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EWRT 1A

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My Name, My Self

William Shakespeare famously said, “A rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” The quote suggests that a name does not alter the essence and identity of who a person is, but honestly, I have to disagree. While I know that the greatest playwright of all time has tapped into some profound truths of life, I can’t help but believe that the power of language and specifically our names shapes our sense of self dramatically. I once had a student whose name was Precious and another named Prince. Imagine from the moment you were born, you heard words of value and royalty directed at you every day of your life multiple times a day. Wouldn’t you have an inherent high self-esteem? I swear Precious and Prince walked a little taller and a little prouder than other students with more ordinary names like Bob or Jane. Language is powerful. It has energy; it has history; it has associations. I know I’m an English instructor and have a certain bias, but I truly believe the words we use can create our reality and specifically our sense of self. Analyzing my own name, Julie Pesano, makes me understand that our names are inherently linked to our identity.

Pesano. My last name identifies me with a group, a culture, and a history. The name is from my father’s side, clearly demonstrating the patriarchal lineage that my European American culture favors. But what about my mother’s maiden name, Taylor, which is now lost forever in the legacy of her children? Ironically, my parents got divorced when I was two, and my mother raised me completely on her own, yet all three of her children bear the name of their father, a man we visited once a year in another state. But it was the 70’s, and tradition unquestioningly had it that the wife and children should take the father’s name. Interestingly, when all of us grew up and left the home, my mother legally changed her name back to Taylor, a sign that she was ready to reclaim her sense of self and independence from a man she hadn’t been married to for twenty years. So now my identity is conflicted. Am I a Taylor, the stalwart English/Irish name that signifies my allegiance to my mother? Or am I a Pesano, the Italian name that explains my Roman nose and olive skin and that has been part of my life since I was born? I’ve always loved having some part of me stem from Italy, a country and culture I associate with warmth, passion, and a love of food and family. Even though I would only visit my Dad’s family once a year, I adored being surrounded by his six boisterous brothers who were always joking, always loud, and always talking with their hands around a dinner table of my grandmother’s pasta Bolognese. My last name meant I was welcomed in the tribe, one of them, with a comforting sense of belonging. Rumor had it that my Italian ancestors immigrated through Ellis Island in the 19th Century, and because they were illiterate, their name got mistakenly spelled from Pisano (people from the town of Pisa, Italy) to Pesano. Technically, if I see any other Pesano’s in the world spelled with an “e”, they are my relatives. I adore this uniqueness, this bond with my father’s family, and this walking history I carry every day. Would I ever change my last name? Never. I was married years ago to a Chinese American man with the last name of Li, and when people asked me if I would take his name, I unabashedly said no. I didn’t feel or look like a Li, I felt like a Pesano. Regardless of the difficulty others have pronouncing or spelling my name (I’ve gotten mail addressed to “Julie Pizza”), I feel such an affection and connection to my name. It is a sign of my history, my family, and my cultural identity.

Julie. My first name contains lots of meaning around my parents’ values and my own sense of self. My mother wanted to name me Julie because she said it sounded like Jewelry, an interesting suggestion that American culture and possibly specifically women admire material objects. There were five other Julie’s in my first grade class, so I have a feeling, she really named me after a famous actress in the 70’s, Julie Christie – clearly a sign that the influence of TV and film was much greater than religion and ancestry. Few of my friends were named after Biblical figures or family members anymore. I actually have a twin brother who my parents thought should also be named with a similar sounding first letter to show our connection, so he was named Jeff. Like the Kardashians’ K, families seem to want to show a family bond through language, as my mother Judee and sister Gina demonstrate with the J sound. Of course, for the first five or six years of my life, everyone would refer to us kids as Gina and the twins. I sometimes wonder how not having an individual name affected my sense of self. I’d always had a feeling of enmeshment with others, a difficulty separating my identity especially my brother and my family. Perhaps my desire to break free caused me to move three thousand miles away from my family and to develop a complete opposite personality from my brother. While names may create our identity, they may also ask us to rebel against them.

