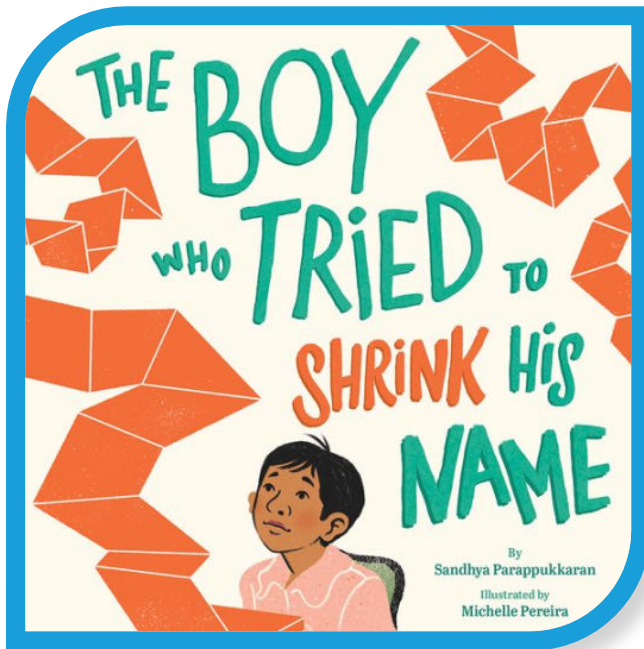




# Monthly Featured Book

Presented by ADL's Education Department

**About the Monthly Featured Book:** This collection of featured books is from Books Matter™: The Best Kid Lit on Bias, Diversity and Social Justice. The books teach about bias and prejudice, promote respect for diversity, encourage social action and reinforce themes addressed in education programs of [A World of Difference® Institute](#), ADL's international anti-bias education and diversity training provider. For parents, guardians and family members, reading the books listed on this site with your children and integrating the concepts into your interactions with them is an excellent way to help children grapple with and learn about these important principles.



## The Boy Who Tried to Shrink His Name

Sandhya Parappukaran (Author) and Michelle Pereira (Illustrator)

Age Range: 4-8

Year Published: 2023

### Book Themes

Diversity, Importance of Names, People, Identity and Culture

## About the Book

When Zimdalamashkermishkada starts at a new school, he knows he'll have to introduce himself to lots of new people. He trips over his long name and decides to shrink it down to the shorter, simpler Zim. The nickname works fine for introductions, but deep down, it doesn't feel right. It's not until a new friend sees him for who he truly is that Zimdalamashkermishkada finds the confidence to step proudly into his long name. This book is an uplifting story that encourages young readers to celebrate their authentic selves, and proclaims that no one should ever have to shrink themselves to fit in.

## Conversation Starters

Whether you read the book aloud with your child or your child reads it on their own and you discuss it later, you can use these open-ended questions to deepen the conversation. Remembering not to judge their responses, listen thoughtfully and engage in a give-and-take that will help them expand upon their understanding of the book and its themes.

- What happens in the story?

- Why do you think Zimdalamashkermishkada says that his name “trips me up every morning?” Why does he want to shrink or shorten his name?
- How do you think Zimdalamashkermishkada feels when his teacher asks him “Can you say your name again?” What makes you think he feels that way?
- How do you think Zimdalamashkermishkada’s mom feels when he says he wants to change his name to Zim? How can you tell she feels this way?
- How does Zimdalamashkermishkada finally learn to do the skateboard trick? How does Elly learn to say Zimdalamashkermishkada’s full name? How does he help her?
- What do these two experiences of learning something new have in common?
- Have you ever tried to learn something new? How did you do it?
- Can you relate to the story at all? If so, how?
- How did you feel when the book ended? What do you think will happen next?
- Why do you think the author wrote this book? What lesson can you take away from the story?

## Talking Points

Below are some important considerations to highlight in order to make this a learning opportunity for your child and your family.

