

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

Choosing My Name

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 ‘<i>aina</i>”</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>	