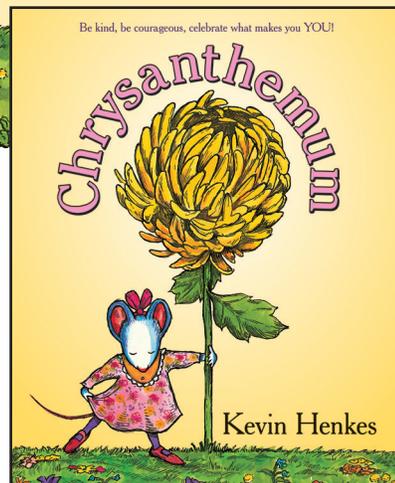




Chrysanthemum

by **Kevin Henkes**



ALA Notable Children's Book
Horn Book Fanfare

About the Book

Chrysanthemum, a cheerful and guileless young mouse, loves everything about her perfect name. And then she starts school. Each day a trio of disdainful mouse girls—Jo, Rita, and the leader of the pack, the domineering Victoria—tease and taunt her mercilessly about the unsuitability of her name. Chrysanthemum wilts. Chrysanthemum's shattered psyche is repaired by Mrs. Twinkle, an "incredible wonder" of a music teacher, who reveals to the class her own long, flower-based name: Delphinium.

Themes

This is an ideal break-the-ice book for the first week of school. Not only does it get children thinking about and bonding with their own names and the names of everyone else in the class, but it is a fine vehicle for starting a discussion about treating classmates with tolerance, kindness, and compassion.

Getting Ready

Many of your children will not have heard of chrysanthemums, so visit your local garden center and buy a pot or two of the flowering plant for all to see and sniff.



Making Predictions and Inferences

Discuss with your listeners the way the main character in stories often encounters a problem that he or she tries to solve. Read aloud the first five pages of the book, stopping at the top of the sixth page with: "Chrysanthemum thought her name was absolutely perfect. And then she started school." As a class, predict what might happen to Chrysanthemum when she gets to school.

Questions for Discussion

- Why do Jo, Rita, and Victoria make fun of Chrysanthemum's name? Why doesn't Chrysanthemum stand up to the three mean girls?
- How do her parents help her feel better each day when she comes home from school?
- Chrysanthemum dreams that her name is Jane. ("It was an extremely pleasant dream.") Do you like your name? Why or why not? If you could change your name to any name in the world, what name would you choose?



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ACTIVITIES

Making Connections

1. What if Mrs. Twinkle had not come to Chrysanthemum's rescue? What could Chrysanthemum have done to get the girls to stop badgering her? What good advice could you give her, based on your own experience, about how to deal with bullies and people who say mean things? Talk this over as a group.
2. "Chrysanthemum felt much better after her favorite dinner (macaroni and cheese with ketchup) and an evening filled with hugs and kisses and Parcheesi." What are the foods and games and other comforts that cheer you up when you are feeling down? Write and illustrate and then share responses: "When I'm feeling down, it helps when I _____."

Beautiful Words

1. Chrysanthemum's father has a way with words. Her mother says, "Your name is beautiful." Her father adds, "And precious and priceless and fascinating and winsome." Of her cruel classmates, her mother says, "They're just jealous." Her loquacious father says, "And envious and begrudging and discontented and jaundiced."

Explore synonyms and antonyms. Children can work in pairs and come up with two opposite adjectives, and four synonyms for each, writing and illustrating the following:

Yesterday I felt _____. And _____ and _____ and _____ and _____.

But today, I feel _____. And _____ and _____ and _____ and _____.

2. Pick a pair of words (tired/awake) to use as models for brainstorming, and show how you can use the dictionary, thesaurus, and the website www.thesaurus.com to come up with a host of interesting (and captivating and engrossing and intriguing and unusual) synonyms.

Name Games

1. Celebrate names by making decorative name cards. Children can write their names with colored markers on strips of cardstock paper and decorate them with beads, buttons, glitter, and bits of shiny ribbon. Take digital pictures of each child, print them out, and make a class bulletin board of names and faces labeled with their fancy name cards.
2. Victoria says of Chrysanthemum, "I'm named after my grandmother. You're named after a flower!" As a homework assignment, children can ask their parents to tell and write down stories of how they got their perfectly perfect names.

