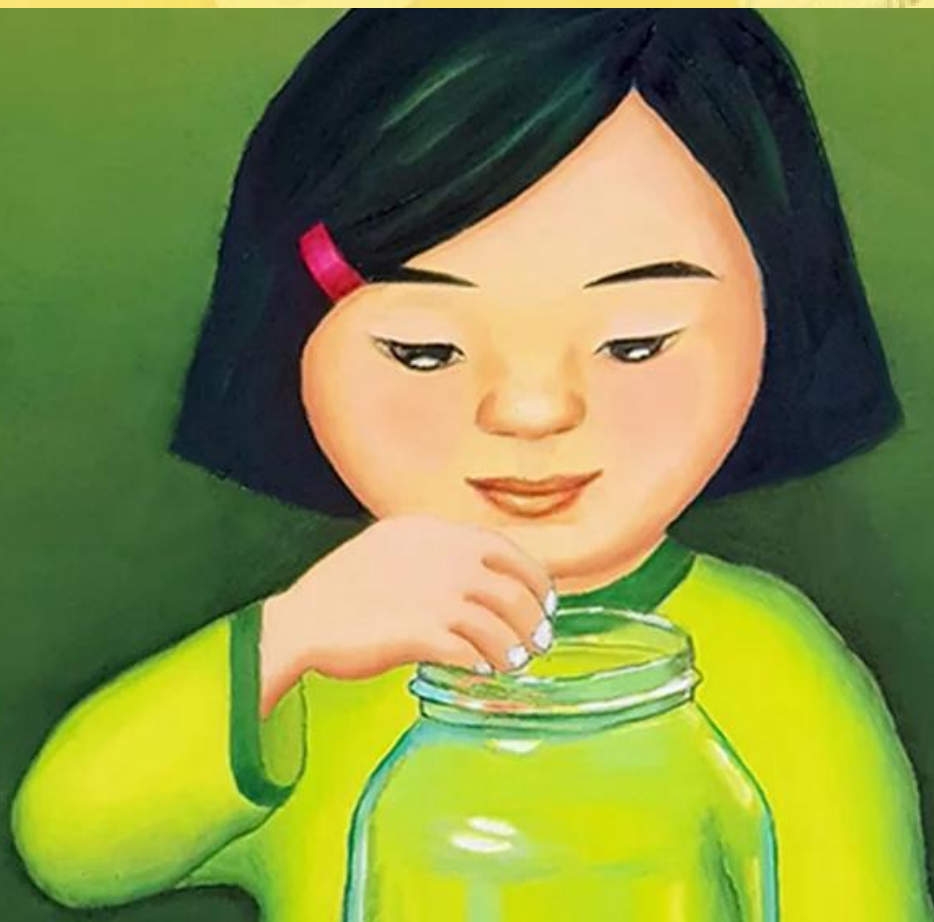


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The Name Jar **Educator Guide**

Exploring Names and Belonging

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This guide was created by K-12 educators in collaboration with author and illustrator Yangsook Choi



About the Book

Title: The Name Jar

Author & Illustrator: Yangsook Choi

Publisher: Knopf Books for Young Readers
(Random House)

Genre: Children's Picture Book, Realistic Fiction

Recommended Grades: K - 5

Synopsis:

The Name Jar tells the story of Unhei, a young girl who moves from Korea to the United States.

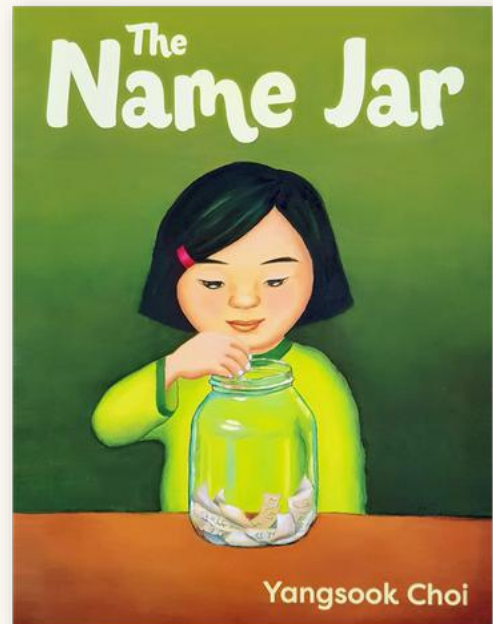
On her first day at her new school, Unhei is worried that her classmates will not be able to pronounce her name, so she decides not to share it. Her classmates then create a jar full of potential names for her to choose from.

