The Name

Original short story. ENL1W, Who I Am, Lesson 6

Name: _____ Date: _____

THE NAME

On the first day of Grade 9, the teacher called attendance in alphabetical order, which meant I had eleven names to get ready.

I knew what would happen. It happened every September. The teacher would reach my name, pause, squint, and try. Sometimes they got the first part. Usually they gave up halfway and looked up hopefully, as if I might take the name back.

“Nkechi?” she said. Close. Better than most.

“It's Nkechi,” I said, the way my mother says it, with the soft start and the bright ending. “Like ‘n-KEH-chee.’”

She tried again. Then again. The girl beside me started to laugh, and I waited for my face to go hot.

Instead, the teacher put down her clipboard. “Hang on,” she said. “Say it one more time? I want to get it right.”

The whole class went quiet. I said it slowly. She repeated it, carefully, the way you'd carry something full to the brim. Then she wrote something beside my name on her list. Later, I saw that she had written it out the way it sounds.

“Thanks,” she said. “That's a beautiful name. What does it mean?”

Nobody had ever asked me that at school. “It means ‘what God has given,’” I said. “My grandmother chose it.”

When she moved on to the next name, the girl beside me leaned over. “That's actually really cool,” she whispered.

I didn't say anything. I just sat up a little straighter. All summer I had been thinking about using a nickname this year, something short and easy that nobody would trip over.

I decided to keep my name.

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Response

Pair activity. ENL1W, Who I Am, Lesson 6

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. How does the narrator feel at the start? Use a quote.

2. What is the turning point of the story?

3. Why does the narrator decide to keep her name? Make an inference with evidence.

4. What does the story suggest about belonging?

5. Connect the story to your life, another text or something in the world.

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