

Names Lost and Names Kept

Name _____

Date _____

1 These Are the Names Exodus 1:1

וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הַבָּאִים מִצְרָיִם

"Now these are the names of the sons of Israel, who came into Egypt with Jacob; every man came with his household." The Book of Exodus takes its Hebrew name, *Shemot* ("Names"), from these opening words.

Think: Why might a story about slavery and freedom begin with a list of names?

2 What Kept a People Together Vayikra Rabbah 32:5, a collection of rabbinic teachings

A rabbinic teaching says that the Israelites were redeemed from Egypt for several reasons, among them that they did not change their names and did not change their language, even after generations of living in a foreign land.

Think: Why would keeping names and language help a people survive? Do you agree?

3 A Classroom in Israel Sami Shalom Chetrit, "These Are the Names," from *Poems in Ashdodian* (2003)

Chetrit was born in Morocco in 1960 and came to Israel at age three. In this poem, he remembers the children of North African families in his town, who had French and Arabic names like Alain, Jackie, Patrick, Brigitte, and Georgette. Their teacher wrote Hebrew names in the class register instead: Ilan, Yaakov, David, Aliza, Zehava. The children understood what was happening, but they insisted on keeping their old names a little longer. The poem's title echoes the opening of Exodus.

Think: Who changed the names, and why? Why do you think the children held on to their old names?

4 A Youth Group Renames Its Members Eli Amir, *Scapegoat* (1983), a novel

Eli Amir came to Israel from Iraq as a boy and drew on his own life in this novel about immigrant teenagers sent to live on a kibbutz in the early 1950s. On their first day, a counselor reads their names from a list and gives each a Hebrew one: Abed Aziz becomes Avner, and Jamil, delighted, becomes Yoram. When the narrator, Nuri, is told he will be Nimrod, he refuses and keeps repeating, "Nuri."

Think: Why might Jamil welcome his new name while Nuri refuses his? What does each choice mean?

5 The Ellis Island Myth Smithsonian Magazine, 2016

Many American families say their name was changed by officials at Ellis Island. Historians say this almost never happened. Inspectors checked arriving passengers against lists written by shipping clerks in Europe, and many inspectors spoke several languages. Most changes were made later by immigrants themselves, who wanted to sound more American or fit into their new communities.

Think: Why might families tell the Ellis Island story? How is a chosen change different from an imposed one?

6 Names Reclaimed Israel, recent decades

In Israel's early years, leaders encouraged a new Hebrew identity, and in 1950 state officials representing Israel abroad were required to take Hebrew surnames. Many immigrants also received Hebrew names on arrival. In recent years, some Ethiopian Israelis who were given Hebrew names have returned to their original Amharic names.

Think: Why might someone reclaim a name their family once gave up? What does it say about identity today?

Sources 1 and 2 translated by JIMENA. Sources 3 and 4 are summaries by JIMENA; teachers who have the original works may read them aloud. Translation of Exodus 1:1 from the Jewish Publication Society (1917).