Torn between fitting in and staying true to herself as she settles into her new life in America, Unhei ultimately realizes that her name doesn't need to be traded for something easier to say.

With growing confidence and encouragement from a new friend, she comes to embrace her own name and its deep connection to her family, heritage, and identity.

Themes:

- identity and self-acceptance
- inclusivity
- empathy
- friendship
- courage
- cultural heritage



Select Recognition:

2001 Chicago Library
Best of the Best

2002 IRA Teachers' Choice

2003 Arkansas Diamond
Primary Book Master List

2004 PBS Reading
Rainbow Selection

2005 Arizona Young
Readers Award Nominee

2019-2020 Kellogg's Feeding
Reading Program Selection

2021 49ers Read for
Justice Selection

2023 One Houston, One
Book City-Wide Reading
Selection

2024 Stages Theatre
Company Theatrical
Adaption

About the Author



Yangsook Choi is the author of the beloved classic **The Name Jar**. Growing up in Korea, she began drawing at age four and loved telling her grandmother scary stories at night. After moving to New York to pursue her art, she has written and illustrated many books for young readers.

Her books have been acclaimed as a New York Times Outstanding Book of the Year, an American Library Association Notable Book, and with an International Literacy Association's Children's Book Award. She has also received 200+ rejection letters—until she lost count. They never stopped coming.

Her past jobs include waiting tables at a smoky Korean BBQ, flying as a flight attendant, and drawing tiny pictures on fake nails.

When she is not creating, she enjoys doodling alongside children locally and across the globe. She has drawn with children in local shelters, mountain villages in the Himalayas, a Bedouin community in the Arabian desert, an underground shelter in China for North Korea refugee children, and an orphanage in Cambodia. She considers these children among her greatest teachers.

Teachers:

Use **The Name Jar**—a simple yet engaging and powerful read aloud—and associated activities to activate students' windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors.

Windows, Mirrors, and Sliding Glass Doors



All learners need reading experiences that allow them to see themselves reflected, explore perspectives different from their own, and step into the lived experiences of others.

Windows invite students into worlds beyond their own. **Mirrors** affirm that who they are and where they come from belong in the classroom. Sometimes, lessons can even become **sliding glass doors**, an invitation to step inside, explore, and feel a sense of belonging.

-BrainPOP Blog Post by Christine Dai,
Make Us Visible NY Co-Director & Middle School Educator

Teacher Testimony: A Note from K-5 Educator Devika Ganapathy



I read **The Name Jar** by Yangsook Choi during the first week of school because it opens up both a **window** and a **sliding glass door** to naturally start talking about who we are, how we want to be known, and what it really means to make someone feel like they belong. Every year the conversations sound different, depending on the students sitting in front of me, which is exactly why I keep coming back to it.

As a lower elementary special education teacher, I love how much space the book gives us to slow down and notice. We can look at Unhei's body language, think about what she's feeling, and talk about the difference between having kind intentions and actually making someone feel understood. I also share my own story about becoming "Dev" because I want my students to see me go first, showing up as either a **window** or a **mirror** for them. Before I ask them to share about their own identities, I want them to know that our classroom is a place where all of our names, stories, and experiences are worth learning about.

Beyond that, I think it matters that Asian American voices are present in our classrooms beyond Asian American and Pacific Islander heritage month or a designated cultural celebration. When stories like **The Name Jar** are woven naturally into the way we build routines, community, literacy skills, and even just having some fun together, they stop feeling like it's a "special" or "different" story and simply become the norm.

At the beginning of the school year, Devika's class creates a chain of links decorated by each student with their name.

It provides a visual metaphor for classroom community—students don't have to be the same in order to belong.

It can also be an informal observation of handwriting, spelling, fine motor skills, task initiation, stamina, and comfort with open-ended work.



WE ARE CONNECTED.

EVERY LINK IS DIFFERENT. EVERY LINK BELONGS.

