



COE'S 2022 OPPORTUNITY MATTERS BOOK CLUB STUDENT ESSAYS



COUNCIL *for* OPPORTUNITY *in* EDUCATION

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Acknowledgments

The Council for Opportunity in Education is profoundly grateful for the engagement of the National Speakers during the 2022 Opportunity Matters Book Club. Their support of this initiative and encouragement of the participating students is greatly appreciated.



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Introduction

Building from the success of 2021's Good Trouble Book Club, COE again invited TRIO students to engage in discussions about how their lives are reflected in literature.

The featured book for 2022 was *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros (1984). Set in Chicago in the 1970s, Cisneros explores timely and important themes of individual identity, family and community loyalty, otherness, racial and sexual oppression, and being defined by others or defining oneself. She does this through a series of vignettes that, as she has written, "add up to tell one big story, each story contributing to the whole—like beads on a necklace."

TRIO programs across the country convened local book club chapters during the spring and summer of 2022. Clubs encouraged program participants to read and meet regularly to discuss the book. COE organized virtual talks by four nationally prominent individuals and registered book clubs engaged in discussions on important themes and ideas explored in the book. Featured speakers in the 2022 Book Club included English and Drama Teacher **Deloris Davis Grant**, Co-founder and Chief Executive Officer of Excelencia in Education **Deborah Santiago**, Chief Executive Officer at Barrio Logan College Institute **Sara Boquin**, and U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs Senior Advisor to the Under Secretary for Benefits **Julia Gusse**. Participating programs also engaged locally prominent individuals to facilitate some book club discussions.

This year, **Deloris Davis Grant**, a co-recipient of COE's 2018 TRIO Family Achievement Award, chaired our Book Club. Grant is an English and Drama teacher at Central Falls High School - the same school where she attended **Upward Bound**. During our kick-off conversation, she introduced an exciting feature to this year's book club experience, **a student essay challenge**.

Pre-Collegiate Adult/Undergraduate Essay Prompt:

Discuss the strongest imagery scene from any chapter in the book. How does this image invoke memories for you? Remember that an image that is strong appeals to any, some, or all of the five senses.

Pre-Collegiate Youth Essay Prompt:

Mimic the author and recreate your own "My Name" piece based on the chapter of the same name. Be creative! This is an opportunity to explore your personal history and pay homage to Sandra Cisneros.

From these prompts emerged the following student essays. For more information about other student opportunities from COE, visit coenet.org.

My Name BY RUTH AVELINO



In English, my name means grief. In the Bible, my name means good friend, and in Spanish, it has many meanings depending on how you look at it. Ruth is a combination of the names of my grandmother and aunt, and now it is mine. How can I make my name my own when it belongs to somebody else? I've always asked myself why I could not have a different name, something more unique to me. As I was growing up, I heard and saw many different names and constantly asked myself why that other name couldn't have been mine. I did not have many friends in school and spent most of my time alone. Boys didn't like me, and girls ignored my mere existence. That is why I have spent most of my teenage years searching for that one name I could call myself.

My grandmother was a lovely and peaceful person, whereas my aunt was a strict and hard-working woman. How was I supposed to top all those expectations? I did not know how to cook, dance, or sing. I barely stood out from the rest. I wanted my name to be recognized even for the silliest thing you could think of. The only thing my name was recognized from was the Bible. I did not want that, I wanted to make sure that every time someone heard my name, they would remember me for who I was. Even so, I am grateful that my name was prettier than my sister's name Virenia, which in my opinion, is way uglier than my name. Judging from her picks, I seriously think my mom has some type of issue picking names. I did not want a very exotic name, I just wanted one that could be mine and mine only. Just like Esperanza, I wanted a name more like the real me, the one that nobody else sees.

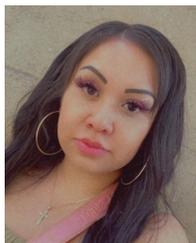
Time passed by, and I realized that, indeed, I was meant to be Ruth. That I was me and that the name I was given is the one that makes me who I am. It represents who I am and what I want to be, despite having the same name as my grandmother and aunt. I had decided to baptize the name as mine and only mine. I was going to give the name "Ruth" my meaning. I realized that my grandmother was a nice person and my aunt too, and I was just being silly and selfish about it since names can have more than one meaning behind them. Ruth also means stability and discipline; it is like I got snapped out of the shell I was living in and completely understood that maybe my name should not be labeled. I noticed that I could be anything I wanted to be, and it made me feel free to break free from all that labeling I had put myself into. It is a shame I spent so many years of my life hating such a pretty name like mine. Ultimately, I couldn't be more proud to be called Ruth.

