



THE BOY WITH NO NAME

The story of *The Boy With No Name* is written to be interactive. The children can be engaged as it goes along so I have placed Task Questions at the points where I generally ask my audience questions. They are only suggestions, so you may not want to ask them all in one telling. This story also includes a joke which even very young children seem to 'get': when the boy misunderstands Hannah's claim that her name is the same forwards or backwards. Whether any of the children get it or not may depend on how well the story is read or told. When they do get the joke it dispels the myth that children of a very early age only laugh at 'slapstick' humour such as people bumping into things; they are capable of much more sophisticated humour than many of us might think.

THE STORY

There was once a boy called...

Well, you see, there is a problem with this story because it is about a boy with

no name and it is very difficult to tell a story about someone with no name, but I shall do my best.

The boy with no name was deeply unhappy precisely because he was without a name.

Everyone else used to call him 'Thing- a-ma-jig' or 'What's-his-name' or 'Ooja-ma-flip' but he didn't like those because 'Thing-a-ma-jig', 'What's- his-name' and 'Ooja-ma-flip' are names for people without names.

He thought that someone must have lost his name some time before and so he decided to set out on a quest to find his name again and then he would know who he was and he would be able to answer the question, 'Who are you?'

'Because, if I don't have a name,' said the boy with no name, 'then I'm just nobody!'

Task Question 1: If you have no name then are you just nobody?

Nested Questions:

- ✓ How important is your name when saying who you are? • When is somebody nobody?
- ✓ What is a name for?
- ✓ What does a name do?
- ✓ What would life be like if you had no name?

First, he came across a chair all by itself in the middle of a field. 'How did you get your name, Mr. Chair?' He asked it. But the chair didn't say anything... because it was a chair!

Some suggested Task Questions:

- ✓ How did the chair get its name?
- ✓ Is the word 'chair' a name?
- ✓ What would happen if a chair didn't have a name?

Then a girl came into the field and sat upon the chair. 'What's your name?' the boy asked her. 'Hannah,' said the girl, 'and my name is very special.' 'Why?' he asked.

Write the name 'Hannah' up on the board.

Task Question 3: Look at the letters of her name very carefully. Can you tell what's special about her name?

Hannah explained why her name is special: 'Because it's the same forwards or backwards.'

The boy said, 'Let's see shall we. Turn around!' Hannah did as she was asked and stood up and turned her back to him. Then he asked, 'What's your name now?' She said, 'It's Hannah.'

'You are right,' said the boy. 'Your name is the same whichever way you stand: forwards or backwards.'

The boy walked on, amazed at such a magical name. He said to himself: 'I wish I could have a name as magical as that.'

Task Question 4: Is that what she meant? If not, then what did she mean? And what did he think she meant?

Shortly afterwards, he came across another boy walking the other way. The boy was looking very confused.

'What's your name?' asked the boy with no name. 'I don't know,' replied the other boy.

'What do you mean, you don't know?'

'Well,' he replied, 'my name changes every few minutes so I keep forgetting who I am. It's hard to keep up.'

'Who are you now?' asked the boy with no name.

'I'm George, I think – no, I'm Megdeep now – it's just changed. Who are you?' he asked the boy with no name.

'I don't know because I don't have a name,' explained the boy. 'I think it was lost and I'm on a quest to find it.'

The-boy-whose-name-kept-changing looked concerned and then he said, 'There's something I must tell you: you don't lose names, or find them, names are given to you. That's why my name keeps changing because somebody keeps giving me a different one.'

'Oh no!' said the boy with no name. 'If names are given to you, and not lost or found, that means I'll never have a name. I suppose I should thank you, though, for telling me the truth, erm... Change-a-Name.'

'What did you just call me?' asked the-boy-whose-name-kept-changing.

'Change-a-Name,' said the boy with no name, 'it just came to me.' Then he thought for a moment and then said, 'But, wait a minute! I think I may have found you a name that you can keep. One that won't keep changing.'

'What do you mean?' asked the boy whose name kept changing, who was, by now, looking even more confused.

'If your name changes every few minutes,' explained the boy with no name, 'then something that is always true of you is that your name keeps changing. So, you can always be called 'Change-a-Name' even if your name keeps changing.'

'That's brilliant!' said Change-a-Name. 'I will keep that name forever. Thank you, erm...' Then Change-a-name walked away smiling and singing, now that he had a name that wouldn't change:

'I'm Change-a-name, I'm Change-a-name A name that always Stays the same.

