Learning Objectives:

- Students will be able to explain what the U.S. Census Bureau does, what type of data it collects, and what the data help explain.
- Students will be able to reflect on their own name using descriptive details as part of a creative writing exercise.
- Students will be able to use a graphic organizer to identify a topic, determine the series of events they want to tell (and in what order), develop characters, note important details, and describe a problem and solution in preparation for writing a narrative.
Activity Description

This activity serves as an introduction to a narrative writing assignment. To provide context for this activity, teachers will give students an overview of the Census Bureau. Then, students will complete a Quickwrite about their name and its history. After that, students will examine and answer questions about census data on popular last names, listen to a story about names, and complete a Quickwrite about that story. To further prepare for their narrative writing assignment about names (which is not part of this activity), students will jot down their thoughts in a graphic organizer.

Suggested Grade Level: 4–5

Approximate Time Required: 160 minutes (potentially split across different days)

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Topics:
- Human population characteristics
- Narrative writing
- Quickwrites

Skills Taught:
- Analyzing data
- Brainstorming
- Comparing time periods
- Completing a graphic organizer
- Identifying an essay topic
- Making comparisons
- Understanding the sequence of events
Materials Required

- The student version of this activity, 9 pages
- An age-appropriate story about a name (see the “During the Activity” section for ideas)
- Teacher computer with Internet access and a projector to display Web sites

Activity Items

The following items are part of this activity. The items and their sources appear at the end of this teacher version.

- Item 1: Top 15 Most Popular Last Names by Rank
- Item 2: Top 15 Last Names With the Largest Frequency Increase

For more information to help you introduce your students to the Census Bureau, read “Census Bureau 101 for Students.” This information sheet can be printed and passed out to your students as well.

Standards Addressed

See chart below. For more information, read “Education Standards and Guidelines Addressed by Statistics in Schools.”

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects

Note: This activity begins to address the standard below by teaching students how to prepare to write a narrative. To fully address the standard, students will need to complete a narrative writing assignment.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard</th>
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<th>Cluster</th>
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<tr>
<td>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.3</td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Text Types and Purposes</td>
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<td>Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.</td>
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Bloom’s Taxonomy

Students will **analyze** census data and information to learn how trends in last names are good indicators of changes in the population.
Teacher Notes

Before the Activity

Since this activity switches between teacher lead instruction and individual student work, suggested timing cues are included to help guide teachers.

(Teachers should reserve approximately 30 minutes to preteach everything in this section.)

Students must understand the following key terms:

- **Frequency** – how often something appears
- **Narrative** – a story, usually told from one person’s viewpoint
- **Population** – the number of people in an area
- **Surname** – last name

Teachers should introduce students to the Census Bureau, explaining what it does. Information to share with students or questions to ask them—in a slideshow format or through a class discussion—can include:

- The Census Bureau counts all the people living in the United States and in other places that belong to the United States, like Puerto Rico. The Census Bureau also figures out the populations of specific areas, like counties. (Teachers can model this by counting everybody in the classroom, including all students and themselves.)
- When the workers over at the Census Bureau count people, they learn some interesting things about them too, like how old they are. (Teachers can take a short census of the classroom, asking students: How many of you are 9 years old? 10 years old? 11 years old? And so on.)
- The Census Bureau can tell you the number of [insert a common age for your students]-year-olds in the country—or even in each state. (Teachers can ask students: Any guesses on how many [X]-year-olds are in [insert the state where your school is located]? Teachers should go to [www.census.gov/schools/facts](http://www.census.gov/schools/facts) to find out the answer.)
- The Census Bureau also asks people for their names, so the Census Bureau can tell us the most popular names in the United States. (Teachers can ask students: What is the most popular first name in our classroom?)

Teachers should facilitate a class discussion using the following questions to get students thinking more deeply about what the Census Bureau does:

- Why does the Census Bureau count all of the people in our country and gather other information about them?
Sample answers and discussion points:

- Imagine for a moment that we didn’t know the population of this classroom. How would we know how many pencils we need? Or how many sheets of paper? We can guess, but we may not always be right!
- Knowing how many people live in the United States (and where they live) helps leaders determine what different communities need—for example, the number of fire stations and firefighters needed in a particular city, or the number of roads, schools, or houses to build in a town.
- Counting people can help everyone make decisions—including businesses. Can someone name their favorite toy? The people who make that toy need to know how many kids there are so they can make enough toys to sell to your parents. Toy companies can get all of that information from the Census Bureau.
- How does the Census Bureau get all of this information?

