



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 educators, adult family members and other caregivers of children, reading the books listed on this site with your children and incorporating them into instruction are excellent ways to talk about these important concepts at home and in the classroom.

The Boy Who Tried to Shrink His Name

Sandhya Parappukaran (Author) and
Michelle Pereira (Illustrator)

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.

ISBN: 978-1419761584

Publisher: Harry N. Abrams

Year Published: 2023

Age Range: 4–8



Book Themes

Diversity, Importance of Names, People, Identity and Culture

Key Words

Discuss and define the words below with students prior to reading the book. Rather than focus on students' retention of all the words, make sure they understand the words enough to follow the story and remind students of the words' meanings as they come up in the book. You can also post the words and point out when they appear in the story. For definitions that are differentiated for young children, see ADL's [Education Glossary Terms](#).

- | | | | |
|------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|
| ■ copying | ■ glances | ■ practice | ■ trips |
| ■ curry | ■ horizontally | ■ ramp | ■ undone |
| ■ explodes | ■ monitors | ■ sheltering | ■ unfolds |
| ■ extend | ■ original | ■ shrink | ■ vertically |
| ■ firmly | ■ origami | ■ trick | ■ wobbly |

Discussion Questions

Before reading the book aloud, ask some or all of these pre-reading questions:

- Describe the cover of the book. Who and what do you see?
- What do you think the title means?
- What do you think the book will be about?

As you read the book aloud, ask a few discussion questions periodically throughout reading to check for comprehension and keep the students engaged. Below are some sample questions that correlate to specific page numbers:

- Why does the boy want to shrink his name? (Page 5)
- What does Elly call Zimdalamashkermishkada? (Page 16)
- How does Elly learn to do the trick on her skateboard? (Page 23)

After reading the book aloud, engage students in a discussion by asking some or all of the following discussion questions:

- What happens in the story?
- When Zimdalamashkermishkada says that his name “trips me up every morning,” what do you think he means?
- Why does he think he needs a shorter name?
- How do you think Zimdalamashkermishkada feels when his teacher asks him “Can you say your name again?” Why do you think he feels that way?
- How do the other students treat Zimdalamashkermishkada (e.g., “laughter, sideways glances”)? Have you ever experienced something like this?
- When Elly calls Zimdalamashkermishkada “Zim,” how does he respond? Why do you think he responds that way?
- How does Zimdalamashkermishkada’s mom feel when he says he wants to change his name to Zim?
- When Zimdalamashkermishkada wonders how Elly learned to do the skateboarding trick, what does she tell him?
- Have you ever had to practice something that you didn’t know how to do, or practice to get better at something? How did you learn?
- How does practicing something you want to learn relate to learning how to say or pronounce someone’s name?
- How does Zimdalamashkermishkada slowly help Elly get his name right?
- How do you think Zimdalamashkermishkada feels when, at the end of the book, Elly says, “His name is Zimdalamashkermishkada!” How do you think Elly feels? Why do you think they feel that way?
- Why do you think the author wrote this book? What lesson can we learn from the story?
- How did you feel when the book ends?
- What do you think the author called the book *The Boy Who Tried to Shrink his Name*? If there was a sequel (a book or movie that continues the story) to this book, what would it be called?

Extension Activities

Below are activities for students that can extend learning from the book.

1. What Happens Next in the Book?

Have students imagine and draw/write what happens next in the book. First, remind them how the book ends by re-reading pages 29-33 and then ask students: *What happens at the end of the book?* Remind students that after a lot of practice, Zimdalamashkermishkada learns how to do the trick on his skateboard and he finally is able to make the full turn. Elly corrects others by saying, "His name is Zimdalamashkermishkada," saying his full name for the first time. Ask students: *What do you think happens next after Zimdalamashkermishkada is able to do the skateboard trick and Elly says his full name? What do you think might happen in school? Will his teacher and will the other students learn to say his full name? How do you think Zimdalamashkermishkada will feel about his name moving forward?* Have students imagine what might happen if the book continues for a few more pages by letting them think and write some thoughts/ideas on their own and then engage in brainstorming of ideas as a class. Then, invite them to draw and/or write another page or two as they imagine the book continuing. When completed, students can share their pages with the rest of the class by posting them on the wall and moving around the room gallery-style to see all the ways in which students imagined the story continuing. You can also invite parents and family members in for a whole class reading of the book and include the students' additional pages.

