

Preliminary Activity Option 1: Exchanging Name Stories

Adapted from EdChange Multicultural Pavilion by Paul Gorski
www.edchange.org/multicultural/activities/name.html

This activity helps bring the stories of individuals to the fore within the multicultural experience. It is appropriate both for groups that are getting to know one another for the first time and groups that have been working together for a longer period.

Ask participants to write short pieces about their names. Leave the assignment open to individual interpretation as much as possible, but if asked for more specific instructions, suggest some or all of the following possibilities for inclusion in their stories:

- **Who gave you your name? Why?**
- **What is the ethnic origin of your name?**
- **What are your nicknames, if any?**
- **What do you prefer to be called?**

Encourage participants to be creative. In the past, some have written poetry, included humor, listed adjectives that described them, etc. Also, be sure to let them know that they will be sharing their stories with the rest of the class.

Facilitator Notes:

In order to ensure that everybody has an opportunity to share her or his story, break into diverse small groups of 8-10 if necessary. Give participants the option to either read their stories or to share their stories from memory. Ask for volunteers to share their stories.

Points to remember:

1. Because some individuals will include very personal information, some may be hesitant to read them, even in the small groups. It is sometimes effective in such situations for facilitators to share their stories first. If you make yourself vulnerable, others may be more comfortable doing the same.
2. Be sure to allow time for everyone to be able to speak, whether reading their stories or sharing them from memory.
3. When everyone has shared, ask participants how it felt to share their stories. Why is this activity important? What did you learn?

Sample:

My full name is Tasanee Jitprasert. Tasanee means “beautiful view.” My parents wanted to pick a name for me that would sound lovely. Even though Tasanee is my first name, my friends and family mostly call me Noi. Noi is my nickname. In my culture, it’s common for everyone to have a short, fun nickname. Noi means little, and I was so tiny when I was born, that’s what they picked.

Having a long unusual name and a totally different nickname has always confused the teachers and new kids on the first day of school. When we were littler, I’d tell kids that Noi rhymes with Boy, but I got teased because I wasn’t a boy. Now, my friends call me either name, mostly Noi. It’s hard for them to say “Tasanee” but they’re pretty close. They like me and they like my name. Or, I should say, they like my names. Tasanee and Noi.