Sample answers and discussion points:

- The Census Bureau sends a form with ten questions to every household in the United States every 10 years. Your parents fill it out. (Teachers should show students an example of the 2010 questionnaire, which can be found here: [www.census.gov/history/pdf/2010questionnaire.pdf](http://www.census.gov/history/pdf/2010questionnaire.pdf).)
- The last time your parents filled this out, you would have been about [TEACHER TO FILL IN AGE].
- The next time your parents receive this questionnaire will be in [TEACHER TO FILL IN THE YEAR].
- When your parents get this questionnaire, they will want to complete it because the information helps people figure out how many firefighters a city needs, how many schools to open, or how many toys to make.

Teachers may want to read a Census Bureau blog post called “What’s in a Name” for more background information about the data in this activity: [www.census.gov/newsroom/blogs/random-samplings/2016/12/what_s_in_a_name.html](http://www.census.gov/newsroom/blogs/random-samplings/2016/12/what_s_in_a_name.html)

During the Activity

Quickwrite 1 (10 minutes): Teachers should let students know that the purpose of the Quickwrite is to just get their ideas and thoughts on paper. They do not need to worry about writing full paragraphs or a story. They should write freely, jotting down whatever comes to mind. The prompts in the student version of this activity are designed to help students think of things they want to say, but students do not need to limit themselves to those prompts as long as they are writing about their name. When students are done, teachers should ask for volunteers to share what they wrote in their Quickwrites.

Questions and answers (30 minutes): Teachers should explain to students that they are going to look at some of the information the Census Bureau collects about names. Next, teachers should either review Item 1 and Item 2 with students or direct students to review the items on their own. Then teachers should have students answer the questions (either as a whole class or individually). Teachers could ask students to highlight information in Item 1 and Item 2 that can help them answer the questions.
Narrative about a name (15 minutes): Teachers must find an age-appropriate story about a name to read aloud to the class. Examples of such stories include “The First Thing My Mama Told Me” by Susan Marie Swanson or “Christopher Changes His Name” by Itah Sadu.

Quickwrite 2 (10 minutes): Teachers should instruct students to complete Quickwrite 2 about the story read aloud.

Narrative graphic organizer modeling (20 minutes): Teachers should model how to complete the graphic organizer (in the student version of this activity) based on the story read aloud, asking for student volunteers to help provide answers. Teachers should explain the purpose of a graphic organizer and make clear to students that they will be expected to complete a similar graphic organizer for a story they want to tell.

Narrative prewriting (45 minutes): Teachers should ask students to think about a story related to names that they want to write about and then complete the graphic organizer. (The story can be real or imaginary.) If time allows, teachers may want to have students share their story ideas as well as the sequence of events.

After the Activity
Teachers should explain to students that the Census Bureau data about names, the story read aloud, the two Quickwrites, and the graphic organizer they used are all designed to prepare them to complete a narrative writing assignment about names. Teachers should decide the best way to proceed to that assignment (not included in this activity).

Extension Idea
Teachers could share the “What’s in a Name” blog post (www.census.gov/newsroom/blogs/random-samplings/2016/12/what_s_in_a_name.html) with students. Since the text might be challenging for some students, teachers could employ a reading strategy such as annotating, guided reading, or summarizing the text.
**Student Activity**

Click [here](#) to download a printable version for students.

**Activity Items**

The following items are part of this activity and appear at the end of this student version.

- Item 1: Top 15 Most Popular Last Names by Rank
- Item 2: Top 15 Last Names With the Largest Frequency Increase

**Student Learning Objectives**

- I will be able to explain what the U.S. Census Bureau does, what type of data it collects, and what the data help explain.
- I will be able to reflect on my own name using descriptive details as part of a creative writing exercise.
- I will be able to use a graphic organizer to identify a topic, determine the series of events I want to tell (and in what order), develop characters, note important details, and describe a problem and solution in preparation for writing a narrative.

Names not only identify who we are, but they also often hold special meaning. A lot of times, our parents choose our first names for us. And in many cases, our last names offer clues as to where our ancestors are originally from, or the type of profession they held.

