

Name: _____ Block: _____ Date: ____/____/____ *Seminar Questions*

Text(s):

- “*What’s in a Name? A Lot, as It Turns Out*” by Erik Eckholm
- TED Talk “Your Name Is the Key” by Huda Essa



Bridge Question:

Write about how you feel about your name.

Consider the following questions if you’re not sure where to start:

What does it mean? Do people mispronounce it? Is it a family name?

Does it reflect a culture? Do you go by a nickname or shortened version of your name? Why or why not?

Opening Question:

Considering both “texts,” what is the power of a name?

Clustered Questions:

Identity

- On page two of the article, Eckholm describes the first time Pauson receives his legal name, “When the big day came last year, it was an anticlimax. After six months of paperwork and waiting by Mr. Pauson, a judge hurriedly stamped ‘a flimsy piece of paper,’ he said.... Still,’ he added, ‘The whole world changed for me.’” Why did his lack of a name negatively affect his life for so many years; or can you argue that he ultimately used his namelessness to shape his identity in a positive way?
- For many people, names are changed as children grow into adolescence and adulthood, passing through shifts in their identity (Muhammad Ali, Caitlyn Jenner, Snoop Dog, etc.). Based on the subjects’ experiences in your texts, what is your opinion concerning the purpose of this practice? Should our names change as we change, or should we retain the names our families offer us?
- Essa argues in her TED Talk that “your name is the key.” In your opinion, the key to what?

Belonging

- In both the TED Talk and the article, the subjects desire a sense of belonging. In what contexts does a name promote or hinder belonging, empower or limit our membership in a group?
- Essa admits in her TED Talk that she identified some of her views as racist. How could an admission like this contribute to an eventual sense of belonging in an American

community? How does ignoring our biases exclude us from belonging in an American community?

- Pauson describes in the article his experience of estrangement from his family. He states at the top of page two, “I was about 13 when I realized that my mother had problems of her own that weren’t my fault,” he said, and a few years later “I knew I couldn’t stay at home anymore.” Consider how most Western names (first, middle, and last) are connected to families when many names around the world do not function this way. Why do names attach us to families and what results from this attachment?

Communication

- Essa explains in the beginning of her TED Talk that it’s common in American society to avoid speaking a name we don’t easily grasp. Why do you think this could be, and what changes could we make to encourage a cultural shift here?
- What are the effects--social, psychological, social, etc.--of not pronouncing a person’s name correctly or acknowledging a person’s name?
- In what ways, including and maybe even related to marginalizing names, does a major culture silence communication from minority cultures?
- How did namelessness alter Pauson’s method of communication, and what are healthy and unhealthy ways that adolescents express “namelessness”?

Closing Question

Teach us your name, and tell us something about it.

Annotated Seminar Reading: What’s in a Name? A Lot, as It Turns Out

By ERIK ECKHOLM MAY 9, 2010



PASADENA, Calif. — With his frizzy hair pulled into forward-protruding ← *This is a word I don’t know. I looked it up, and it means _____.* spikes and his goggle-size glasses, Max Pauson resembles one of the futuristic comic-book characters he admires and draws. Ebullient ← *This is a word I don’t know. I looked it up, and it means _____.* and eager to show a sketchbook filled with startling portraits, he seems to have identity to spare. ← *Descriptive language here really helps the reader to understand what the subject of this article looks like. I can picture him.*

But this promising art student’s strong sense of self was hard-earned. It was forged in an unstable, emotionally wrenching childhood and, in an odd detail that might serve as a metaphor ← *A metaphor is a comparison of two unlike things (saying something IS something else).* for his struggles, it comes after 19 years of life without a legal name. ← *How does his namelessness serve as a metaphor for (or symbol of)*

his difficult childhood? Does this mean that an upbringing full of hardship might make you feel nameless, like your own identity is insecure, erratic, or hard to explain to others?

His birth certificate read only “(baby boy) Pauson.” Name to come.

His father had disappeared. His mother — in his words, “a pack rat who takes a really long time to decide on anything” — did not pick a first name at the hospital in San Francisco in 1990. And she never followed up, leaving him in a rare and strange limbo. ← *This is a word I don't know. I looked it up, and it means -----.*

While Mr. Pauson was long aware of the blank spot in his identity, he never quite had the time or means to correct it. He lived with his mother in a house that sometimes lacked electricity. ← *I find this sentence upsetting. Here's why: -----.* He spent time in foster care and returned to live with his mother in homeless shelters and in public housing. ← *Why did he have to go to foster care? What were his foster families like? What must that be like to go into the American foster care system, especially for someone nameless?* Finally, at 15, he ran away to live with friends' families. ← *Here is a support system that helped Maximus succeed. Why did he feel the need to run away? What was his mother really like?*

In an era when identities and backgrounds are scrutinized more than ever, he still managed to get into schools, though he never tried to obtain a driver's license.