I'm Change-a-name, I'm Change-a-name My name will never Change again!'

The boy with no name was happy to have given someone else a name but still nobody had given him one.

Upon realising that he would never find his name the boy with no name wandered in the other direction still sad and nameless.

A little while later he met a girl playing by the roadside. 'Who are you?' he asked.

'Don't ask me that question!' said the girl.

'Why?'

'Because my name is so long that you will probably fall asleep half way through,' she warned him. 'Most people do.'

'I promise I won't,' said the boy.

'OK. I warned you! My name is:' she took a deep breath, 'Harriettatina Morderwer Halfthwit Bob Iddlewiddle Nintwit Gorsbush Nobblesworth.'

'What?' he exclaimed.

'My name is:' she took another deep breath and then said, slower this time, 'Harriettatina Morderwer Halfthwit Bob Iddlewiddle Nintwit Gorsbush Nobblesworth.'

'I'm afraid I can't remember all that,' said the boy. 'All I can remember is Bob.'

'That's the only bit anyone remembers! And it's a boy's name!' said Harriettatina. 'Who are you, anyway?' she asked eventually.

'I don't know who I am,' answered the boy with no name.

'Why?' she asked.

'Because I don't have a name,' he explained.

'What do you mean you don't have a name? Everyone has a name! Even

things that aren't real, like Humpty Dumpty, have a name!'

'I don't and so I sometimes feel like I'm not real,' said the boy with no name,

sadly. 'I thought it had been lost,' he continued, 'and I was on a journey to find it but I met a boy called Chang-a-name – well, he wasn't called Change-a-name when I met him but he is now – anyway, he told me that you don't find names, they are given to you, and nobody has ever given me a name. But now I realise that I never had a name and I never will.'

‘That’s terrible,’ said Harriettatina.

‘And that’s why I’m so sad,’ he said.

Harriettatina stopped and thought for a minute. Then she said, ‘I have an

idea! Why don’t I give you one of my names – there are far too many for me.’ ‘That’s a great idea!’ said the boy with no name.

He tried on each of her names, one by one, until he found the one that suited

him best.

First he tried on Harriettatina. Do you think that name would suit him? Then he tried on Morderwer. Would that suit him?

What about Halfthwit? Bob? Iddlewiddle? Nintwit? How about Gorsbush? What about Nobblesworth?

Eventually the boy with no name decided which name he liked best.

‘Thank you for giving me my name,’ he said.

‘And thank you for shortening mine,’ said Harriettatina, ‘Harriettatina

Morderwer Halfthwit Iddlewiddle Nintwit Gorsbush Nobblesworth is the perfect length.’ They shook hands and both went home much happier than when they had met each other.

When he opened the door to his house his mum shouted, ‘Who’s that?’ And the-boy-with-a-new-name replied, ‘It’s me: Bob.’

Task Question: How important is a name?

Nested Questions:

- ✓ Can you have a name for people without names such as ‘Thing-a-ma-jig’?
- ✓ How can something that doesn’t exist, like Humpty Dumpty, have a name?
- ✓ If you swapped names with someone, would they become you and would you become them?
- ✓ If everyone had the same name would that mean that everyone is the same person?
- ✓ Why do people suit their names? Does everyone suit his or her name?
- ✓ Finish this sentence: ‘If nobody had a name then...’
- ✓ Did he get the magical name he wanted, like Hannah?
- ✓ If you found an object that didn’t have a name, what would it be?

Extension activity: whole-class game – who am I?

In this game one person, the player, stands up and has to decide to be someone else in the room, without telling anyone who. The player can be anyone they want – a girl or boy – but it is a good idea that the player secretly tells you, the teacher, who they are so that you can help if they get stuck or forget, and so they don’t change who they are during the game. Encourage the player not to choose their best friends, as the others are therefore likely to guess easily. The player then gives one clue about who they are by saying, for example, ‘I am a girl’. Then they choose someone (or a number of children) to guess who they are. If the class is not able to guess correctly then they have to say another clue such as, ‘I am wearing a blue jumper’. The aim is to get the class to guess who they are in three or less goes by giving only one clue each time. If the class has not guessed who they are in three guesses then it is the end of their go as player and someone else should become the player. It is a good game for identifying unique features.

Once they get the hang of this game you could set the challenge of seeing if there is anyone who would like to have a go at getting the class to guess who they are with just one clue-word for the class. In this case they really have to think of something unique to that person. Someone once said, ‘I have grey hair’ – Oh, that’ll be me then!