Names/ Nombres

Julia Alvarez

BACKGROUND Julia Alvarez was born in New York City. When she was still a baby, her parents took her back to their home country, the Dominican Republic. Due to political unrest in that Spanish-speaking Caribbean nation, the Alvarez family moved back to New York City in 1960. Julia was ten years old. At first, she had trouble fitting in.

When we arrived in New York City, our names changed almost immediately. At Immigration, the officer asked my father, *Mister Elbures,* if he had anything to declare.[1] My father shook his head no, and we were waved through. I was too afraid we wouldn't be let in if I corrected the man's pronunciation, but I said our name to myself, opening my mouth wide for the organ blast of the a, trilling my tongue[2] for the drumroll of the *r, All-vah-rrr-es!* How could anyone get Elbures out of that orchestra of sound?

1. **At Immigration . . . declare:** Immigration is the place where government officials check the documents of people entering a country. People must acknowledge, or declare, certain goods or moneys that they are carrying.
2. **trilling my tongue:** rapidly vibrating the tongue against the roof of the mouth, as in pronouncing a Spanish *r*.

CLOSE READ

MARK IT UP

Use these marks to monitor your reading:

* * This is important.
* ? I don't understand.
* ! This is a surprise.

When you see this pencil, you'll be asked to mark up the text. You can also write in this book in any way you find useful.

FOCUS

In the first part of this **personal essay,** the author describes the different names her family received when they returned to New York City. As you read, underline each new name the author shares.

At the hotel my mother was *Missus Alburest,* and I was *little girl,* as in, "Hey, little girl, stop riding the elevator up and down. It's not a toy."

When we moved into our new apartment building, the super[3] called my father *Mister Alberase,* and the neighbors who became mother's friends pronounced her name *Jew-lee-ah* instead of *Hoo-lee-ah.* I, her namesake, was known as *Hoo-lee-tah* at home. But at school I was *Judy* or *Judith,* and once an English teacher mistook me for Juliet.

It took a while to get used to my new names. I wondered if I shouldn't correct my teachers and new friends. But my mother argued that it didn't matter. "You know what your friend Shakespeare said, 'A rose by any other name would smell as sweet.'"[4] My family had gotten into the habit of calling any literary figure "my friend" because I had begun to write poems and stories in English class.

By the time I was in high school, I was a popular kid, and it showed in my name. Friends called me *Jules* or *Hey Jude,*[5] and once a group of troublemaking friends my mother forbade me to hang out with called me *Alcatraz.*[6] I was *Hoo-lee-tah* only to Mami and Papi and uncles and aunts who came over to eat *sancocho*[7] on Sunday afternoons—old world folk whom I would just as soon go back to where they came from and leave me to pursue whatever mischief I wanted to in America. JUDY ALCATRAZ: the name on the wanted poster would read. Who would ever trace her to me? PAUSE & REFLECT

PAUSE & REFLECT

1. What was Alvarez called at home? What new nicknames did she receive at school? Fill in the blanks below. *CLARIFY*

At home: _____

_____

At school: _____

_____

_____

_____

2. Underline the details in lines 26–36 that show the author's feelings about her nicknames.

Then describe her feelings on the lines below. *MAKE INFERENCES*

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. **super:** superintendent, or building manager.
4. **'A rose . . . smell as sweet':** In Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet,* the main characters' families are enemies. But when Romeo and Juliet fall in love, Juliet uses almost these words to say that Romeo is precious to her no matter what his family name is.
5. ***Hey Jude:*** the title of a hit song by the Beatles in 1968.
6. ***Alcatraz*** (ăl'kə-trăz'): the name of an island in San Francisco Bay that was once the site of a prison.
7. ***sancocho*** (säng-kô'chô) *Spanish*: a traditional Caribbean stew of meat and vegetables.

My older sister had the hardest time getting an American name for herself because *Mauricia* did not translate into English. **Ironically,** although she had the most foreign-sounding name, she and I were the Americans in the family. We had been born in New York City when our parents had first tried immigration and then gone back "home," too homesick to stay. My mother often told the story of how she had almost changed my sister's name in the hospital. ▶

After the delivery, Mami and some other new mothers were cooing over their new baby sons and daughters and exchanging names and weights and delivery stories. My mother was embarrassed among the Sallys and Janes and Georges and Johns to reveal the rich, noisy name of *Mauricia,* so when her turn came to brag, she gave her baby's name as *Maureen.*

"Why'd ya give her an Irish name with so many pretty Spanish names to choose from?" one of the women asked her.

My mother blushed and admitted her baby's real name to the group. Her mother-in-law had recently died, she apologized, and her husband had insisted that the first daughter be named after his mother, *Mauran.* My mother thought it the ugliest name she had ever heard, and she talked my father into what she believed was an improvement, a combination of *Mauran* and her own mother's name, *Felicia.*

"Her name is Mao-ree-shee-ah," my mother said to the group.

