

**Minnesota Storytime
Reading Guide**

Title: *The First Thing My Mama Told Me*

Author: Susan Marie Swanson

Illustrator: Christine Davenier

**Publisher and
Copyright Date:** Harcourt, 2002

**Connection to
Minnesota:** Minnesota author

Summary: This is a story about Lucy, a girl who proclaims, “When I was born, the first thing my mama told me was my name,” and goes on to offer a lyrical memory from each year of her life. For example, she tells about how she scribbled her name when she was three and stomped her name in the snow when she was six.

Suggested ages: 4-6, 7-10

Tips for Reading:

- As the story is written in the first person, read the book with the pride and enthusiasm of the seven year old girl telling her own story.
- Draw children’s attention to the endpapers (covered with a pattern of birthday candles) and take note of how Lucy’s name appears in the illustrations on the cover (above the coat hook) and title page (on the step stool). Her name appears in pictures from the very beginning, but it isn’t mentioned in the text until later.
- Draw children’s attention to the dog on the dedication page, and enjoy watching for the dog on subsequent pages.

**Questions
before reading:**

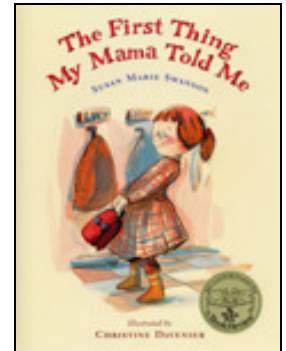
- Do people in your family tell stories about when you were little?
- Do you have a little brother or sister or cousin? How old is he/she? How big?

**To Introduce
this story say:**

We’re going to read a book about a girl named Lucy, who tells us her own stories about growing up. She remembers a lot of things about her name.

**Questions
After Reading:**

- Which part of the book was your favorite part? (Revisit children’s favorite segments of the book, showing illustrations and rereading bits of the text.)
- Where are some places you have read and written *your* name?
- Lucy said that her name comes “from a long ago word for light.” Did you notice any lights in this book?
- Do you know where your name came from?
- Why are our names so important to us?



RELATED ACTIVITIES

- Art:**
- Make pictures – perhaps watercolor paintings like those in the book – about real life family memories.
- Culture:**
- Explore how names are linked with different cultures. For example, talk about common Spanish names, Russian names, Somali names, etc.
 - Make a list of the same name in different languages. For example, Mary/Maria in English/Spanish and Eileen/Ailee in English/Finnish.
- Dramatization:**
- Act out segments of the book.
- Language:**
- Write poems or make simple books using children’s names. For example, for each letter in a child’s name, have him/her say or write a word or phrase beginning with that letter (like **TOM** – Tall, **Oreo** eating, **Messy** room)
 - Tell and/or write down family memories with an emphasis on action.
- Suggestions for English Language Learners:**
- Clarify that the baby, toddler, and older child in the book are all the same girl.
 - Act out segments to explain the action vocabulary in the text, such as scribbling, stomping, and “flashlight writing.”
- Related Books:**
- ***Chrysanthemum*** by Kevin Henkes (Greenwillow, 1991)
 - ***The Name Jar*** by Yangsook Choi (Random House, 2001)
 - ***My Name is Yoon*** by Helen Recorvits, illustrated by Gabi Swiatkowska (Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2003)
 - ***Hope*** by Isabell Monk, illustrated by Janice Lee Porter (Lerner, 1999)

