, My <i>piko</i> name connecting me to the 'aina"</p>	<p>What is a chosen name? How can she choose it, if her mom gave it to her? What is your chosen name?</p>	