TOGETHER, THEY MAKE OUR CLASSROOM.

02 About this Guide

This discussion guide is designed to help educators explore *The Name Jar* with young readers. It can be used in classrooms, libraries, or at home, and is flexible enough to fit a single sitting or several shorter sessions.

About the Book provides background on the story, author Yangsook Choi, and central themes, which is a helpful starting point before diving into reading and discussion.

Learning Goals outline student-facing instructional objectives that frame what readers should understand or be able to do by the end of the unit, and include a 45-50 minute sample lesson plan to guide instruction.

Discussion Questions are organized by pre-, during, and post-reading:

- **Pre-reading questions** activate thinking around names, belonging, and the experience of moving or facing something new
- **During reading questions** offer strategic stopping points paired with text-dependent questions
- **Post-reading questions** are higher-order, organized around the book's major themes

Feel free to pick and choose based on your group's age and attention span.

Words and Names to Know highlights key words and pronunciations from the text that may be new to readers. Consider pausing to discuss each as they appear in the text.

Activities, including **Printable Worksheets**, offer hands-on ways to extend the book's themes beyond discussion, such as crafting, writing, and reflective exercises. These work well as follow-up sessions or take-home extensions.

Expand the Learning provides additional resources, related titles, and ways to connect the book's themes to your community.

There is no single “right” way to move through this guide! You can read the book together first, then choose the sections and questions that best fit your group's needs, time, and comfort level.

03 Learning Goals

Learning Objectives

Students will explore themes of identity, cultural inclusivity, and acceptance through the story *The Name Jar*.

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1

Explain the meaning and origin of their own name, and describe why it holds personal or cultural significance

2

Identify and describe an element of their own cultural heritage

3

Make personal connections between a text and their own life experiences, using specific examples from the text to support thinking in verbal discussion and/or written response

4

Engage with their own name through multiple modes of expression—written, spoken, and hands-on—to reinforce identity and a sense of belonging

5

Demonstrate respectful listening skills and responses when hearing about others' names or cultures, building appreciation for differences within a classroom community.

Justine

Hannah

ADAPT FOR
OLDER GRADES

These learning goals are applicable across ages and grade levels.

For middle school, consider adapting this guide into a single-class lesson.

For high school, use it as an opening activity to launch deeper conversations about identity, belonging, and cultural inclusion.

04 Before You Teach

Section 6:
Pronunciation Guide &
Discussion Questions
PP. 9-11

1

Review selected discussion questions

2

Familiarize yourself with pronunciation, especially of Unhei's name

3

Gather materials according to selected activity

4

Decide whether/how you will model a personal name story

Section 7: Activities
with Printable
Worksheets & Section
8: Extension Activities
PP. 12-17

**INSIGHT FROM DEVIKA'S
CLASSROOM**



Another special element for this lesson is a teacher bringing in a human experience. It sets a tone that 1.) your teachers are people too and 2.) makes the story feel real. I always share the story with my students of how I was Devika my whole life, but on the first day of college, someone mispronounced my name, and I blurted out, "If Dev's easier you can say that," and it just stuck forever.

In the classroom, a role-play around an unfamiliar name could potentially become practice asking someone how to say their name, listening carefully, and trying again when we get it wrong (I'll often use myself for this—Devika Lakshmi Ganapathy is a mouthful).

05 Lesson at a Glance

Total Time: 45-50 minutes

Format: Read-aloud, discussion, and hands-on activity. Options for extension.

Suggested Sequence:

Launch (5 minutes)

- Introduce the theme of names by having each student write their name on an index card or name tag
- On the back, have students answer a few low-risk warm up questions: Do you have nicknames? Are you named after someone? Have you ever named something like a pet or character? What is one thing you like about your name?)
- Introduce the idea of names and belonging through a name chain activity (see page 4)
- Keep this light and open! The goal is to activate thinking, not to put anyone on the spot

Consider sharing your own completed index card or name tag as a model for students.

Modeling personal vulnerability, when appropriate, can help students feel more comfortable engaging with the prompt.

