



Puns with ESL Names

Names in this poem are all given names among by ESL (English as a Second Language) students at Yosemite Junior High in Fresno CA, mostly Southeast Asians. I loved them then; I love them now. Puns are still the lowest form of humor.

It's a joy teaching ESL students
Whose names reflect various cultures,
But what Americans do to foreigners' names
Is normally done by vultures.

Yet even teachers who practice the names
Hear things that sound sort of funny,
If the names below sound like fun and games,
It's mostly because they are punny.

We have a boy named MA, a girl named PA,
Three boys in one class named SUE.
HER is a him, HEM is a her,
A ME, a MAI, and a YEU.

A MAN who's a lady, a childless MOM,

A TORNH who can SING a SONG,
A CESAR not a salad, A ROMAN not Italian,
Two cooks (KOK, CUOC), and a LAO who is Hmong.

Turn steak with a NOUTHONG, savor the TAING,
Shake hands with a Lao named SAIGON.
If you wish for a fish, we feature LITHOUNA,
Served gladly by a tiny KINGKHAM.

Hey, diddle, diddle, try a math riddle.
What will your answer be?
Add LE, to a LEE, and TOU LEE, too.
The answer's not four LEE'S, but three.

For religious folk of King James persuasion,
There's a YEE, a NAY, and a LO!
From Genesis' LABEN to the gospel of MARK,
From ALPHA to his sister, OMEGA.

A first-class princess, whose family is POR,
But the student from Georgia's just PHO,
A BEE with no sting, a LOC, but no door,
A kid five feet tall who is LO.

A KER, a HER, a DER, and a GER,
A PO, KHO, LO, and a ME,
A VANG, a PANG, a HANG, SANG, YANG,
A GEE—and a BEE, VEE, DY.
A CHAK who can talk, a CHUM who's a pal,
Two boys, when they're old still NOU,
If you're lost, CHEK our MAP, but don't look around
For Buster Brown's THY in your shoe.

A poem, like a sundae, is finally complete
When a red cherry crowns the top.
Two student names, NAN-THA-VONG-DOUANG-SY,
And IN-PRA-VONG-VIENG-KHAM, share that spot.

There's MOR, much more, but I don't want to bore,
Or try any tricks to amaze you.
I'll end with a boy who is really a KAO,

And an OLAY! from Southeast Asia.”