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| ***American Voices* Portfolio Assignment #1**  **“My Name” by Sandra Cisneros**  **Response: Narrative Pastiche** |

For your first portfolio assignment (and your first writing assignment of the year!) you will write a pastiche of Cisneros’s vignette “My Name.” ***A pastiche is an artistic work that imitates the style of another artist or work***. In other words, you will write your own vignette about your name—about what your name means, what it means to you, how you believe it defines you or affects how other people see you. Your final pastiche should be about the same length as Cisneros’s piece, and it should mimic her writing in its style and narrative voice.

Here is a brief sample I wrote about my own name to help you get started:

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| Three days before I was born, my mother watched a soap opera and found my name. It was a husband-stealing villain’s name and how it is mine. As a child, I always felt it was too long, too clunky, too harsh. When others looked up the definitions of their names, they found beautiful meanings like “song bird,” or “flower,” or “strong hunter.” My name, however, means “from the court.” I found it too formal…and uninspiring. I dreamed of changing my name to something more exotic, something I thought sounded more sophisticated. Brittney, or Stefanie, or Savannah maybe. Names that were in abundance in every pre-teen ‘80s sitcom and young adult novel. But now, as an adult, I have learned to embrace my name. I look back at my earliest school work and kindergarten art projects, and I see the letters of my name scrawled at the bottom of the page in my tiny hand so many years ago. And I realize that I have written those letters—that name-- thousands of times, over the years, and that name belongs to me. |

Here are a few questions to consider before you start writing. These are all ideas Cisneros includes in her own vignette, so you should try to include answers to as many of them as possible in your pastiche of her writing. Remember that your audience is your fellow classmates (and me!) and we want to learn as much as we can about you throughout your exploration of your own name.

* Explain what your name means. Does it have a special meaning in a foreign language? How did you get your name?
* Do you have a nickname? How did you arrive at that nickname? Do you like it? Why or why not?
* If you could change your name, what would you change it to? Would a name change make you feel differently about yourself? Why?
* Try to include a personal anecdote about your name. Has your name ever gotten you into trouble?
* Do you know why your parents chose your name? Who chose it? Were you named after a particular person? Why were you named after him or her? Are you like that person or different from him or her? How?
* Has anyone ever commented on your name? What did he or she say? How did that comment make you feel?
* Do you think your name causes people to treat you in a particular way? How? Cite an example or two.
* Try to add metaphors to your writing; consider what your name would be if it were a color, a day, a car, a tree/flower, animal, or feelings and sounds you associate with it.
* Review how Cisneros creates a name that conjures up meanings beyond the surface to reveal the character’s personality.

**American Voices Portfolio Assignment #2**

**“Growing up Asian in America” by Kesaya Noda**

**Response: Poetic Nonfiction**

Kesaya Noda uses a direct, prosaic style in her essay “Growing Up Asian in America.” Noda divides the body of her piece into three sections, each associated with a particular aspect of her identity: “I am racially Japanese,” “I am a Japanese American,” and “I am a Japanese American woman.” It is this style and structure I want you to experiment with in your second portfolio entry.

**Assignment:**

Using the same structure as Noda’s piece, write a 1-2 page personal essay exploring aspects of your identity that are important to you. Before you begin writing, think about what aspects of yourself you might want to explore.

* You might consider your ethnic background (which could be more than just one ethnicity), your linguistic heritage, your place of origin, your place of residence, your gender, your age, your favorite activities, etc.
* Next, think about how these aspects of yourself fit together.
  + Do they build on each other, as Noda’s elements seem to do, or do you feel a sense of inner conflict or confusion?
  + What are the sources of these aspects of identity?
  + What specific stories or memories are connected to them? Use these stories or memories to bring to life each aspect that you describe

Your essay should follow the same pattern as Noda: a brief introduction, and then three (or more) sections about different aspects of your identity. Your final piece should be 1-2 pages, typed and double-spaced.

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| ***American Voices* Portfolio Assignment #3**  **“I Hated Tonto (Still Do)” by Sherman Alexie**  **Response: Poetry** |

In his essay, Alexie explores the different aspects of his identity and the ways in which the society and media of his childhood influenced his perceptions of that identity. One of the most poignant aspects of Alexie’s writing, I think, is the way that he explores how none of us is *just one thing*—that we are all composed of varying identities, each one evolving as times goes on and we interact with the world in new ways. Alexie is a Native American man, but he is also a writer, and a father, and the child of an alcoholic. None of these parts of his identity is any more important than the other, although they come to the surface depending on the situation.

The other aspect of Alexie’s essay I want you to consider is the fact that while you may see yourself and the parts of your identity very clearly, other people will most likely hold opinions or stereotypes of who you are based on how you identify yourself. That is not necessarily a negative thing—but it is a worthwhile idea worth addressing. What perceptions or assumptions do people hold about you because of the different roles you play?