2. My Name, My Identity

Ask students: *What is this book about?* Remind students that this book is about names and the importance of saying someone's full name correctly. Ask students: *What are some ways we can learn to pronounce someone's name?* Brainstorm strategies for correctly pronouncing others' names, which may include (1) have students introduce themselves and emphasize how to pronounce their name and have other students say it back; (2) in the beginning of the school year, invite students to say their name aloud every time they raise their hand; (3) have all students record (audio or video) the pronunciation of their name; (4) use the strategy that Zimdalamashkermishkada and Elly used, by breaking down the name into parts and then practicing; and (5) model and foster a culture where students can ask others how they pronounce their name to make sure they are getting it right. Then, explain/ elicit that someone's name is part of their identity and may be central to who they are. Define identity as: "the qualities, beliefs, etc. that make a particular person or group different from others." Explain that Zimdalamashkermishkada's parents named him that for a special reason. Then ask or remind students about how Zimdalamashkermishkada feels pressure to shorten his name and others also try to shorten his name. Ask students: *Why do Zimdalamashkermishkada and others feel they need to shorten his name?* Explain/ elicit that he has a long name and others may not be familiar with the name. Through Zimdalamashkermishkada's friendship with Elly, he learns that he can learn a skateboarding trick by breaking down the steps and practicing. Ask students: *Why is it important to learn to pronounce someone's name correctly?* Explain that instead of saying that certain names are hard or challenging to pronounce, it is more inclusive and respectful to say "I need more practice to pronounce that name." Build empathy with students by explaining that saying 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.

3. People, Identity and Culture

Explain that names sometimes reflect something about our culture. Ask: *What is culture?* Define the word 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 the parts of

culture are often (but not always) handed down from family or community members or from one generation to the next. Culture can also come from the place where the person's family and ancestors live or are from. Explain that culture also can include one's region of the country, whether you live in a city, suburban or rural setting, your family traditions including how you celebrate holidays, your religion, other identity categories etc. Ask students: *What did you learn about Zimdalamashkermishkada and his family's culture from the book? Were there aspects of daily life you saw in the book that are part of his family's culture (e.g., language, food, clothing, names, etc.)?* After this discussion, ask students to share aspects of their own culture(s) that are important to them. Then have students create their own cultural webs. They can put their name in a circle in the middle of the web and then create other circles (or whatever shapes they like) around it, writing words or drawing pictures (especially for younger children) of the things about their identity and/or their culture that are important to them. They can then connect these pictures or words to their names and to the other circles that are related (e.g., if they record two or more different holidays, they can connect them to their name as well as each other). This activity can also be done by first having students talk with their family members about aspects of their culture, including the origin or meaning of their name, and then bringing that information to school to include in their culture webs.

ADL Resources

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

Curriculum Resources

9 Ideas for Teaching Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) Heritage Month <https://www.adl.org/resources/lesson-plan/9-ideas-teaching-asian-american-pacific-islander-heritage-month>

Bellen Woodard, Identity and "Crayon Activism" <https://www.adl.org/resources/lesson-plan/bellen-woodard-identity-and-crayon-activism>

Diverse Books Matter <https://www.adl.org/resources/lesson-plan/diverse-books-matter>

Who Am I? Identity Poems <https://www.adl.org/resources/lesson-plan/who-am-i-identity-poems>

Websites

7 Amazing Books that Convey the Importance and Value of Names <https://www.adl.org/resources/blog/7-amazing-books-convey-importance-and-value-names>

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>

Safe and Inclusive Schools for All <https://www.adl.org/resources/tools-and-strategies/safe-and-inclusive-schools-all>

Children's Books

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>

Books about People Who Are Asian, South Asian, Southeast Asian, Pacific Islander <https://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?f%5B0%5D=topic%3A1626>