Read Aloud & Discussion (20-25 minutes)

- Read **The Name Jar** aloud, pausing at selected moments to explore Unhei's perspective and her changing relationship with her name (see Discussion Questions on page 10 for suggested stopping points)

Activity (15-20 minutes)

Choose one classroom activity based on students' age/readiness

Suggested for Grades K-1

- Filling a Name Jar (Drawing)
- Filling a Name Jar (Drawing and writing)

Suggested for Grades 2-3

- A Name Story

Suggested for Grades 4-5

- Writing Prompt

Reflection (5 minutes)

- Return to the essential question: How can we help people feel they belong without asking them to change who they are?

Extensions

- See Extension Activities section (page 17) for further material



Pronunciation Guide & Discussion Questions

Words and Names to Know

- **Unhei** (YOON-hey): the main character
- **Kimchi** (KIM-chee): a common Korean side dish made from vegetables and spices
- **Pronunciation**: making the sounds of a word
- **Identity**: who someone is based on their traits, beliefs, and qualities

Discussion Questions

This section contains suggested discussion questions teachers can utilize throughout the read aloud to engage students in meaningful discussions surrounding key themes of **The Name Jar**.

A. Before Reading

Activate students' thinking about names, belonging, and new experiences.

- What is identity?
- What parts of a person's identity makes them unique?
 - How might those parts shape the way they see themselves and the world around them?
 - How do you feel about your own name? Does it have a special meaning?
- What can a name tell us about someone? What can't it tell us?
- Why might someone's name be important to them?
 - How do people get their names?
- What can we do when we aren't sure how to pronounce someone's name?
- Think about a time when you tried something new: a new sport, the first day of school, a challenging math problem...how did it make you feel?
 - Who or what made you feel like you belonged/were capable of accomplishing that?
- **Deeper Thinking**: How can someone have good intentions but still make another person feel uncomfortable or misunderstood?

B. During Reading

Support student engagement by asking text-dependent questions integrated in strategic stopping points throughout the read aloud.

- What happens when Unhei introduces herself on the bus? How do the other children respond? How do you think their responses affect Unhei? What in the words or illustrations make you think that?
 - When we do not know how to pronounce someone's name, what choices can we make?
 - How might those choices affect the other person?
 - What can you do when you are learning to say someone's name?
- Why does Unhei tell the class that she hasn't chosen a name yet? What clues help us understand what she might be thinking or feeling?
 - Instruction Note: this is a great optional pausing point to talk about what Unhei might be feeling or why someone might feel pressure to hide a part of themselves. It can also be used as a chance to gauge student's general knowledge of character perspective and general social perspective-taking skills!
- When Unhei returns to school, she finds a glass jar on her desk. Why do you think her classmates did this? What do you think their goal was?
 - How do you think her classmates feel?
 - How do you think Unhei feels when she sees the jar?
- After reading her grandma's letter, Unhei takes out her wooden stamp and fills a paper with it. Then, she thinks for a long time in front of the bathroom mirror.
 - What do you think Unhei is thinking and feeling?
 - What might the stamp represent to Unhei?
- **Deeper Thinking:** What experiences might have influenced the way Unhei is thinking about her name? Use evidence from the story.



C. After Reading

Facilitate synthesis of major themes by asking higher-order discussion questions.

- Why did Unhei consider choosing a different name?
- How does Unhei change over the course of the story?
- How do Unhei's classmates change?
- What does Joey do that helps Unhei feel that her name matters?
- What responsibility do we have when someone's name is unfamiliar to us?
- **Deeper Thinking:** What does Joey do that helps Unhei feel seen and understood? How are his actions different from simply being "nice"?

D. Closing Reflection

Encourage students to make connections between the text, themselves, and the classroom community.

- What changed for Unhei? What changed in her classroom?
- What's one thing we can do in our classroom to show care when we're learning someone's name?
- What's one way you could help everyone feel they belong?
- **Deeper Thinking:** How can a community help people belong without asking them to change who they are?



07

Activities with Printable Worksheets

Choose one classroom activity based on students' age/readiness. Printable worksheets are on the next pages and linked in the thumbnails below.

K-1 Suggested for Grades K-1



Filling a Name Jar (Drawing)

Have students draw pictures that represent people who are important to them.



Filling a Name Jar (Drawing and Writing)

Have students draw in names (nice handwriting/bubble letters) that are important to them.