Nicknames. While we all have a name on a birth certificate, nicknames allow us to change roles in certain groups and situations. Much like code switching, in which we change our language to meet a different audience, we often change our name with friends and family. When I was little my sister nicknamed my brother and me, Juffer and Jizzle. She was five, so obviously didn’t know the problematic sexual implications of Jiz, but these names have given us a certain inclusivity and bonding that reminds us of our unique relationship as siblings. My friends who know me well call me Jules or Jewels to show our familiarity, informality, and community. Nicknames are a fascinating way that we have some control over our identity. While we can’t choose our family name or even our first name, we can choose a nick name that is more uniquely suited to whom we think we are. I had a student in class who took the pen name Caesar because he wanted to associate his creative writing with power and admiration. I’ve had transgender students who morphed their names to a more masculine or feminine sounding name to better correlate to their sense of gender identity. Patrick became Patricia, or Erica became Eric. My international students as well have often taken on an American name while they are studying in the US to make it easier for English speakers to pronounce, but also to have something of an American identity and belonging. Haoyuan became Albert, and Se Chang became Sean. Like the clothes we wear or the haircut we get, names are a way to dress ourselves and express our individual identity.

In conclusion, my name is not just my name. It is a walking billboard of my history, my culture, my family, my preferences, and my values. Just like there is no other Julie Pesano on the planet, there is no other person like me. From now on, when I sign my name or introduce myself, I’ll realize the profound meaning of those three words. My name reveals layers of me from the general culture to the specific individual; it reveals how we are clearly connected and yet undeniably unique. What does your name say about you? Does it have more complexity and significance than you ever imagined? Does it make you wonder how it has shaped your sense of self and identity? Even Shakespeare, a lover of language, would have to admit that a rose by any other name is not just a rose.

Ewrt 1A

J. Pesano

Critical Reading of Sample Essay

Directions: Examine the student essay “My Name, My Self” using the following questions.

1. How is the essay formatted? Does it look accurate from your knowledge of English paper specifications?
2. Examine the title. Is it effective in drawing the reader in? Does it give a clear indication of the one and content of the paper?
3. Does the essay have an effective introduction? Does it provide enough background information to attract the reader? What are some other effective ways to create an introduction?
4. Is there a clear and narrow thesis stating the position of the paper in the introduction? Underline the thesis. What elements should a thesis have?
5. Does each paragraph have a topic sentence that directly supports the thesis? Underline each topic sentence. What should a topic sentence do in a paragraph?
6. Does each supporting body paragraph contain information that directly supports the topic sentence? Give examples.
7. Are there enough examples which are explained clearly with lots of detail? Give examples of great detail.
8. Are there logical transitions between paragraphs and between sentences? What is a transition? How and why is it effective?
9. Is there sufficient critical thinking?
   1. Does the essay explore a topic in a unique way?
   2. Is the information insightful, looking beyond the obvious?
   3. Is there awareness of the target audience?
10. Does the conclusion effectively finish the essay? What are some other effective ways of finishing an essay?
11. Examine the grammar. Does it use language effectively and creatively?
12. Write a final summarizing sentence or two of the strengths and weaknesses of the essay.

Checklist of Points

*Content*

1. Outline: ( \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Out of 5 points)
2. Thesis Statement/ Controlling Focus: (\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ out of 15 points)
   1. Does the essay have a properly placed thesis?

# Is the thesis clearly stated?

* 1. Does the thesis make a position that can be developed?
  2. Is the thesis narrowed and focused?

1. Paragraph Development: (\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ out of 20 points)
   1. Is there enough information in each paragraph?
   2. Is the information developed into smaller and smaller subtopics or does it only repeat the topic sentence?
   3. Are the examples explained clearly with lots of detail?
2. Critical Thinking ( \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ out of 20 points)

A. Does the essay explore a topic in a unique way?

# Is the information insightful, looking beyond the obvious?

* 1. Is there awareness of the target audience?

*Organization*

1. Organization: (\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ out of 20 points)
   1. Does each paragraph have a topic sentence that directly supports the thesis?
   2. Does each supporting body paragraph contain information that directly supports the topic sentence?
   3. Are there logical transitions between paragraphs and within paragraphs?

*Language Skills*

1. Grammar and Mechanics (\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ out of 20 points)
   1. Are the grammar rules, usage, punctuation, spelling, and form all used with knowledge and competence?

## Total: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ out of 100 points