



A Campaign of the
Oakland Literacy Coalition

Read Aloud Guide

Title: *The Name Jar* by Yangsook Choi

Best for: K-3rd grade

Summary: This book tells the story of Unhei, a young Korean girl who moves to America with her family. When she arrives at her new school, her schoolmates have trouble pronouncing her Korean name and she begins to wonder if she should choose a new American name. Her classmates suggest a variety of names: Daisy, Miranda, Lex, and more, but nothing seems to fit. In the end, she chooses to keep her original Korean name, and also makes a friend from her class.

Why we chose this book: This book illustrates a very common experience for many children - when others can't pronounce your name. This book raises some complex questions that young children often have to address early in their school experience: cultural assimilation, wanting to fit in with others and not being teased, but also wanting to honor and preserve strong family ties to one's name and culture. This book shows various perspectives and ultimately celebrates Unhei's choice to keep her original Korean name.

Central themes: assimilation, Korea, family relationships, friendships, cultural identify

Introducing the book: You can begin by showing the cover, reading the title and author, and then saying something like this:

"This book is about a girl who is new to America, and her new classmates have trouble pronouncing her name. Have you ever had someone mispronounce your name, or call you the wrong name?"

"Does anyone here know how they got their name?"

"Have you ever been a new student at school? How did that feel? How do you think new students feel on their first day?"

After Reading: Debrief with students

"On the bus, none of the children are able to pronounce Unhei's name. When she gets to her classroom, she did not want to introduce herself. Why do you think she didn't want to tell her class her name?" (she was embarrassed the kids on the bus couldn't pronounce it; she was afraid other students would make fun of it)

"How did Unhei's class try to help her?" (They gave her a name jar; they added names they thought she would like to choose)

"Why does Unhei keep her Korean name?" (She likes it best; she knew that her mom and grandmother had chosen it specifically for her.)

"How does her class respond when she chooses to keep her Korean name?" (They learn her name; they learn to pronounce it correctly.)