Ruth Avelino

Upward Bound

UNIVERSITY OF PUERTO RICO, RIO PIEDRAS
San Juan, PR

The Beginning of the End BY GÉNESIS CORTÉZ



Her name means Hope in English, and too many letters in Spanish. Named after her great grandmother, Esperanza reluctantly accepted her name. For she, like me, did not understand the meaning of being given a name with such power that one can easily overlook it as just another name. Not wanting to be like her grandmother, who was stolen just to spend the rest of her life looking out the window. Esperanza would fight for herself not to be her great grandmother just as I fought not to be my mother.

My name signifies the beginning. Being the youngest of four children, I always found it ironic. It took time for me to realize the significance of my name. It wasn't for me but my mother, who was trying to find herself in the darkest hour. She found light in naming me, something I would share with her later in life. That is where I got it. The darkest hour triggered her inner turmoil that I couldn't comprehend as her child. That was until it happened to me. I became her, my mother, who I fought every ounce in me to not become. I did not want what happened to her to happen to me. Until what dimmed her light, the darkest hour ended up consuming me. I wanted the light that named me, Génesis, not the darkness that created me. My name means the beginning, ironically, it was the beginning of an end for my mother. If I had known, if she had told me what would happen, she could have prepared me. But how could she? Nobody prepared her. She never told me. For when it happened to me, there was no light left. Nobody could have prepared me, not even my mother. His name means God is gracious. As I died, Ian grew, and I learned to survive. She loved me the way I love him.

Regardless of the pain put upon us to create another life, innocence was stolen. The beginning of the end of my relationship with my mother became apparent as I prepared him for the truth. His name signifies God is gracious. He knows the truth, as I prepared him, for the darkest hour will not take his flame.

Génesis Cortéz

Student Support Services

TRUCKEE MEADOW COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Reno, NV

What Sally Said BY RIGOBERTO DELGADO



The vignette “What Sally Said” from Sandra Cisneros’ book, “The House on Mango Street,” revolves around cycles of trauma and abuse. In particular, it is how Esperanza notices the abuse that Sally endures at the hands of her father. “She’d say she fell... That’s why her skin is always scarred... But who believes her... a girl who comes in with her pretty face all beaten and black can’t be falling off the stairs. He never hits me hard.” Such imagery is very impactful because Sally is in middle school while enduring the very violent abuse from her father. No one, young or old, should have to experience abuse. Unfortunately, Sally and Esperanza brush it off as a common occurrence. This story seems all too familiar to people who are harmed or harm themselves in some way.

Reading this story dredged up unpleasant memories. The lines “But who believes her... a girl who comes in with her pretty face all beaten and black... He never hits me hard” reminded me of my friend Paige and her abusive boyfriend. Her eyes were red, tears on her cheeks, her voice shaking; it hadn’t been the first time. She kept saying, “He only hit me once; it wasn’t that hard.” Paige wouldn’t tell me the truth, but her bruises did. Black and blue all over, she couldn’t hide it this time, and so she had to tell me. When Sally said, “He never hits me hard,” I could not help but be reminded of my experience with Paige.

It wasn’t just memories of others the imagery brought up. It also reminded me of my own experience. “Who believes her... a girl who comes in with her pretty face all beaten and black can’t be falling off the stairs. He never hits me hard.” I get chills just thinking about it, my ears stinging, my scalp always hurting, the burning feeling of my hair getting torn out, the clink of the buckle, and the marks left by the leather. The haunting countdown to every hit in a voice that seemed not his own. Who was this man? Why was he belting me, yanking me around by the hair like I was an unruly dog on a leash? My mother didn’t believe me or made excuses for him. After all, who would she believe? My father or me?