**Quickwrite 1:** Write about your first name, your last name, or both. Use as many descriptive details as possible in your writing.

Some things you might consider as you write: Do you know the story behind how you got your first name? Are you named after anyone? What does your name mean to you—do you like it or dislike it, and why? Do you have any interesting stories about your name? What do you know about your last name? Do you know where your ancestors or family members are from? If you could pick a new first or last name, would you? If so, what would it be?

*Students’ Quickwrites will vary, but here is an example of something a student might write:* “I am named after my grandma, Eleanor, but my family calls me Ellie. I like the name Ellie but not Eleanor because it sounds like an old lady. I am proud to be named after my grandma because she was a wonderful person. Every time someone calls me Eleanor because they don’t know my name is Ellie, I think of my grandma. It makes me proud.”

Pause here for guidance from your teacher.
Questions and answers: Now it’s time to answer some questions about names based on information from the Census Bureau.

1. Take a look at Item 1: Top 15 Most Popular Last Names by Rank. What were the top three most popular surnames in the United States in 1990, in 2000, and in 2010? Have the three most popular surnames changed over the years?
   The top three were Smith, Johnson, and Williams. They have not changed over the years.

2. Why do you think some names are in red text?
   Student answers will vary, but the correct answer is that the red text indicates the first time these names have appeared among the top 15 last names in a census.

3. What is similar about all of the names in red? And what does this tell you about how the population of the United States is changing?
   The names are Hispanic surnames. This means that more people living in the United States have Hispanic last names.

4. Compare the most popular names in 1990 to the most popular names in 2000 and in 2010. What changes do you see?
   There were more Hispanic names in 2000 and in 2010 than in 1990. Students may also note that Garcia was the sixth most popular last name in 2010.

5. Now look at Item 2: Top 15 Last Names With the Largest Frequency Increase. What does the graph show?
   It shows the surnames rising the fastest in frequency between 2000 and 2010. Students may note that this is different from the most popular surnames.

6. What are the top three surnames with the largest percentage increase?
   Zhang, Li, and Ali

7. What can we learn by collecting information on last names that are the most popular and that are rising the fastest in frequency in the United States?
   We can learn that the U.S. population is changing and that the populations of people with historically Hispanic and Asian surnames are increasing.

8. Predict what you will see the next time the Census Bureau gathers this type of information about names.
   Student answers will vary, but students may predict that the list of the top 15 surnames will include more Hispanic names and some Asian names.

Pause here for guidance from your teacher.

Narrative about a name: Listen as your teacher reads aloud a story about names. As you are listening, pay close attention to the details in the story—who the characters are, what the order of events is, and what the conflict is (if there is one).
Pause here for guidance from your teacher.

**Quickwrite 2:** Reflect on this story. What did you like or dislike about it? What was the main thing you learned in the story? Who were the characters? What were some of the important events that happened in the story? If there was a problem in the story, what was it and how was it solved?

*Students’ Quickwrites will vary, but they might choose to focus on the characters in the story or whether they enjoyed the story based on the plot.*

Pause here for guidance from your teacher.

**Learning how to use a narrative graphic organizer:** Watch carefully as your teacher uses a graphic organizer to visually organize thoughts and ideas related to the story you just heard.

Pause here for guidance from your teacher.

**Narrative prewriting:** Think of a story you want to tell that is related to names. It can be a true story based on something that happened in your life, or you can completely make it up. The story should include a beginning, middle, and end. It should also have characters and a problem and solution.

Now use the graphic organizer below to brainstorm your story. (Eventually, your teacher will ask you to actually write your story based on what you put in your graphic organizer.)

1. Start in the middle where it says “Important Event.” What is the main story you want to tell about names?
2. From there, move on to the bubble in the center—“What happened?”—and complete the bubbles for “First,” “Next,” and “After that.”
3. Then move to “Where and when did it happen?” and fill it in with some details.
4. Then, answer “What happened after the event?” followed by “How did you feel?” and “How did it change your life?”
Brainstorming an Important Event

Important Event

What happened? Where and when did it happen?

How did you feel? How did it change your life?

First, Next, After that,

What happened after the event?

First, Next, After that,
Item 1: Top 15 Most Popular Last Names by Rank

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<th>1990</th>
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<td>Smith</td>
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Item 2: Top 15 Last Names With the Largest Frequency Increase