

What's in a Name?

Name: _____

A family name (also called surname or last name) is a name that is passed from one generation to the next. In many cultures a woman adopts her husband's family name when they are married.

In Europe, surnames began to be used in the 12th century, but it took several centuries before the majority of Europeans had one. The primary purpose of the surname was to further distinguish people from one another. In the 13th century about one third of the male population had a given name of William, Richard or John. To uniquely identify them, people began referring to different Williams as "William the son of Andrew" (leading to Anderson), "William the cook" (leading to William Cook), "William from the Brook" (leading to Brooks), "William the brown haired" (leading to William Brown), and so on. Eventually these surnames became inherited, being passed from parents to children.

Surnames usually fall into categories:

1. Given Names (patronymic-father or matronymic-mother)
2. Occupational
3. Geographic
4. Descriptive (Nicknames)

If you think your surname falls into one of these categories, write which one it is here:

If you aren't sure, or if you want to know more, you are about to find out! When you find out, go back and write it on this line.

Assignment: Research your surname! Use the iPad to look for clues. Type the following words into the search bar: Origin of Surnames. Choose a website to look for more information regarding your surname. Write at least two paragraphs about your search (you may include the websites that yielded the best information). Your parents may also be a good source of information. They may know quite a bit of history involving your family name! Be prepared to share the results of your search with your group in class.