Rigoberto Delgado

Upward Bound

BARRIO LOGAN COLLEGE INSTITUTE

San Juan, PR

My Name BY TIYONNA FERNANDORS



The House on Mango Street is a fantastic story. I learned a lot about Esperanza. Esperanza didn't like her name; her name meant sadness, waiting. She wanted to change her name and baptize herself under a new name. I researched her name, which means to hope, and it describes her as a strong girl who dreams big. Her name was her grandmother's name, and now it is her name. Esperanza's personality is unconfident, pessimistic, and naive; she is a shy girl. At the beginning of the story, Esperanza was happy, self-centered. At the end of the story, she becomes responsible and hard-working. She also struggles with her culture and the nun that made her feel ashamed at school.

My Name is Tiyonna and I like my name. My name means a lot to me because this will be my name forever. I will have this name forever, and I will never change it. My name means a lot to me because the meaning of my name is pride and strength. It describes me as an intelligent girl, independent, an A- and B- student, a fearless woman, kind, caring heart. My name is unique.

My name is of Jamaican origin and means princess. My mom named me Tiyonna for a reason, and my name has a deeper meaning. I have nicknames like Tiy, Tliy, Tt, Tiy Wow, funny nicknames my family calls me. I don't get ashamed when they call me them. I love my name and am grateful for it because it is also an American name.

My name is important to me because it describes my identity and is a name someone can call to get my attention. It also carries cultural, familial, and historical connections. Everyone needs a name because if there weren't names, it would be different, and you would have to have different ways to get people's attention. Names are important to our community and our people. Everyone has meaning to their name.

Tiyonna Fernandors

Talent Search

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

College Park, MD

My Name BY LUIS FUENTES



Over a decade ago, a young Mexican woman went into labor on a hot summer day. The result was a small baby boy with rounded cheeks and short blond brown hair; this baby boy is me. My mother decided to give me the name Luis, a male name of Spanish origin. However, she wasn't the one who thought of the name; in reality, my elder brother had initially suggested it. He thought it would be a suitable name for his younger brother, and my mother agreed. She also believed it would be a name I could learn with little to no difficulty, given how it's only made up of four simple letters. Additionally, my mother prefers to give us unique names that aren't already in the family, she kept this tradition with all her children.

As I've grown, I've met other boys with the same name. Usually, it didn't affect me at all, other than getting confused whenever a teacher would say the name and neither of the two Luis would know which they're referring to. One of the times I particularly enjoyed, the other Luis and I played tennis. Whenever we'd play together, we had a saying, "Two Ls make a W," while both of us made an L with our thumb and index finger and then put our thumbs together. Eventually, this became our routine, and since we were both good, we often bested our opponents, enabling our matching names to be something we were even more proud of.

That leads to the meaning of the name Luis; the name has the meaning of "famous warrior;" I would say the name has applied to who I am as a person.

First, the meaning can be split into famous and warrior, which can translate to being well-known and a type of fighter. At school, I'm pretty well-known because I am involved in several different groups at school, and I have met a wide range of people. I've met even more individuals by making connections with friends and new friends. As for being a fighter, I've faced great adversities throughout my life and have overcome them thanks to my desire to move forward and be a solid example for others. Additionally, a samurai is a type of fighter, these fighters have a code of honor and guidelines they dedicate their lives to. I, too, have my own set of rules I will always remain true to, such as helping others when I can and being always dignified.

Basically, throughout my life, my name has been like a badge of honor to me. Though it may have felt a bother at first due to its commonality, my life experiences have turned my name into something I can be proud of.

Luis Fuentes

Upward Bound

TARRANT COUNTY COLLEGE

Fort Worth, TX

My Name BY MIGUEL MANRIQUEZ, JR.



My name has two different versions in two languages. Michael and Miguel, despite being one of the most common names, fits perfectly with most of the people bestowed this name. Most Michaels or Miguels that have crossed my path have been somebody who I noted as being immediately likable and humble, with there being a few exceptions.

My dad's name is Miguel. Miguel Angel. In English, it sounds off, as if it's not meant to be together. In Spanish, the name just rolls off of your tongue like water. It's calming and soothing as if the names were supposed to be paired together. It even fits whenever my mom yells it across the house.

Most Mexicans pair Miguel with Angel. I'm pretty sure it signifies where the name came from, San Miguel Archangel, being one of the three archangels, along with Gabriel and Raphael. In Catholicism, he protects us from the snares of the Devil.

Personally, I think the name Miguel fits me. Hopefully, I don't sound arrogant, but I think that I fit the stereotype of most Miguels. Someone compassionate. Someone who anyone can like. Giving is one of the many loving purposes which drives him forward. Someone generous with their time. One day when my dream of being a father has come true, I will name my son after my family's name and guide him on a path that will cause an impact on the world.

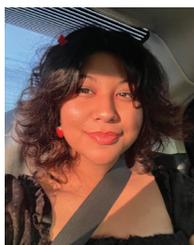
Miguel Manriquez, Jr.

Upward Bound

TARRANT COUNTY COLLEGE

Fort Worth, TX

My Name BY JIROMI PENA



My name has no meaning as it is spelled differently than its origin, leaving me to create a meaning for its spelling. The original spelling is “Hiromi,” which in Japanese stands for “abundant beauty.” Although this is the spelling of my name, I don’t feel beautiful, and I don’t feel like I have an abundance of it. I have always felt like the odd one, similar to a skittle in a bowl of M&M’s. We may all have similar facial features, but I feel different from those around me at my core. It is as if the abundant beauty I could have been was destroyed because of how my name is spelled.

However, my father was proud to have a sweet baby girl. He took the name from a Mexican Japanese-born singer, “Hiromi Hayakawa.” When I analyze Hiromi Hayakawa, I can see her abundant beauty, yet when I look at my reflection in my mirror, I cannot see the same within myself. Additionally, she is talented, a singer and an actress, and she was able to do both as a star in Mexico. Although you could hypothetically say that just like Hiromi Hayakawa, I can act as my face displays thousands of different emotions to fool those around me.

As a young girl with noticeable ethnic features, I am fetishized by the older men around me and those younger who simply view me as an object they can touch as they please. I wish I were finished growing and developing so that the way men looked at me had a minimal justification because I was of age instead of being a child. I was only 15 when I was asked for my hand in marriage for the fifth time by someone older for them to receive their permanent citizenship. Although I did not have the appearance of a little girl, in my soul, I felt like I was still a little girl living her childhood even though the eyes of many forced me to mature at an age that I shouldn’t have had to.

All these eyes gazed at me, examining each crevice of my body, while a few ignored the bright “Do Not Touch” sign in front of me. Like Esperanza, it was a traumatizing experience, including people who told me, “I love you.” Some of these people were strangers, and some were friends with whom I had carefully placed my trust.

However, this trauma does not ruin my name, nor does it change its meaning, as I know my value as a human being. I wonder if life would have been different if my name was “Hiromi” instead of “Jiromi.” Yet, I know that no matter what spelling my name has, I will continue to be an abundance of beauty and bloom until I get picked from the crowd to succeed.

Jiromi Pena

Upward Bound

UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA LAS VEGAS

Las Vegas, NV

My Name, My Identity BY LORENZO RODRÍGUEZ



"Words have meaning, and names have power." - Unknown

Do any of you like your name? Are you proud that you are named the way you are? Well, I certainly am. My name is Lorenzo. A simple name, right? No more than seven letters. It is not a name that needs to be spelled to know how to write it. As it turns out, some individuals don't know that Lorenzo is spelled with a z and not an s. Putting that aside, I think that names are the foundation of someone's personality. I am not taking into consideration middle names because ninety-nine percent of the people I know either don't like them or don't use them. My name was created in Rome, which means Coronado de Laureles, which means victorious. Also, my name can be used as a last name. Knowing the meaning of my name gives me confidence in achieving things in my life. The point is that, even if you do not like your name, you must figure out its origins and meaning and might even end up liking it more. In summary, I like my name because it is unique, and I have never met another boy with the same name in my fifteen years of life.

I'm glad I am named Lorenzo. This name makes me feel empowered. Sometimes, I feel that my name has more presence than I do. It makes me feel like someone important. But I believe when my mom was searching for a name for her firstborn, she chose the name that fit me the best. Many people have told me that my name is the name of a poet or a writer. Even though I would not like to be any of those things, I am proud that my name gives off that artistic vibe. My mother is a woman who persevered when her dreams seemed impossible. She is a teacher and a mother of two kids who raised them alone. My mother's name is Leisa. She decided to name me Lorenzo because of a character in a Spanish movie. Also, because both of our names start with the letter L. I look up to her, and someday I would like to be as hardworking and passionate as she is.

