

The Name Game

A writing prompt by author Hena Khan

A friend and I overheard a little girl asking her mother, “but HOW did you KNOW my name BEFORE I WAS BORN?” As we laughed, I thought about how even our names are something we don’t pick ourselves, they end up being a big part of us.

When I was growing up, my best friend changed her name when we were in elementary school. It left me feeling like I lost a piece of my friend, and that she was deciding to become someone else. I wondered if my own name was less worthy than I thought. As a kid I often imagined how my life might differ if my name was Melissa, or if I had a really cool nickname (I didn’t).

I never changed my name, though, and kept my last name after marriage. I randomly ask my kids if they like their names, or if they wish they were called something else. And I explore this theme in my book, *Amina’s Voice*, when Amina’s best friend Soojin considers taking a new name, much like my friend did.

Writing prompt: Imagine that you could go back in time and name yourself before you were born. What name would you choose? Take a few notes about why you picked that name. Does it have a special meaning? Does it evoke a certain emotion? Can you describe the way it makes you feel—powerful, funny, confident, brave, something else? Do you think you would be a different person if you had grown up with that name? Who would you be?

Now, write yourself a short 4-5 line bio (a description of yourself) that highlights your personality and personal achievements using your imagined name. If you think you’d be exactly the same person you are today no matter what your name was, that’s great too! Happy writing!