

**AIM:****Why are names important to us?***Instructional Objectives:*

Students will be able to:

1. explain the social and historical significance of their own name;
2. explain why different groups of Americans see their names as important;
3. identify and explain the social and historical significance of different names.

*Motivation:*

Play the recording of Ruby Dee reading the Langston Hughes poem, "The Census Man."

When it is finished, ask: Why in the poem did Alberta K. Johnson refuse to allow the census name to record her name improperly?

(It is important to have students elucidate their understanding. For example, an answer "because that is the name her mother gave her," should be followed up with further questions asking students to think about why the character Albert K. Johnson felt so strongly about the name her mother gave her, such as "And why is using the name her mother gave her important to her?")

*Lesson Development:*

<i>Contents</i>	<i>Questions</i>
1. Names – particularly first (given) names – represent our individuality and dignity as a person.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. (Have a student read aloud Reading 2.) In this reading, the young boy named Norman says "I don't know who he is, but he know me." What did he mean by that statement?</li><li>* (Have a student read aloud Reading 3.) In this reading, Maya Angelou's character Margaret breaks the dishes of her employer. Why does she consider this action to be a victory over her employer?</li><li>* How would you feel if you were called by the same name as other students? If you were identified by a number?</li></ol>
2. Names – particularly last (family) names – represent our ties of kinship, our relationships with family and tradition and our links to the past.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>2. (Have a student read aloud Reading Four.) Why would enslaved African-Americans, a people whom had had no family names in West Africa (like many peoples in many traditional societies), take secret last names in the South? Why would many enslaved African-</li></ol>

	Americans insist upon keeping the family name of their first owner?
3. Ask students to report on/read the previous night's homework on their names. As appropriate draw out the following points below.	
4. <i>Social and Historical Origins of Names</i> <b>African American Names</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Took names to celebrate new status of freedom: Freedman, Freeman, Justice, Lincoln, Grant, Washington.</li> <li>Took African names: Cudjoe (name for African male born on Friday) or Phoebe (from Phiba/Phibbi -- African female born on Friday.)</li> </ol> <b>Other Names</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Took last names of skills of which they were proud: Taylor, Mason, Wheeler, Carpenter, Smith, Shoemaker.</li> <li>Names derived from Father: John/son, O'/Connor, Mac/Donald, William/s.</li> <li>Names changed upon immigration in attempts to Americanize names by shortening long family names.</li> </ol>	4.

*Summary/Application:*

Why would Nazis give people they brought into their concentration camps a number which replaced their names? Why would they brand that number onto a person?

## On Names

### Reading One:

The census man,  
The day he came round,  
Wanted my name  
To put it down.

I said, JOHNSON,  
ALBERTA K.  
But he hated to write  
the K that way.

He said, What  
Does K stand for?  
I said, K ---  
and nothing more.

He said, I'm gonna put it  
K -- A -- Y.  
I said, If you do,  
You lie.

[Langston Hughes, "*Madam and Census Man*"]

My mother christened me  
ALBERTA K.  
You leave my name  
Just that way!

He said, Mrs.,  
(With a snort)  
Just a K  
Makes your name too short.

I said, I don't  
Give a damn!  
Leave me and my name  
Just like I am!

Furthermore, rub out  
that Mrs., too --  
I'll have you know  
I'm *Madam* to you!

### Reading Two:

In Darien, Georgia, a kindly patriarchal planter and renowned Presbyterian minister spoke to a little black boy: "Howdy John" -- he was too sensitive to call him "Sambo." "My name is Norman, sir." As the patriarch and his son-in-law, who later told the story, passed on, they heard someone ask Norman who the old man was. "I don't know who he is," he replied, "*but he know me.*"

[From Eugene Genovese's *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made.*]

### Reading Three:

(One of Margaret's employers, a Mrs. Cullinan, refuses to call the young black girl by her proper name: "That's too long. She's Mary from now on.") For a week I looked into Mrs. Cullinan's face as she called me Mary. She ignored my coming late and leaving early... Then Bailey solved my dilemma. He had me describe the contents of the cupboard and the particular plates she liked best. Her favorite piece was a casserole shaped like a fish and the green glass coffee cups... When I heard Mrs. Cullinan scream, "Mary!" I picked up the casserole and two of the green cups in readiness. As she rounded the kitchen door I let them fall on the tiled floor... Mrs.

Cullinan cried louder, "That clumsy n\*\*\*\*\*. Clumsy black little n\*\*\*\*\*." Old speckled face leaned down and asked, "Who did it Viola? Was it Mary? Who did it?" Everything was happening so fast that I can't remember whether her action preceded her words, but I know what Mrs. Cullinan said, "Her name's Margaret, god-damn it, her name's Margaret!" And she threw a wedge of the broken plate at me... I left the door wide open so that all the neighbors could hear. Mrs. Cullinan was right about one thing. My name wasn't Mary.

[From Maya Angelou's *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings*]

#### Reading Four:

It greatly surprised the Mississippi plantation girl Susan Dabney that her family's slaves had surnames. A servant took her to see the older woman's brother marry. "I heard her address him as Mr. Ferguson," she remembered years later, "and at once asked, 'Mammy, what makes you call Henry Mr. Ferguson?' 'Do you think 'cause we are black that cyarn't have no names?' was Mammy's indignant reply." Susan Dabney learned a social fact that remained hidden from most nineteenth century slaveowners and other whites. Many slaves had surnames; and they often differed from the surnames of those who owned them, a fact unknown to most whites before and after emancipation.

[From Herbert Gutman's *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom.*]