

## Guide to:

# *The Name Jar*

Written and illustrated by Yangsook Choi

**Publisher:** Random House  
Children's Books

**Publication Date:** 2003

**Language:** English

**ISBN-10:** 9780440417996

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**Genre:** Fiction

**Lexile:** AD590L

**Guided Reading Level:** N

**Grade Level:**  
Preschool – Grade 2

**Featured Country of Origin:**  
Korea

**Themes:** Names, belonging,  
friendship, first day of school



### **Publisher's Synopsis**

Being the new kid in school is hard enough, but what happens when nobody can pronounce your name? Having just moved from Korea, Unhei is anxious about fitting in. So instead of introducing herself on the first day of school, she decides to choose an American name from a glass jar. But while Unhei thinks of being a Suzy, Laura or Amanda, nothing feels right. With the help of a new friend, Unhei will learn that the best name is her own. From acclaimed creator Yangsook Choi comes the bestselling classic about finding the courage to be yourself and being proud of your background.

### **What we love**

This delightful story encourages students to develop respect for self and respect for others. Many students will relate to Unhei's nervousness on the first day of school and desire to fit in, along with her internal conflict about being true to herself. With beautiful illustrations and clear prose, it makes for an excellent read aloud.

### **Background**

Names are a vital part of identity and closely tied to cultural backgrounds. Research shows that pronouncing names correctly increases students' sense of belonging and psychological safety, while mispronouncing, changing and avoiding saying students' names can have lasting negative effects. Learn more at <https://www.mynamemyidentity.org/>

### **Pronunciation and Vocabulary**

- Unhei: Pronounced "OON-hye"
- Kimchi: Pronounced "KIM-chee"
- Identity: Who or what a person is
- Relieved: Thankful or no longer anxious
- Greet (Greeted): To say hello
- Scrunching: To squeeze, to wrinkle or become marked with lines
- Blush: To get red in the face from embarrassment
- Sprinkling: To rain lightly
- Grooves: Long narrow cuts or indentations
- Chant (Chanted): To say or shout repeatedly
- Announce (Announced): To speak or give information aloud
- Remember (Remembered): To recall information that you already knew

## The Name Jar (continued)

### Pre-reading Focus Questions

- Do you know the meaning of your name and/or why it was chosen for you?
- Has anyone ever had trouble pronouncing your name? If yes, how did you feel when you had to correct them?
- How do you feel when someone asks about your name? Why do you feel \_\_\_\_\_?
- Were you nervous on your first day of school? How might you feel on your first day of school in a new country?

### Extension/Higher Level Thinking

- How did Unhei's feelings toward her name change throughout the story?
- What did you notice about the children on the bus compared to the children in the classroom? How do you think these differences affected Unhei?
- Why was the gift from Unhei's grandmother so important? Think of an item in your life that holds special memories or provides you comfort. Describe a time this item made you feel a bit better when you were sad or nervous.
- What do you think the author wants the reader to learn from the story *The Name Jar*?

### Interdisciplinary

This story can be connected to culturally responsive instruction and social studies units on building community and family traditions.

#### About the Book Author/Illustrator (from publisher)

Yangsook Choi grew up in Seoul, Korea. She has written and illustrated several books for young readers, including *The Sun Girl and the Moon Boy* (written) and *Good-bye, 382 Shin Dang Dong* (illustrated). The first book she illustrated, *Nim and the War Effort* by Milly Lee, was an ALA Notable Book and an IRA-CBC Children's Book Award Winner.

### After-Reading Discussion Questions

- Would you want to pick a name out of a jar without looking? We don't get to choose our names when we are born. Do you like your name? What would you like your name to be if you had a choice/or didn't like your name?
- How do you think Unhei felt when the boy wanted to see her name stamp and keep the paper? Does this make Unhei feel like she has made a friend?
- Do you think Unhei feels better about her name after she talks to Mr. Kim?
- How do you think Unhei feels when Joey says her name correctly?

### Additional Resources



[Asia Society video of Yangsook Choi reading \*The Name Jar\* and leading an art activity](#)



[Q&A with Yangsook Choi and Playwright Susan H. Pak](#)



[20 Reading Skills to Teach with \*The Name Jar\*](#)



[The Name Jar Activities, Lesson Plan, and Ideas In 2023](#)



Research abstract for [Practicing Cultural Humility by Using Actionable Steps for Improving Name Pronunciation and Use](#)

#### About the Consultant Nicole Kwmuntis

Nicole Kwmuntis co-wrote and provided guidance for this guide. She is currently a reading specialist for students in grades K-4 at Malden Public Schools in Massachusetts. During her tenure in Malden she has advocated for the literacy development of multilingual learners and supported extended learning experiences for multilingual learners beyond the school day.

#### About The Immigrant Learning Center

The Immigrant Learning Center, Inc. (The ILC) of Malden, MA, is a not-for-profit organization that gives immigrants a voice in three ways. The English Language Program provides free, year-round ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes to help immigrant and refugee adults in Greater Boston become successful workers, parents and community members. The Public Education Institute informs Americans about immigrants and immigration in the United States, and the Institute for Immigration Research, a joint venture with George Mason University, produces valid, reliable and objective multidisciplinary research on immigrants and immigration to the United States. For more information, visit the website <http://www.ilctr.org>. The ILC can also be found on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn.