Names are an important part of language. Does it matter what your name is and does it affect the way you think about things? Fiction writers choose their character’s names very deliberately. If you were creating an action hero, you would be more likely to call him Jack Bronson than Cecil Greebling. If you were creating a female character who was smart, attractive and strong, would you care her Tara Steele or Daphne Blenkinsop? Names matter.

In non-fiction, a writer will usually keep the names of real people, but not always. In some autobiographies, if the events described are too awful, the author might change the names or use first names only. As a way of examining the effect of names, let’s look at an autobiographical work in which real names are used. The following extract is from the preface of *Chinese Cinderella,* in which the author explains why she wrote the book and how people are named in Chines culture.

***Chinese Cinderella***

**Preface**

***Chinese Cinderella* is my autobiography**. It was difficult and painful to write but I felt **compelled** to do so. Though mine is but a simple personal tale of my childhood, please do not underestimate the power of such stories. In one way or another, every one of us has been shaped by the stories we have read and absorbed in the past. All stories, including fairy tales, present **elemental** truths, which can sometime **permeate** your inner life and become part of you.

**The fact that this story is true may hold special appeal**. Today the world is a very different place. Though many Chinese parents still prefer sons, daughters are not so much despised. But the essential things have not changed. It is still important to be truthful and loyal, to do the best you can, to make the most of your talents, to be happy with the simple things in life, and to believe deep down that you will **ultimately** triumph if you try hard enough to prove your worth.

**To those who were neglected and unloved as children, I have a particular message**. In spite of what your abusers would have had you believe, please be convinced that each of you has within you something precious and unique*. Chinese Cinderella* is dedicated to you with the **fervent** wish that you will persist in trying to do your best in the face of hopelessness; to have faith that in the end your spirit will prevail; to **transcend** your traumas and transform them into a source of courage, creativity and compassion.

**Author’s note**

*Names*

In Chinese families, a child is called by many names.

1. My father’s surname is Yen. My siblings and I inherited his surname of Yen. Chinese surnames come at the beginning of a person’s name.
2. At birth, a baby is given a name by his or her parents. My given name is Jun-Ling. Since my surname comes first, my Chinese name is Yen Jun-Ling.
3. At home, a child is called by a name dependent on the order of his or her birth. The oldest daughter is called Big Sister, the second daughter Second Sister and so on. There are separate Chinese words for older sister (jie) and younger sister (mei); older brother (ge) and younger brother (di). Since I was the fifth child in my family, my name at home was Fifth Younger Sister (Wu Mei). However, my younger siblings called me Wu Jie, which means Fifth Older Sister.
4. When the older generation calls me Wu Mei the word mei takes on the meaning of ‘daughter.’ Wu Mei now means Fifth Daughter.
5. The same goes for the word ‘di.’ Er Di can mean Second Younger Brother or Second Son.
6. Our stepmother gave us European names when she married my father. When my brothers and I attended schools in Hong Kong and London where English was the main language, my name became Adeline Yen.
7. After I married, I adopted my Chinese American husband Bob Mah’s last name and my name is now Adeline Yen Mah.
8. Big Sister’s name is Lydia, Big Brother’s is Gregory, Second Brother’s is Edgar, Third Brother’s is James. Fourth Younger Brother’s name is Franklin. Little Sister’s name is Susan.

**Literacy Link**

Numbered and bulleted lists

When you are presenting a lot of information, it helps if you can break up the text by using bulleted or numbered lists, as Adeline Yen Mah does in her author’s note. This makes it easy for a reader to scan the text and pick out information. The numbers or bullets also break up the text into bite-sized chunks that are easier to understand and remember.

We use a numbered list when it is important to follow steps in certain order, as in a recipe. We also use them to create a hierarchy, where 1 is the most important and 5 is the least important, for example. Some writers use them as a way of making us remember something:

You must do three things:

1. Wash your hands
2. Read the recipe carefully
3. Handle knives with care.

If you want to break up a list of information, and if order, hierarchy and memorisation are *not* important, then use bullets.

**Comprehension Activities**

**NAME: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Getting Started**

1. Make some predictions about what the author of *Chinese Cinderella*, Adeline Yen Mah, might have in common with Cinderella. **2 marks**

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1. Would the preface and author’s note of *Chinese Cinderella* come at the start of the book or at the end of it? Explain. **2 marks**

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1. The rest of *Chinese Cinderella* is an autobiography. How do you think it will differ from this preface and author’s note? Explain. **2 marks**

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1. Why do you think the author numbered the paragraphs in her author’s note? Look at the possible reasons listed below. Tick those you think are correct and put a cross against those you think are not likely. **2 marks**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| The author is good at maths. | The information is fairly complicated. | The information is a series of steps to follow, like a recipe. | Breaking information into smaller pieces makes it easier to follow. | The number 8 is very lucky in Chinese. |

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1. From what the author says in the preface, do you think she had a happy or unhappy childhood? List all of the words that give you clues. Explain how some of the words support your answer. **5 marks**

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1. Read the topic sentence of each of the paragraphs (in bold in the text) in the preface, and then read the rest of the paragraph.

How well did the topic sentence outline what was going to follow? If 5 is extremely well and 1 is very poorly, rate the topic sentence out of 5. Explain your rating.  **6 marks**

1. *Chinese Cinderella* is my autobiography.

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1. The fact that this story is true may hold special appeal.

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1. To those who were neglected and unloved as children, I have a particular message.

1 2 3 4 5

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**Working Through**

1. Read the Literacy Link at the end of the extract.  **2 marks**
2. In the author’s note for *Chinese Cinderella*, would you have used bullets or numbers? Explain.

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1. Would you use a bulleted or numbered list of you were writing a short story or novel? Explain.

**2 marks**

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1. Do you think all of Adeline Yen Mah’s family members would see things the same way as she does? Would they tell the same story? Explain. **3 marks**

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1. How many names has the author been known by? List them.  **2 marks**

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1. How many meanings does the author give for the name Wu Mei? In your own words, explain what these meanings are. **3 marks**

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1. Look at the following words in the preface:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| compelled | elemental | permeate | ultimately | fervent | transcend |

1. Come up with words or phrases that you could replace these words with in the text. **3 marks**
2. Check that the sentence still makes sense by substituting the new word for the word listed above.
3. Write out the sentence including the new word.

**Analysing names and how they affect us**

**Getting started**

1. What would your name be in your family if you were named like the Chinese author? First Sister? Second Son? How would you feel about this? Explain.
2. If you had to change your given name, what name would you choose? Do you think your current name suits your personality? Explain.
3. In the author’s note, names such as *Big Sister* are given capital letters. Would you normally do this in English? How do capital letters change the name?

**Working through**

1. If your family name came before your personal name, as it does in Chinese, do you think this would change the way you think about yourself? Explain.

**Going further**

1. From what you have read about Chinese names, what do you think might be considered more important in Chinese society: individualism or the family? Explain. How do you think this compares with modern Australia? Explain