

Session 1: Mentor Texts

Below are the mentor texts needed for Sessions 1 and 4. Both pieces were written by student authors from 826 MSP.

My Family Interview

by Johnny Vasquez

My mothers word's burden me

My mother's name is Maria Vasquez and this is her story. Once my mom told me to sit down and hear what she had to say, I knew in my mind at least part of her life had to be painful to hear. She told me that she found a job at the age of 8 in Ecuador, where she grew up in a two-story house she had to clean and cook 24/7. Her boss paid her well and let her sleep in a room. She saved up her money her whole life and she enjoyed her job making tamales, cooking, cleaning. It was hard work for her. But also she told me that she didn't have a mother or father, but she had a sister. Her sister took care of her and she taught my mother how to clean but the sister died right before she found a job. This hurt her so much but was able to focus on work and she cried all the time.

My mother's words burden me when my mother finished talking about how hard she worked when she was a kid. She talked about the people she lost. She lost her father and mother in an accident and they were the only family members my mom had during the time when she was a kid. Her sister taught her many things and also disciplined her and helped her in a way. But then her sister died unexpectedly and she was left alone with no father, no mother, not even a sister, but she pulled through it. Then when she was in her late 30s, she got married to a person I didn't know. She loved him so much they even had a cat, a house, and everything but then everything changed. Her husband died in a car crash and she was alone again then she was forced to put the cat up for adoption because she couldn't take care of it anymore. She lost her job and she felt hopeless so she crossed the U.S.A. border for a new life.

My mother's words burden me at this point knowing what she went through all her pain. It saddens me, but I knew it was important for me to know so I continued then after finishing her tragic past. She told me that when she met my father in a bar. They talked and danced and got to know each other a few months later, my dad introduced me to my new mom. She became my stepmom, but we share an intimate mother-and-son relationship. What my mom told me next was that when I was little, I ran to her with open arms around her throat and kissed her cheek and she said by that point I stole her heart. From then on me and my step mom spent almost all the time together and I felt happy hearing it then she told me about how she wants my future for me. She wants me to finish high school, go to college, have a well paying job and marry someone I love and have kids and should visit her and all I could do was smile. Hard working, dedication, perseverance, pain, and here is what it takes to have value in life.

Discussion Questions:

- What did you learn about the writer from reading this essay?
- What do you think the writer inherited from their stepmom?
- Why do you think the writer chose to interview their stepmom?
- Is there a member of your family that you'd like to know more about? Why do you want to know more about them?

Session 1: Mentor Texts

Below are the mentor texts needed for Session One. Both pieces were written by student authors from 826 MSP.

My Name

by Ikra Abdi

I was born in the year of 2005 in Ethiopia, and I traveled a lot in Somalia. My name was, however, picked by my grandpa. My name has a beautiful meaning behind it. It means *read*. When I was a little girl, my whole name was different. It was spelled in Arabic like in the English version of the Quran. It was spelled *Iqra*, but today it is spelled *Ikra*.

Growing up was difficult because I didn't speak English, so every time I looked around, people were always glaring at me. I didn't know whether or not they were talking about me. I first lived in New York where I made many friends using my hands to talk; however, I always thought it was weird.

Although I didn't live like a wealthy person, I lived like a normal person. My parents worked a lot to provide me and my siblings a living. My parents always told me not to go outside. They were scared it was dangerous, like it was back home. I always argued with them, telling them that all people were not the same. Even though I never went outside, I looked out the window every day wondering how it was outside. It was a Thursday night when I heard my mom talking on the phone, saying that it was very dangerous out here in New York. Of course I wasn't happy. When I told people about my name, they thought it was weird because I was obsessed with my name. My name was used a lot back in the ancient days, our Prophet Muhammed (pbuh) was in danger at the time. Angel Jibril brought the Kitab or Quran to our Prophet (pbuh). The first page or in Arabic (surah) was Iqra in the whole entire Quran. My name is not only important because of the past history, but because my name is my identity and it shows who I am; I am IKRA ABDI.

Discussion Questions:

- What did you learn about the narrator from reading this essay?
- Why do you think the narrator's spells their name differently now?
- Why are names such an important part of who we are?
- Do you know what your name means or its origin?