In the bottom box, have students write about one name in the jar that's important to them. For grade 1, have them explain why.

2-3 Suggested for Grades 2-3



A Name Story

Have students write about a name they'd like to explore. It might be their name, a nickname, a family name, or another name that is meaningful or interesting to them.

4-5 Suggested for Grades 4-5



Writing Prompt

Have students write and draw in response to the prompt: Unhei's mom says, "It's good to be different." Write a paragraph connecting the story to your life on why being different is a good thing.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Filling a Name Jar

In the jar, draw pictures of people who are important to you.



Name: _____ Date: _____

Filling a Name Jar

In the jar, write the names of people who are important to you.



Write about one name in the jar that is important to you and why.

Name: _____ Date: _____

A Name Story

Directions: Choose a name you'd like to explore. It might be your name, a nickname, a family name, character name, or another name that is meaningful or interesting to you.

You decide what you'd like to share. It's okay not to know the story behind a name.

The name I'd like to explore: _____

What do I know about this name?

Is there a story connected to it that I'd like to share?

How is this name pronounced?

What else would I like people to know?

Name: _____ Date: _____

The Name Jar

Directions: Unhei's mom says, "It's good to be different." Write a paragraph connecting the story to your life on why being different is a good thing. Then in the box, draw a picture based on what you wrote.



08 Extension Activities

Select activities appropriate to your students and classroom.

Creative Activities

In each activity, discuss the meanings or origins of these names.

Create a "Name Jar" in the classroom where students can submit names that are important to them

Create beaded name bracelets

Create a name placard out of construction paper decorated with glitter, sequins, and stickers

Create a name stamp using foam letters and ink

Cultural Sharing Showcase

Have students bring in an item or share a story related to their culture or heritage. This will help students learn about and appreciate each other's backgrounds

Write a short story about your name or a name that is special to you.

Multisensory Activities

Students write their names in sand, shaving cream, watercolor, or chalk

While in a circle, throw a beach ball to someone. When anyone catches the ball, they say the name of the person who threw it and then their own name

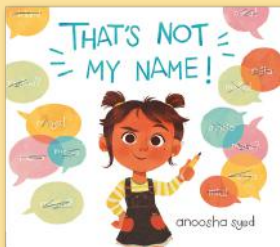
Students clap out the syllables of their name or jump for each syllable.

Writing Prompts

Unhei's name means **grace** in Korean. Where did **your** name come from, what does it mean, and why is it important?

In the story, Unhei's classmates put name suggestions into a glass jar as she searches for a new name that will help her fit in. Write about a time you tried to fit into a new place or group. What made you feel welcome in the end?

09 Recommended Book Titles

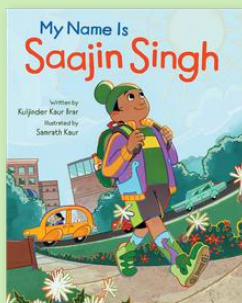


That's Not My Name!

Written and Illustrated by Anoosha Syed

Grades: PreK - K

Mirha is so excited for her first day of school! But when her classmates mispronounce her name, she goes home wondering if she should find a new one. Maybe then she'd be able to find a monogrammed keychain at the gas station or order a hot chocolate at the cafe more easily.

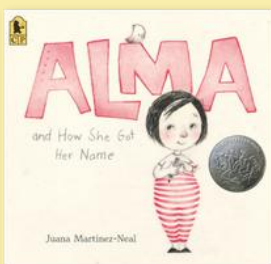


My Name is Saajin Singh

Written by Kuljinder Kaur Brar; Illustrated by Samrath Kaur

Grades: PreK - 3

Saajin loves his name. On his first day of school, Saajin is excited to meet his new classmates, but things take a turn when the teacher mispronounces his name.



Alma and How She Got Her Name

Written and Illustrated by Juana Martinez-Neal

Grades: PreK - 3

If you ask her, Alma Sofia Esperanza José Pura Candela has way too many names: six! How did such a small person wind up with such a large name? Alma turns to Daddy for an answer. As she hears the story of her name, Alma starts to think it might be a perfect fit after all—and realizes that she will one day have her own story to tell.

