

Incredibly Plain

William Yamaguchi Dobson

It was no fun being called Plain. Worse still, Plain's last name was Smith. Can you think of a plainer name than Plain Smith? No, I bet your bottom penny you can't.

Some days Plain wished his name was anything but Plain: Peter or Sam or Rodrigo would do the job.

The name Smith originated from skilled tradespeople who bashed things with hammers. People who bash things with hammers are usually strong and eat meat. Plain didn't like noise and he was vegan. So, he couldn't even live up to his name.

But...

Here's a secret: Plain was not human.

He was pretending to be human. But he didn't know that yet. In fact, his entire family were also playing along. You see, Plain and his family were yokai: centuries-old Japanese monsters. Well, monster is a bit harsh. They weren't ghosts. They weren't demons. They were ... yokai – that's the word for it.

The people of Norfolk didn't know that Plain and his family weren't human, of course. They didn't know Plain's grandfather could transform himself into a cabinet: useless, unless you needed somewhere to hide unwanted Christmas presents. Equally, they didn't know Plain's grandmother could eat through a cabbage field in under thirty seconds – again, not very useful, especially for the farmer.

Because Plain didn't know he was not human, he didn't know one day soon he would learn about his yokai magical powers. Every yokai has at least one magical power. Plain's father could shapeshift into animals and carb-rich foods such as fusilli pasta.

The best part of this secret was that Plain would be told his true yokai name.

For now, he was stuck with Plain Smith.

On Tuesday, a new girl started at his school. Her name was Incredibly (it's true!) and her last name was Boring (also true!)

Incredibly was laughed at during register; she was laughed at during break; and on the way home, behind her back, all the children made fun of her name.

By Friday, Plain and Incredibly found they had something in common - they both hated celery - no, that wasn't it. They both had names they weren't happy with.



Readers aged 6-12

Incredibly Plain

William Yamaguchi Dobson

“What should we do about it?” Incredibly asked Plain.

“Tell our teacher,” suggested Plain.

“Our teacher is called Mr Dung. He’s in the same boat as us,” said Incredibly.

“I guess,” said Plain, “we have to take it on our chin – that’s what my Pa says.”

They took it on their chins for a few more days. Nothing improved, so, they applied (and were successful) to be ‘headteacher for the day’. The one rule they set was that every pupil swapped names with someone else, decided by drawing names from a hat.

The two children who drew Plain and Incredibly’s name didn’t have fun.

At assembly, the real headteacher asked the pupils if they had learned a lesson.

From that day, everyone thought twice before teasing someone about their name.