“Sometimes I thought it was kind of cool, like the Man With No Name in ‘The Good, the Bad and the Ugly,’ ” he said last week in his subsidized apartment here, which is provided by a group that helps former foster-care children.... When Mr. Pauson was in grade school, child welfare officials came to ask him about his mother and conditions in their house. *The journalist says that his childhood made him feel nameless; how does poverty do this?* “I didn't know what to say,” he recalled, only hinting at how torn he felt at the time: “I was a little kid, and my mother was my idol.” ← *This sentence contains an example of good word choice.*

“I was about 13 when I realized that my mother had problems of her own that weren't my fault,” he said, and a few years later “I knew I couldn't stay at home anymore.” ← *Why are some details about the subject's personal life left out of this article? Is he worried that his mother or his family will read it? He must still care about his mother.*

Mr. Pauson said he got involved in drugs briefly but found his way with the help of mentors, public and private aid and, most of all, his love of drawing.... ← *Here is a support system that helped Maximus succeed. ← This detail reveals something about Maximus's character. Here's what I think it means: -----.*

“I always used art as an escape,” he said. ← *Why was art a therapeutic activity for him? Art therapy is used sometimes to help traumatized people express their feelings. Why did he feel the need not to conform? Did he always feel like he just didn't fit in anywhere?* He said he was a tormented outcast in middle school, but once he entered San Francisco's School of the Arts, a magnet school where nonconformity was valued, “I finally felt comfortable being myself.” ← *Here is a support system that helped Maximus succeed.*

“It was kind of like Hogwarts,” he said of the high school. “The teachers were all real characters.” Even so, he did not always fit in smoothly, said Thomas Morgensen, one of his art teachers there.

“When he arrived, he was wired and not real focused,” Mr. Morgensen said. “He was well liked, but some of the teachers had a hard time dealing with his energy level.” ← *What about his childhood made him unfocused and too energetic for classes sometimes?* He often cut classes, too. But Mr. Morgensen and others saw that he was serious about his work.

Mr. Pauson’s portfolio won him a full scholarship to the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena. ← *This sentence makes me feel hopeful. Here’s why: .* ----- He was also accepted by Hillsides Youth Moving On, ← *Here is a support system that helped Maximus succeed.* a nonprofit group that provides subsidized housing to former foster youths, along with counseling, job aid and life skills that many never picked up. ← *This is a long sentence that flows really well.* He bicycles the five miles from the Hillsides apartment complex to school.

His artwork... includes energetic portraits and humorous takes on popular musicians like Jimi Hendrix, Billie Holiday and the duo Gnarl Barkley, ← *How does his artwork on famous people reflect his own lack of identity?* all done in a cartoonish style that Mr. Morgensen praised as “very controlled, but in his own crazy manner.”

The Hillsides program requires that residents take a job — part time if they are in school — and Mr. Pauson found one teaching art to children that required a thorough background check. His legal void caught up with him. ← *Why do so many programs require official names and IDs, documentation on our identities?* Hillsides found a lawyer who helped him create an official identity with the weighty name he had imagined for himself as a child: Maximus Julius Pauson. ← *The Latin name “Maximus” means “the greatest or largest,” and the Latin name Julius “devoted to Jove (God).”* ← *Why did he choose this name?*

When the big day came last year, it was an anticlimax. ← *This is a word I don’t know. I looked it up, and it means* ----- After six months of paperwork and waiting by Mr. Pauson, a judge hurriedly stamped “a flimsy piece of paper,” he said. ← *His words, “a flimsy piece of paper,” provide a good contrast between the unimportant paper and the meaning of that paper.* “It wasn’t at all like the scene in ‘Roots’ when the father holds up his baby to the sky and says his name.” ← *This sentence has some complicated punctuation. Good times.*

Still, he added, “The whole world changed for me.” ← *This is a short sentence that packs a powerful punch.* ← *How did the world change for him? I can’t imagine suddenly having a name for the first time.*