"Why, that's a beautiful name," the new mothers cried. *"Moor-ee-sha, Moor-ee-sha,"* they cooed into the pink blanket. *Moor-ee-sha* it was when we returned to the States eleven years later. Sometimes, American tongues found even that mispronunciation tough to say and called her *Maria* or *Marsha* or *Maudy* from her nickname *Maury.* I pitied her. What an awful name to have to transport across borders!

My little sister, Ana, had the easiest time of all. She was plain *Anne*—that is, only her name was plain, for she turned out to be the pale, blond "American beauty" in the family. The only Hispanic-seeming thing about her was the

FOCUS

Next, the author describes her sisters' "American names." Read on to discover what the names are and how they got them.

ironically (ī-rŏn'ĭk-lē) *adv.* in a way that is contrary to what is expected or intended

TestSmart

Which pronouns in lines 37–44 indicate that this personal essay is told from the first-person point of view?

(A) *my, I,* and *our*
(B) *she* and *herself*
(C) *American* and *English*
(D) *older sister* and *Mauricia*

TIP When a test item includes **academic vocabulary,** review any terms you are unsure about. A **pronoun** is a word that is used in place of a noun. In the **first-person point of view,** the writer describes his or her own experiences. To answer this question, read all of the choices and eliminate any that are not pronouns. Then decide which of the remaining answers contains examples of first-person pronouns.

affectionate nicknames her boyfriends sometimes gave her. *Anita,* or as one goofy guy used to sing to her to the tune of the banana advertisement, *Anita Banana.*

Later, during her college years in the late 60's, there was a push to pronounce Third World[8] names correctly. I remember calling her long distance at her group house and a roommate answering.

"Can I speak to Ana?" I asked, pronouncing her name the American way.

"Ana?" The man's voice hesitated. "Oh! You must mean *Ah-nah!*"

PAUSE & REFLECT

Reread lines 80–83. What change in society's attitude did the roommate's response reflect? *MAKE INFERENCES*

FOCUS

During her first years in America, Alvarez just wanted to fit in. As you read the next part of her **personal essay,** consider the author's thoughts about being different.

Our first few years in the States, though, ethnicity was not yet "in." Those were the blond, blue-eyed, bobby-sock years of junior high and high school before the 60's ushered in peasant blouses, hoop earrings, *sarapes.*[9] My initial desire to be known by my correct Dominican name faded. I just wanted to be Judy and **merge** with the Sallys and Janes in my class. But, inevitably, my accent and coloring gave me away. "So where are you from, Judy?"

"New York," I told my classmates. After all, I had been born blocks away at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital.

"I mean, *originally.*"

"From the Caribbean," I answered vaguely, for if I **specified**, no one was quite sure what continent our island was located on.

"Really? I've been to Bermuda. We went last April for spring vacation. I got the worst sunburn! So, are you from Portoriko?"

"No," I shook my head. "From the Dominican Republic."

"Where's that?"

"South of Bermuda."

They were just being curious, I knew, but I burned with shame whenever they singled me out as a "foreigner," a rare, exotic friend.

merge (mûrj) *v.* to blend together

specify (spĕs'ə-fī') *v.* to make known or identify

8. **Third World:** from the developing nations of Latin America, Africa, and Asia.
9. ***sarapes*** (sə-rä'pāz) *Spanish*: long, blanketlike shawls.

"Say your name in Spanish, oh, please say it!" I had made mouths drop one day by rattling off my full name, which, according to Dominican custom, included my middle names, Mother's and Father's surnames[10] for four generations back.

"Julia Altagracia María Teresa Álvarez Tavares Perello Espaillat Julia Pérez Rochet González." I pronounced it slowly, a name as **chaotic** with sounds as a Middle Eastern bazaar or market day in a South American village.

I suffered most whenever my extended family attended school occasions. For my graduation, they all came, the whole noisy, foreign-looking lot of fat aunts in their dark mourning dresses and hair nets, uncles with full, droopy mustaches and baby-blue or salmon-colored suits and white pointy shoes and fedora hats, the many little cousins who snuck in without tickets. They sat in the first row in order to better understand the Americans' fast-spoken English. But how could they listen when they were constantly speaking among themselves in florid-sounding phrases, rococo consonants, rich, rhyming vowels? Their loud voices carried. ▶

Introducing them to my friends was a further trial to me. These relatives had such complicated names and there were so many of them, and their relationships to myself were so **convoluted**. There was my Tía Josefina, who was not really an aunt but a much older cousin. And her daughter, Aída Margarita, who was adopted, *una hija de crianza*.[11] My uncle of affection, Tío José, brought my madrina Tía Amelia and her *comadre* Tía Pilar.[12] My friends rarely had more than their nuclear family[13] to introduce, youthful, glamorous-looking couples ("Mom and Dad") who skied and played tennis and took their kids for spring vacations to Bermuda. ▶

After the commencement ceremony, my family waited outside in the parking lot while my friends and I signed

10. **surnames:** last names.
11. ***una hija de crianza*** (o͞o'nä ē'hä dĕ krē-än'sä) *Spanish*: a child raised as if one's own.
12. **My uncle of affection . . . Tía Pilar:** My favorite uncle, Uncle José, brought my godmother Aunt Amelia and her close friend Aunt Pilar.
13. **nuclear family:** a family unit consisting of a mother, a father, and their children.

chaotic (kā-ŏt'ĭk) *adj.* confused; disordered

TestSmart

VOCABULARY

What does the word *florid* mean in line 122?

