

## The story of your name: building community in the service – learning classroom

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### **Abstract:**

This activity can be beneficial to anyone who teaches classes which require student presentations, discussion, in-class activities, or other forms of oral communication.

**Keywords:** ice breakers | communication apprehension

### **Article:**

**\*\*\*Note: Full text of article below**

## Motivating Students

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In Your Class: Empower students to shape the course. As the course progresses, assess the course. Give little surveys. Ask students to help create assignments and tests. Ask students to offer their opinions about what makes a good professor or learning environment. Show students that you take their advice by putting their reasonable requests into practice in your class. Do you remember your BEST teachers? They were the ones who taught with you constantly in mind. They tailored the course to meet the needs of each specific class.

**4. Success Motivates.** For many people motivation occurs when they do something well. You feel part of a worthwhile endeavor and you work hard to ensure continued success. The saying is true: nothing succeeds like success!

In Your Class: Give credit for little victories. In public speaking class, little victories can be found for a student who was too afraid to speak, who managed to speak to a small group, to the skilled speaker refining transition statements in a speech. The key here is that success is very specific to the individuals in the class.

**5 Personal Benefits Motivate.** What's in it for me? Most people want to know the answer up front. Many people need to see the reward system before they can get excited about performing well.

In Your Class: Be very clear about your grading and the penalties for not completing assignments. This is a hallmark of good teaching. In speech class, I show sample speeches that are "A" "B" and "C" grade speeches. I give a very detailed description of how they are graded. I also make the statement in the first class: "This course is designed for you to succeed." This sets the tone and lets students know that their destiny is in their own hands.

*Many people need to see the reward system before they can get excited about performing well.*

**6. Clarity Motivates.** If our task is unclear, we cannot know what we need to do to be successful. This point is a close cousin to #5, because being clear—letting people know what they need to do to be successful—usually makes people very successful.

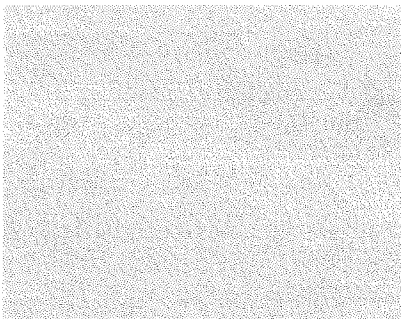
In Your Class: Spell out your goals and expectations for students as clearly as you can. Bring in sample work from the previous year and describe projects in great detail. Give specific information about formatting, length, and due dates. The clearer you are, the more students will be able to live up to your clear expectations.

Remember that lifting up students is a sure-fire way to make your courses more effective, your time better spent, and your teaching more successful.

### Reference

Silberman, Mel. (Ed.). (1999). "How to motivate others." *Training and Performance Sourcebook*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

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## The Story of Your Name

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### Introduction

For ten years I started each class off with the same ice breaking "circle of friends" activity because the students liked it and it accomplished the desired goals. After team teaching *The Power of Story* at Monmouth University for a year with Claire B. Johnson, I was challenged to come up with an even better ice breaker. Claire encouraged me to find a way that the first day ice breaker might also serve as an introduction to the performance elements that I would later cover in great detail. What resulted is a class activity which fosters a sense of community, allows students to face their communication apprehension in a non-threatening way, introduces some of the performance elements of speaking (eye contact, rate, and volume), and creates a positive atmosphere in which the rest of the semester can flourish. This activity can be beneficial to anyone who teaches classes which require student presentations, discussion, in-class activities, or other forms of oral communication. Beyond my



Children at Atlantic Highlands Elementary School in New Jersey enjoy a story about a man who needs a hearing aid. (Credit for the photograph goes to Jim Reme.)

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## The Story of Your Name

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communication courses, I have used it in my interdisciplinary class and in workshops with 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> graders with great success.

### What to do before the activity:

Be sure your class has been assigned to a room which will allow for chairs and desks to be moved. Students will need to move their seats as the activity progresses. Students will stay seated during the entire activity.

*This activity can be beneficial to anyone who teaches classes which require student presentation, discussion, in-class activities, or other forms of oral communication.*

### What to do during the activity:

1. Instruct students to write down the story of their name. Tell them to be sure to include everything they know relating to their name. This might include the reason they were so named and/or anything that has happened to them to date related to their name. From this point on, all members of the class will participate in each step of this activity at the same time. (It will get loud at times.)

2. Pair students up in teams of two and have them read their name stories to each other.

3. After all students have had the chance to share their story with a partner, pair teams of two together forming circles made up of groups of four students. Have them take turns telling the story of their name until all four people in the group have had the opportunity to speak. This time tell them not to read but instead look at the others in the group as much as

possible. Make it clear that only one person should be talking at any point in each group.

4. After all students have had the chance to share their story with their group of four, create groups of eight (again in circles) by joining two groups of four. Have them take turns telling the story of their name until all eight people in the group have had the opportunity to speak. No reading once again. Make it clear that only one person should be talking at any point in each group.

5. After all of the groups of eight have finished, split the class into two large circles. Have the students take turns telling the story of their name until all in the circle have spoken. No reading. Make it clear that only one person should be talking at any point in each group.

6. The last step involves the entire class forming one large circle. One at a time individuals, including the faculty members tell the story of their names to the entire class. No reading.

### What to do after the activity:

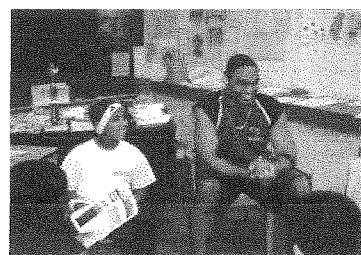
Facilitate a discussion or assign a written reflection which focuses on any of the following:

- What are the common themes heard in the stories?
- What are personal adjustments made in presenting the story as the audience grew?
- What changes did they notice in the stories of others as they were repeated?
- What are the benefits of practicing a public address before the formal presentation?
- What might someone have learned as a result of participating in the activity?

### Conclusion

The questions used after the activity can be designed to focus on the specifics of

the content of the course. I like to follow my review of the syllabus with this activity. I have sometimes facilitated the discussion on the second day due to time restrictions. At the end of each semester when students are asked to reflect on their progress for the semester, they often point to the name story activity as the reason they were able to start out so successfully. One former student, now studying education in graduate school, recently commented on the power of story to transform the classroom on that very first day of the semester.



Monmouth storyteller Stephen Bridgemohan tells students at Bradley Primary School in Asbury Park, New Jersey about his proud heritage through the story of his name.

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Kim serves on the Communicating Common Ground (CCG) national leadership team. CCG (<http://www.natcom.org/Instruction/CCG/ccg.htm>) is a partnership of the National Communication Association, American Association of Higher Education, Southern Poverty Law Center, and Campus Compact which is dedicated to stopping hate, hate speech, and hate crimes by teaching tolerance to kids. To find out more about The Storytelling Project visit [www.monmouth.edu/~story](http://www.monmouth.edu/~story).