Everyone's name is unique, it is the first impression people have of you. It's what makes you, YOU! Don't let the stereotypes get to you, even if you might have a common name or if that name has a reputation or something else. I encourage you not to let it get to you! Be proud of your name and what it means to you. Do not pay attention to what other people think of you. A name is a powerful weapon. It changes how people perceive you! So, do not take it for granted and always be proud of your name, for it is part of your identity.

Mc Millen, Marly. *"Name Quotes."* NamelyMarly, 2022, <https://namelymarly.com/name-quotes>.

Lorenzo Rodríguez

Upward Bound

UNIVERSITY OF PUERTO RICO, RIO PIEDRAS
San Juan, PR

My Name BY ANAHI SANCHEZ



I do not have a name—I have two. I have two names, two groups of people, and two identities. One name belongs to the group of warm hugs and loud praises from my family's every summer visit to Mexico, obligatory rounds of firm handshakes and direct eye-contact greeting every visitor, and heaping tablespoons of salsa so full that spills trail paths to everyone's plates. It is a reminder that all my sacrifices are worth it.

To this group, I am known by my Real name. The name was curated by months of recommendations amid excited sharing of news and attentive observations in the hopes of inspiration. Meticulously selected to be as soft and feminine as a blooming pink rose, it is a sweet melody so often paired with love shining in the eyes of my family and smiles radiating from their mouths. Wind chimes sing as they greet the summer breeze; each syllable melts into the next to create a bright crescendo. "Anahi" is not just a word, not a label. To me, it is a melody that calls me to those who make me feel safest.

The other group is different. It is hand cramps from attentive notetaking during classes, friends I can never quite seem to get as close to as I should, and seemingly unappetizing but not-that-bad school lunches. It is all stress, hopes, dreams, and endless typing and writing.

To this group, I am known by my Other name. The name was born after a couple of seconds of furrowed eyebrows and a grasping tongue, confused about how to gurgle out the sound the letters of my name indicated. It was the creation of my kindergarten teacher the day we met. My teacher, appearing soft and inviting, was nearly indistinguishable from the grandmas of classic fairytales. Her stout body and curls, wispy, short, and white, as though she had glued cotton to her head, created excitement in initiating the adventure of my new school, an effect ruined when I met the barks of the wolves, confusing me and making me understand the importance of successes in my new endeavor. This group's ambush of noise I could not understand would make my journey difficult, beginning with their pivotal first word.

The unfamiliar sound that escaped my teacher's lips left my mind blank until she said, "Oh, what pretty name you have," with "name" being the only word I understood. The timid, unsure nod I made would decisively mark the birth of my Other name and my struggle in this group to reach the house at the end of the woods, where my appearance set me apart as clearly as any red cape would. A house where learning, security, and helping family is possible.

My life with each group is a distinctive movie, one an impressionist film full of beauty and care-free childish fantasies and the other a realistic piece of a girl's eagle-sharp focus on achieving her dream, full of opportunities her family never had.

Anahi Sanchez

Upward Bound

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

My Name BY DAYALI SANCHEZ



Three syllables, six letters, and an infinite number of mispronunciations. Every year is the same conversation, just with a different face. “It’s Day-oli, not Day-yali,” I tell my PE teachers, math teachers, orchestra instructors, and even the elderly couple next door who have been my neighbors my entire life, but even then, it’s still not correct. As far back as my memory goes, I have been an unwilling participant in the never-ending battle to win recognition of my name. A place where people call out “Day-oli” is one I hope to conquer, but even that would not be a complete victory. The promised land my parents envisioned was one in which I would be called “Da-ya-lee,” my birth-given name.