(A) plain
(B) flowery
(C) forgetful
(D) peaceful

TIP When a test item asks you about a word you're unsure of, you can use what you know about **word parts** to help you find the correct answer. In this case, think about words that contain the word part *flor*, such as *floral* and *florist*. Then look for the answer choice that is similar in meaning.

convoluted (kŏn'və-lo͞o'tĭd) *adj.* difficult to understand; complicated

MONITOR

When you read autobiographical writing, you learn the writer's private thoughts and feelings. Reread lines 113–134. Underline details that reveal Alvarez's feelings about her family.

Describe her feelings in your own words.

yearbooks with nicknames which recalled our high school good times: "Beans" and "Pepperoni" and "Alcatraz." We hugged and cried and promised to keep in touch.

Sometimes if our goodbyes went on too long, I heard my father's voice calling out across the parking lot. "*Hoo-lee-tah! Vámonos!*"[14]

Back home, my tíos and tías and *primas,* Mami and Papi, and *mis hermanas* had a party for me with *sancocho* and a store-bought *pudín,* inscribed with *Happy Graduation, Julie.*[15] There were many gifts—that was a plus to a large family! I got several wallets and a suitcase with my initials and a graduation charm from my godmother and money from my uncles. The biggest gift was a portable typewriter from my parents for writing my stories and poems.

Someday, the family predicted, my name would be well-known throughout the United States. I laughed to myself, wondering which one I would go by. PAUSE & REFLECT

PAUSE & REFLECT

Personal essays often allow you to get a sense of the author's personality. After reading this essay, what sense do you have of Julia Alvarez? Write four adjectives on the lines below. *DRAW CONCLUSIONS*

Big Question

Look back at the Big Question on page 165. What do you think Julia Alvarez's name means to her? Use some of the following words and phrases in your answer. *MAKE INFERENCES*

identity	*pride*
being different	*fitting in*
family	*culture*

14. ***Vámonos*** (bä'mô-nôs) *Spanish:* Let's go.

15. **Back home . . . *Julie:*** Back home, my uncles and aunts and cousins, Mami and Papi, and my sisters had a party for me with a stew and a store-bought pudding, inscribed with *Happy Graduation, Julie.*

Reading Comprehension

DIRECTIONS *Answer these questions by filling in the correct ovals.*

1. The author doesn't correct the immigration official's pronunciation of her family's name because
   - (A) she is too embarrassed
   - (B) her mother tells her not to
   - (C) her father corrects him first
   - (D) she fears that they will not be allowed to enter

2. Why did Mrs. Alvarez first say that her eldest daughter's name was Maureen?
   - (A) There was another child named Mauricia at the hospital.
   - (B) She was embarrassed to be different.
   - (C) Maureen was her aunt's name.
   - (D) Mrs. Alvarez loved Irish names.

3. Which sentence is the best example of the informal style of this personal essay?
   - (A) "My initial desire to be known by my correct Dominican name faded."
   - (B) "My mother blushed and admitted her baby's real name to the group."
   - (C) "There were many gifts—that was a plus to a large family!"
   - (D) "It took a while to get used to my new names."

4. Based on the details given in lines 105–112, Alvarez's peers probably found her name
   - (A) easy to remember
   - (B) unusual and amazing
   - (C) not appropriate for her
   - (D) similar to their own names

5. Read this sentence from "Names/ Nombres":

   > "I just wanted to be Judy and merge with the Sallys and Janes in my class."

   From this sentence, you can infer that as a child, the author
   - (A) longed to be seen as different
   - (B) was teased by the girls in her class
   - (C) relied on her friends, Sally and Jane
   - (D) just wanted to blend in with her classmates

6. What is the main source the author used for the information in this personal essay?
   - (A) immigration records
   - (B) interviews with officials
   - (C) nonfiction books about nicknames
   - (D) her own memories and family stories

7. Which word contains the base word *ethnic* and is similar in meaning?
   - (A) either
   - (B) ethical
   - (C) ethnicity
   - (D) ethernet

8. Which word contains the base word *pronounce*?
   - (A) mispronunciation
   - (B) disproportionate
   - (C) dispassionate
   - (D) pronoun

GO ON