For your third portfolio assignment, I want you to write an “I Am” poem that explores five (5) different aspects of your identity. You certainly may have more parts to you than these five, but choose the five aspects of you that you hold as most important. For example, you are a teenager, but you are also a female, an athlete, an immigrant, and a sister. Or you identity first as a Black man, then as a student, a Christian, a son, and a boyfriend. Or you may say that the part of your identity most important to you right now is as a member of the LGBTQ community, then as an advocate, then as an atheist, a daughter, and an American. You may choose to put the parts of your identity in order of important, or not—it’s up to you.

Your final poem must address (5) aspects of your identity—first define what that looks like in your life, and then take a stand against what stereotypes, misperceptions, or assumptions others might have about you that you want to shut down.

See the attached example I wrote about myself as a template to help you get started. Good Luck!

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| ***American Voices* Portfolio Assignment #4**  **“We are Ugly, But We’re Here” by Edwidge Danticat**  **Response: Reader Response** |

For your fourth portfolio assignment, you will write a 1-page reader response to the piece by Danticat.:

**In reader-response, the reader is essential to the meaning of a text for they bring the text to life. The purpose of a reading response is examining, explaining, and defending your personal reaction to a text.**

For most of the next two years of IB Literature, you will be asked to analyze and argue for the author’s purpose and intent in a particular text. This skill is important and valuable, but it also sometimes disregards (or at least doesn’t value much) your personal reactions and opinions of the text as a reader, regardless of whether or not they were intended by the author.

So for this portfolio, you have the chance to give your personal reader response to Danticat’s essay. You are basically writing one page that explains what your reactions are to this piece as a reader. Use the following questions to help you with this response. You would only need to answer a few of these questions in your 1-page response.

* What do you think is the most important sentence in the essay?  Why?
* Write a question you would like to ask the author.  How do you think he or she would respond?
* Do you agree with the point the author is making?  Why?
* Do you like the ending of the essay?  Why or why not?  Do you think there is more to tell?
* What images or figurative language did the author use that you found particularly effective?
* **Describe how the author made you feel as you read her essay.**
* Why do you think the author chose the opening line he or she did?  Did you like it?  Did it make you want to read further?
* Did you enjoy the essay?  Why or why not?
* Write about an important lesson that was learned in the story.
* Would you recommend the essay to another reader?  Explain why or why not.
* Make a list of “lingering questions” you have after finishing the book.
* Make a list of things you don’t understand, find confusing, or have questions about.

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| ***American Voices* Portfolio Assignment #5**  **“Let America Be America Again” by Langston Hughes**  **Response: Imagery Study** |

For your fifth portfolio, you get a break from writing ☺ This portfolio entry will ask you to take a closer look at some of beautiful and thought-provoking imagery used by Langston Hughes in his poem.

Using the notes and annotations from our discussion of the poem in class, choose a stanza or two from the poem (no more than 12-15 lines total) and create a drawing that depicts the poet’s use of imagery. ***Remember that imagery is not just visual—there is also auditory imagery (sound), olfactory imagery (smell), tactile imagery (touch), kinesthetic imagery (movement), and organic imagery (emotion, hunger, thirst, pain, etc).*** Choose a section of the poem that speaks to you and that you have some creative ideas about how to depict the imagery.

Your final drawing should include depictions of the specific words and lines of the poem, as well as the actual written words from the poem. In other words, you will need to find a way to caption or include the lines of the poem you are analyzing within your drawing.

You may use any medium you wish, including colored pencils, crayons, pastels, water colors, and/or paint. Please keep your drawings 2D and reasonable size so you can easily include them within your final portfolio.

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| ***American Voices* Portfolio Assignment #6**  **Excerpt from *An American Childhood* by Annie Dillard**  **Response: Creative Writing** |

In our discussion of Dillard’s writing, we looked closely at her use of the moth trapped in the jar as a metaphor for her own feelings of stunted potential and lack of growth in her own life. Dillard beautifully connects this vivid memory from elementary school to her view of her childhood as she looks back as an adult. It is a haunting memory for her, and leaves a haunting image in her readers’ minds as well.

For your final portfolio entry (HOORAY!), you will explore a metaphor that works for your own life right now. Think of an object, a situation, or an event that has many facets to it, so you can relate as many parts of your life to it as possible. Below I listed a few of the metaphors previous IB juniors have used for this assignment—feel free to use one of them as your own, or come up with one of your own!

Your final creative writing piece should be 1-2 pages, typed and double-spaced.

Possible Metaphors:

* High speed train (with or without a driver!)
* Circus
* Butterfly in a cocoon
* Playing a round of golf
* Science fiction or horror movie (or any kind of movie!)
* Choose Your Own Adventure book
* Rollercoaster
* Jigsaw Puzzle
* Maze with no map or guide
* Animal trapped in a zoo
* Video Game
* Garden
* Driving on an interstate highway