Throughout the entirety of my mother’s pregnancy, my parents were avid watchers of the Latin equivalent of Ms. Universe, Nuestra Belleza Latina. One competitor, in particular, stood out to them for her graceful beauty, charismatic disposition, and clever mind. She was everything they hoped to raise me to be. Dayami Padrón, the pageant’s runner-up in the 2008 airing, would ultimately become the inspiration for my name. However, they did not want it to be a carbon copy, as they wanted me to grow into my unique person. They did not want me to grow to be her, they wanted me to value the admirable qualities that allowed her to excel. Therefore, my dad suggested they alter the ending to better fit my older sisters’ names. With my mother’s eager approval, “mi” became “li,” then, my father pointed out enthusiastically, it would sound like a melody, “Natalie, Anahi, Dayali!”

Maybe they sound a little too similar to each other, because, alongside the everlasting quest of correcting teachers when they mispronounce my name, distinguishing myself and my name from my sisters’ seems to challenge me every year. Teachers and adults seeing me as not my person but as an extension of them can give me advantages, but often their association brings about demanding expectations. Whether it be the first day of school or the last, when teachers call for me, it rarely is my name that they say. Comments such as “I hope you’re just like your sisters” and “I know you’ll be just as smart and dedicated as your sisters” feel more like burdens rather than words of encouragement as they were intended to be.

Whether it be the wrong name or the wrong pronunciation, I know it is very probable that I will be battling for my name for a long time. However, I also know with certainty that I will remain persistent in my journey to the promised land. My name represents me; I am not a representation of my name.

Dayali Sanchez

Upward Bound

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

Manhattan, Kansas

My Name BY EVELYN SANCHEZ SANTIAGO



Evelyn, a name initially given to boys, was officially gifted to me on October 23, 2006. Many things contributed to my wrong opinion of my name, but the thing that hit me was how people said and spelled it wrong. E-v-e-l-y-n six letters that I thought were too simple turned out to be too complex for others. When people spelled my name like Evelin, Evilin, or Evlyn; it made me feel ashamed that no one could spell it right. Teachers taking roll was always dread for me. There was always a teacher that got it wrong. “Eeveleen,” “Eileen,” and “Elyn” are the most common. I hated my name for a while, wishing I could change it to something else, until the 6th grade when I learned about nicknames.

Nicknames are a way for someone to temporarily change their name to an abbreviation of their given name. I did not have any nicknames, but others gave me nicknames. Eve, Eevee, Lyn, Ev, E. They never stuck. I gave up on having a nickname, thinking I would always be “Evelyn.” A year later I finally found my nickname. “Eleven” was a simple nickname that held so much meaning. It did not alter what I thought about my original name; maybe I even liked it because it sounded so much like it. It wasn’t because it was a number; the reason that I liked it was because it was the first ever nickname that I genuinely liked and stuck with me for so many years.

Back then, I did not realize that my name was so much more than I thought it was. As a child, I always wanted a complex name with “more than 8 letters.” I had a mindset that “special” names were long and had a variety of letters. The day that someone suggested I search up my name was unique. It was a change that affected me and turned me into the person I am today. “Evelyn, a name meaning like beauty or beautiful bird, has a background as lovely as she is” (Mama Natural). When I read that, my thinking changed completely. I finally understood that I shouldn’t hate my name, I should learn to embrace it and make it my own. Since then, my name has been a part of me that I wouldn’t change for the world.

My name is now a part of me that I would not change for the world. I may not have liked my name at first, but I am glad that I took the time to look into it and research it before I resented it forever. Evelyn, Evelyn Sanchez, Evelyn Sanchez Santiago. Three words, different meanings, all of me. I don’t resent my mother or father for giving me this name. Instead, I thank them for giving me the privilege of carrying it.

Evelyn Sanchez Santiago

Upward Bound

UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA LAS VEGAS

Las Vegas, NV

My Name BY YESENIA SANCHEZ



By definition, my name means flower, but my name means to triumph. When asked what the definition of my name is, I say flower, many think it is cute and simple. But no one has ever asked me what I want my name to mean. When someone hears my name, I want them to think of triumph, yes, perfect. Triumph is a great success, and no, it is not “Yes-ee-neya” like the substitute teachers would call me when filling out attendance and not “Julie’s younger sister” or “Evelyn’s older sister.” It is also not that funny face teachers make that resembles someone eating a lemon when trying to pronounce my name. It used to embarrass me, but now it gives me great pride to create something and rewrite a dictionary. So the next time someone asks me what my name means, I will say: My name is Yesenia, it means flower, but most importantly, it means triumph, my future, and present.

