

Naming Characters in *NEW CROWN*

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Shakespeare may be right when he has Juliet argue that “a rose / by any other name would smell as sweet,” meaning that the names of things do not change what they really are in the real world. But fictional characters, whether in a play by Shakespeare or a textbook by New Crown writers, are not, by definition, in the real world. They are fictional. So calling a rose a skunkweed does change our perception of it. That being the case, it is fair to ask how the names of the primary characters of *NEW CROWN* were chosen and what do their names mean.

The four basic principles governing the practice of naming in *NEW CROWN* are simple: the names are relatively short; Japanese students will find them easy to pronounce and remember; the names are relatively common; and they don't reproduce names of characters appearing in other junior high school textbooks. Let's look a little more closely at each of the names of the main characters.

◆ Tanaka Kumi

Tanaka (ricefield & middle, 田中) is the fourth most common Japanese surname. Kumi, in New Crown, is written with the *kanji* 久美, which mean “for a long time (eternal, everlasting)” and “beauty”, is also a popular name.

◆ Kato Ken

Katō (加藤), which uses the characters for “add/increase” and “wisteria”, is the eleventh most common Japanese surname. The character for the character Ken is 健 or “healthy”. It is one of the more popular names for men in Japan, particularly if used in combination with a second character, such as Kenichi or Kentaro.

◆ Emma Simmons

Emma comes from a Germanic word meaning “whole” or “universal”. As a name, it is simple but distinctly feminine. There are many Emmas in history and literature, from Queen Emma, who married King Ethelred the Unready in 1002, to the Harry Potter actress, Emma

Watson.

The name Simmons most likely came from the Biblical name Simon or Simund, which is the Greek form of the Hebrew name, Shim'on which meant “hearkening” or “listening”.

◆ Paul Green

The name Paul, meaning “small” or “humble”, comes from the Latin family name of Paulus. The single most famous Paul is Saint Paul (nee Saul), a leader of the early Christian Church and the writer of most of the epistles of the New Testament. It is simple and very popular in many countries.

Green means, well, green. It has several possible origins as a name. It could be a physical reference to someone living on or near the village green. It could refer to a person who is green or untested. Or, it could refer to the person who played the part of the Green Man during May Day celebrations. It is a common surname in the US, the UK and, in other forms, throughout north Europe.

◆ Raj Shukla

The name Raj is from Sanskrit, and means “king” or “rule”. It is not especially popular as a first name for men, but a relatively common family or surname. The best know Raj in popular culture is Raj Koothrappali, a character in the TV show Big Bang Theory. Raj's family name, Shukla is also from Sanskrit and means “white”. It is a common surname in North India.

◆ Yang Meiling

Meiling 美玲 means “beautiful sound” (more specifically tinkling, as of pieces of jade or the sound of a small bell) It is the third most popular given name in Taiwan. Yang 楊, meaning “aspen”, is the sixth most common family name in mainland China. It has been used as a family or clan name for nearly 4,000 years.

The names, by and large, fit the New Crown criteria: short, easily said, common, and not in use elsewhere.

Think about your name. What does it mean? Where did it come from?