### 1. Importance of Names

Talk with your child about the main message in the book—the importance of names and saying and pronouncing them correctly. Remind them that we see in the book that Zimdalamashkermishkada tries to shrink or shorten his name, and others also try to shorten his name. Explain/elicite that Zimdalamashkermishkada’s parents named him that for a specific or special reason. Ask your child why others and Zimdalamashkermishkada himself feel the need to shorten his name. Explain/elicite that he has a long name and others may not have seen or said it before. It may be helpful to explain to your child that instead of saying someone’s name is “hard” or “difficult to pronounce,” you could say that you “need more practice saying it.” Stating that someone’s name is “difficult to pronounce” makes it sound like there’s something wrong with their name, which can make children feel excluded or disrespected. In addition, you can share with them that some names that may be considered “hard” to pronounce in their classroom or community may be very common names in a classroom in a different community or country. And names that might be considered common or ordinary in their classroom or community might be uncommon or even “hard to pronounce” in another classroom. If appropriate, you can also talk with them about their name, the specific or special reason you gave them their name, and the origins of it. You can discuss how you feel about your name and ask them how they feel about their name.

### 2. People, Identity and Culture

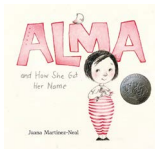
Elicite and explain to your child that for some people and families, names reflect something about their identity or culture. You can define culture as “the patterns of daily life that can be seen in language, arts, customs, holiday celebrations, food, religion, beliefs/values, communication style, music, clothing and more that a group of people share.” Explain that these aspects of culture can be (but are not always) handed down from one generation to another through relatives and ancestors. Elicite details from the book that reflect his culture (e.g., food, clothing, naming, etc.). Ask your child if they think Zimdalamashkermishkada’s name is part of his culture or identity group. Talk with your child about the aspects of race, religion, ethnicity and culture that are important in your family. Explain how you would define your family’s culture(s), and together identify what foods, holidays, customs,

naming traditions, etc. are important to your family. Your family may identify with more than one culture or may not have a strong or central cultural identity, and that can also be discussed. Talk with your child about what they know and don't know about their culture, what they may have found out about their culture from you (their parent), grandparents or other relatives; what more they want to know and what questions they have to learn more.

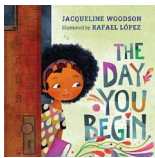
### 3. Practice Helps You Learn Something New

Talk with your child about how in the book, we see that several people don't try to pronounce Zimdalamashkermishkada's name and some try to shorten it. Zimdalamashkermishkada himself also tries to shorten it and says that his name "trips me up every morning," Ask your child: What happens when Zimdalamashkermishkada learns from Elly how to do a skateboard trick? Elicit that he learns that breaking something into smaller parts/steps and practicing those steps (and sometimes making mistakes) helps him learn how to do the skateboard trick. Ask: How does this relate to learning to pronounce Zimdalamashkermishkada's name? Similar to learning the skateboard trick, breaking Zimdalamashkermishkada's name into parts and practicing helps Elly learn how to say his name. Engage your child in a discussion about whether they have ever tried to learn something new (like riding a bicycle, making a recipe, learning to play an instrument or sport) or learned to pronounce a new word or name. Elicit and explain that practicing (and breaking it into parts) helped them learn that skill, word or name.

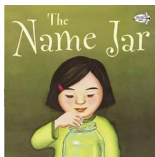
## Other Books You Might Like



Alma and How She Got Her Name <https://www.adl.org/alma-and-how-she-got-her-name>



The Day You Begin <https://www.adl.org/day-you-begin>



The Name Jar <https://www.adl.org/name-jar>



Your Name is a Song <https://www.adl.org/your-name-song>

## ADL Additional Resources

The following are curriculum and other resources on the importance of names, culture/identity and diversity.

- 7 Amazing Books that Convey the Importance and Value of Names <https://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?f%5B0%5D=topic%3A1626>
- Children's Books about People, Identity and Culture <https://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?f%5B0%5D=topic%3A1586>
- Children's Books about People who are Asian American Pacific Islander <https://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?f%5B0%5D=topic%3A1626>
- Early Childhood Frequently Asked Questions <https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/question-corner>
- Identity-Based Bullying <https://www.adl.org/resources/lesson-plan/identity-based-bullying>
- Let's Get it Right: Using Correct Pronouns and Names <https://www.adl.org/resources/tools-and-strategies/lets-get-it-right-using-correct-pronouns-and-names>
- Table Talk: Family Conversations about Current Events <https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/table-talk>
- Who Am I? Identity Poems <https://www.adl.org/resources/lesson-plan/who-am-i-identity-poems>
- Why We Need Diverse Books <https://www.adl.org/resources/tools-and-strategies/why-we-need-diverse-books>