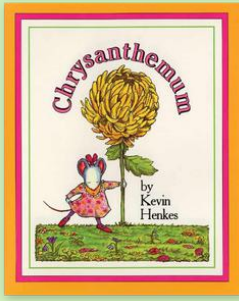


Always Anjali

Written by Sheetal Sheth; Illustrated by Jessica Blank

Grades: PreK - 3

Anjali and her friends are excited to buy matching personalized license plates for their bikes—but Anjali can't find a plate with her name. She is often teased about her "different" name, and this is the last straw. Anjali is so upset that she demands her parents let her pick a new name!



Chrysanthemum

Written and Illustrated by Kevin Henkes

Grades: PreK - 3

When Chrysanthemum was old enough to appreciate her name, Chrysanthemum loved it. And then she started school. “I’m named after my grandmother,” said Victoria. “You’re named after a flower.” Chrysanthemum wilted. Then the students were introduced to their music teacher, Mrs. Delphinium Twinkle. And suddenly, Chrysanthemum blossomed.



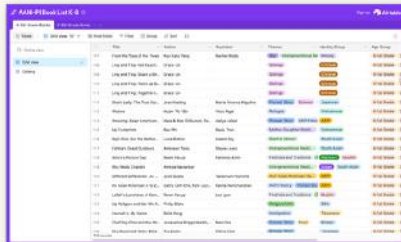
Your Name Is a Song

Written by Jamilah Thompkins-Bigelow;

Illustrated by Luisa Uribe

Grades: K - 5

Frustrated by a day full of teachers and classmates mispronouncing her beautiful name, a little girl tells her mother she never wants to come back to school. In response, the girl’s mother teaches her about the musicality of African, Asian, Black-American, Latinx, and Middle Eastern names on their lyrical walk home through the city.



Find more books of Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander stories using **Make Us Visible’s Book Lists at makeusvisible.org/resources**

10

Q&A with the Author, Yangsook Choi



Q: When educators read *The Name Jar* with students, is there a particular moment, detail, or character interaction you hope they pause on and discuss?

Yangsook: There's a scene where Joey asks Unhei about her name, and instead of explaining, Unhei offers to "show" him. It's a simple moment that opens the door to the question for teachers to ask: "What would you like to 'show' us about your name?"

Q: Since *The Name Jar* was first published, have conversations you've had with young readers changed the way you think about the story?

Yangsook: Many young readers have told me they saw themselves in the story, and that has reminded me just how powerful it is for children to feel seen. Representation speaks long before anyone reaches the microphone.

Q: What advice would you give a teacher who has a student whose name is unfamiliar to them or difficult for them to pronounce?

Yangsook: Just ask the student how they'd like you to say their name—not just the pronunciation, but the personality behind it, too. Gentle? Playful, like a cartoon character? Or dramatic, like you're announcing them at the Olympics? You might not get it right the first time, but you can both laugh about it. Names are personal—saying them with a little personality makes them even more special.

“

I hope the book encourages students to respect every name they meet. A name is more than a word — it's an identity. And identity isn't just who we are, it's who we're called to be.

-Yangsook Choi





For Educators, By Educators

This resource was developed by Make Us Visible's Education and Curriculum Team:
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Reviewed by K-12 educators and librarians:
Christine Dai, Michelle Kennedy, Colin Ng, and Justin Woodard, Ed.D

Layout & Design:
Jamie Li



Standards

National Council of the Social Studies (NCSS) Themes:

1. **Culture:** Understanding how Unhei's name is a part of her cultural identity.
2. **Individual Development and Identity:** Discussing how names contribute to our sense of self and how we present ourselves to others.
3. **People, Places, and Environments:** Exploring how Unhei's move from Korea to the United States affects her identity and interactions with her peers.
4. **Global Connections:** Encouraging students to think about the global nature of names and cultural diversity in their own lives.

Common Core Standards (ELA):

1. **Reading Literature (RL.K-5.1):** Ask and answer questions about key details in a text.
2. **Speaking and Listening (SL.K-5.1):** Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about topics and texts.
3. **Writing (W.K-5.3):** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events.
4. **Language (L.K-5.5):** Demonstrate understanding of word relationships and nuances in word meanings.

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Tell us about your experience
using our Educator Guide:





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WHAT WE TEACH, WE MAKE VISIBLE