Yesenia Sanchez

Upward Bound

UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA LAS VEGAS

Las Vegas, NV

Mis Nombres BY EDUARDO VILCHIS

Eduardo. Lalo. I go by both. To one particular person, I also go by “how.” Yes, just like the word used frequently in questions. You see, my 2-year-old niece is someone I care for so much, someone who can only speak a few words. Those words include my siblings’ names (her uncles), candy, food, ama, apa, and most importantly, “how.” Every day she goes around the house, screaming and yelling my name, “how!” To be honest, I don’t know where she got that name from; it was something out of the blue, but I grew fond of the name; it makes me feel different and unique compared to her other uncles.

My names represent my culture, my heritage, where I come from, and my roots. I don’t consider myself to be your “average” Hispanic teenage young man. Most people usually go by one name, not me; to most friends and family, I go by Lalo, and it is only Eduardo when I’m in trouble at home or in a “professional” setting.

Eduardo. You would think that a name like this would not be hard to pronounce, but you’d be surprised how many people mispronounce my name. I think it has more to do with the fact that some people can’t roll their r’s, and it’s the r that they fail to pronounce. Nonetheless, they at least try to pronounce it, and that’s all that matters. Since we’re on the topic of names, let’s talk about my last name, “Vilchis.” In my culture, you typically see last names like Ramirez, Hernandez, Martinez, and Garcia, to name a few. Vilchis, according to Google, comes from Southern Spain. It seems pretty fancy if you ask me. What’s not so fancy is the way most people “try” to pronounce it. I’ve heard “Bilchez,” “Vilchez,” “Bilchis,” and many more. There are two ways I pronounce it “Vil-chiz ” (like the word bill but with a v) in English and “Veel-cheese” in Spanish, but the “Veel” part is not like “feel” instead, the double “e” is emphasized, if that makes sense. The pronunciations might seem a bit complicated, but it’s not, and at least I don’t have two or three other last names to pronounce. Though part of me would like multiple last names like others, I’m grateful for my last name.

Eduardo Vilchis*Upward Bound*

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Born Yellow BY DAISY VILLA



In the chapter titled “Born Bad,” Esperanza is faced with the reality of death as a young girl, much like I was. She watched as her once beautiful and cheerful aunt withered away from her illness. It is not easy to see a loved one suffer in that way, and by no means is it easier for a child that may not understand that reality. Moreover, it is shocking to realize that “diseases have no eyes,” and they may afflict anyone at any time. To cope with this sudden shift in perspective, she resorts to a game that leaves her guilt-stricken for being insensitive towards her sickly aunt. From this encounter with death Esperanza also develops a sense of guilt for her actions. In her case, guilt has driven her to condemn herself to hell and believe she truly deserves to be there. This guilt has her questioning, “who decides who deserves to go bad?” This is a question I have asked myself many times before, and as a child, I looked to the dusty volumes of literature housed on ornate shelves for the answer. Within those ivory pages, I found no response that was enough for me. It wasn’t until I experienced so many moments bathed in remorse, the color of yellow. No one decides who deserves to go bad.

I don’t have to imagine what it is like to be in that room. I was there, just like Esperanza was. I remember how the sunlight streaming through the window always seemed dimmer than the rest of the house. How the dust waltzed through the air delicately like snow and how the air hung heavy with that same yellow smell. The ivory pictures on the wall display life coming to an end. The last memories of my grandfather in that amber room. The place where he spent his final year of life was suspended in time. Stuck in a somber resemblance of a snow globe.

Some claim we are born bad. Others claim we are born on an evil day and were born cursed. I believe we are born into this world as every other creature, a blank slate. A new beginning. A new life. The answer is not found in the pages of a book or the words of a preacher. Instead, it lies in ourselves. We are the makers of our fate and decide our guilt alone.

Like death, guilt is a sobering affliction in life that is feared and hidden away. It is an inherent part of life. One that colors the backdrop of our lives. It is a weight that cannot be shouldered indefinitely but can be transformed into a renewing force. The guilt I once carried has been reformed into an uplifting reminder. Life is full of yellow. The color I once despised now stains the beautiful moments of my life with a gentle shade of forgiveness.

Daisy Villa

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