

This essay was written by a student at Reseda Charter High School as part of an intentional lesson on names as part of our identity and belonging, and was linked to a content objective with poems students read about identity, names, and belonging.

The poem that really tugged at my heartstrings was *Grandfather* by Andrei Gureanu.

Reading this poem made me reflect on my identity and how much it is intertwined with my culture. In the poem Andrei wrote about how he has the first name of his grandfather but I connected the words and the message with my last name. My last name is so important to me. It is a reminder of who I am, where I came from and how I got to the point of having that last name. In my culture last names always end with the suffix -yan or -ian. The prefix of the last name is usually a name. For example, my last name is Hovsepian. The prefix is "Hovsep", and the suffix is -yan. My last name basically means that I am a descendant of Hovsep who could have been any one of the many great great grandfathers in my family tree. I see my last name as a huge and fundamental part of my identity. The prefix reminds me of the generations of Hovsepians that came before me and the suffix -yan reminds me of my Armenian roots.

I used to be so embarrassed of my last name because no one could ever pronounce it (they still can't). Teachers would often just shorten my name to "Angelina H." and they wouldn't bother even trying to pronounce it. They didn't have a hard time with the names or last names of other students but I just brushed off my confusing state with the idea that "my last name is probably unfamiliar to them". But why? How come I could get used to American culture, and food, and names but they always shortened part of my identity. Why was having a different last name so embarrassing? School year after school year I became used to the fact that my last name was so bizarre to other people so I didn't even bother mentioning it unless it was mentioned to me. I always dreaded attendance because I knew the teacher wouldn't get it right and it was so embarrassing when my classmates laughed and took such a big part of my identity as a joke. It felt like people weren't taking me seriously. They weren't taking my culture seriously. This led me to feel ashamed, I wouldn't write out my full last name because I didn't want my peers making remarks about my last name.

This poem really made me reflect on the meaning of my last name. I am going to carry it with me for the rest of my life so why be ashamed? There are whole generations behind me with this last name and each one of them passed it down to other people. There is a story behind my last name and now I'm really eager to share it with everyone. I broke down my barrier of shame and embarrassment because I realized that my name is such an important part of my identity.

When I first introduce myself to people I tell them my name, it's a first priority so why should I be scared? As I've gotten older and gotten more comfortable with my identity and culture I realized that leaving back this sense of being ashamed actually made me closer with my culture. I love my last name and I would never leave it behind or look past it ever again.

My Name

Shame Shame Shame

You have a different last name.

Why can't I be treated the same?

On the board I see generations

But mine is cut short

It feels like my identity is worth a quart

I cannot bare

When people stare

And with wide eyed faces

Then try to determine what fits in the spaces

Now I feel like I'm enough

My name is me

And I am my name