

Narrative Sample Response

In Hebrew, my name means ascension. In Arabic: sublime. In Swahili: exalted. It means the hopes and dreams of my family, **affirmed** every time it is spoken aloud. My name is a garden with towering plants and a flowing spring. It is raised beds and cushions set in rows. In the green vines and purple bramble, my name is a cup of cool water. It is carpets spread around, ready to welcome friends.

It was a name from a fantasy book my mother read as a teenager. Though she can't remember the name of the book, only my name. She was so young when she had me, my mother-sister-something else. A flower-breathing chimera.

The story goes that my uncle, her brother, left the earth days before I arrived. I wondered about the empty chair, the black space. The **sorrow** sat there, quiet and **distant**. Although it was difficult, my grandmother tells me I saved them. They would never have made it through without me, my tiny body illuminating the dawn on the horizon, helping them **combat** despair. Just like the girl in the story, I had to make magic. Aleah, my mother said, we would be lost without you.

My name has three syllables and hundreds of spellings: Aaliyah, Aleigha, Alea, Aliah, Aliyah, Aleeah, Alia, Alleia, Aleiah. No one ever gets it right. When I was small, my name felt so much bigger than me, like an oversized coat I kept tripping over. Would I ever grow into it? I wanted a simple name, one where I might hide. (Alex)andra, (Sam)antha, or (Mich)aela. It took time, but I grew into it. Aleah. Ascension. What started as a fragile sprout, unsure of its place, has become a flourishing vine, climbing confidently toward the sky.