

2009 Name of the Year

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The sixth annual Name of the Year vote was held at the American Name Society meeting in Baltimore on January 8 2010.

For 2009 we had seventeen total nominees, the most ever. The first nominee for Personal Name of the Year was Aiden/Caden/Jayden/Brayden/Zayden, a set of rhyming names all now popular for newborns in the United States. Bernie Madoff, the name of the Wall Street financier convicted of fraud for running one of the largest Ponzi schemes in history, and Tiger Woods, the professional golfer whose marital problems became a focus of media attention in 2009, were nominated because of their new notoriety. Jackson was nominated both for its status as a popular baby name and as the surname of the late Michael Jackson. Sparrow James Midnight Richie Madden, a son of rock singer Joel Madden and actress Nicole Richie born in September, was nominated as a representative celebrity baby name. Ocho Cinco, the name of a football player who legally changed his name to the Spanish words for “eight-five” to match the number on his uniform, was nominated again, as it had been for 2008. Chesley Burnett “Sully” Sullenberger III is a name that became famous in January 2009 when Sullenberger was the pilot who safely landed a disabled airliner on the Hudson River. It was thought to show how sudden fame can make even a difficult, unusual name heroic.

Nominees for Trade Name of the Year included Bing, the name of a new search engine from Microsoft; Droid, the name of a line of “android based” smart phones sold by Verizon Wireless; Kindle, the name of the device for reading electronic books sold by Amazon.com, which was one of the top-selling holiday gifts of 2009; Twitter, the name of the 140-character message service that became ubiquitous in 2009, figuring prominently in news about the Iranian election; and H1N1, the name of the strain of swine flu that caused thousands of deaths throughout the world in 2009.

Nominees for Fictional Name of the Year included Max, the name of the little boy who is the chief character in Maurice Sendak’s children’s book *Where The Wild Things Are*, which was made into a film which premiered in 2009; Sheldon and Leonard, the names of two nerdy physicists on the television program *The Big Bang Theory*; and Don Draper, the name of a 1950s advertising executive on the series *Mad Men*.

Place Name nominees were Afghanistan, the name of the Asian country much in the news because of President Obama’s decision to send more troops there; Helmand Valley, the name of a valley in Afghanistan noted for its opium production; and Salish Sea, the name officially adopted in both the United States and Canada in 2009

for the inland oceanic waters of British Columbia and Washington state. This single name, which does not replace the names of other features such as Puget Sound and the Straits of Georgia, emphasizes that this area forms one ecosystem. It honors the Salish language group of Native Americans. The name Salish Sea was first proposed by biologist Bart Webber in 1988.

Voters first decided the H1N1 was not really a trade name, but that it deserved special recognition because of how such a seemingly awkward construction had managed to replace “swine flu.” H1N1 was then unanimously voted “Miscellaneous Name of the Year” for 2009.

The winner for Personal Name of the year was Chesley Burnett “Sully” Sullenberger. Trade Name of the year was Twitter. The Fictional Name of the year was Max, and Salish Sea won the title of Place Name of the Year. After a discussion pointing out how Salish Sea points up modern concerns with the environment and Native Americans, and how its joint Canadian and American nationality reflects the North American emphasis of our society, Salish Sea was voted overall Name of the Year for 2009. This result has been widely reported on by media in the Pacific Northwest.

For 2010, the American Name Society will again vote on Names of the Year in the four categories of Brand Names, Fictional Names, Place Names, and Personal Names before choosing an overall winner. Send nominations to Dr Cleveland Evans, either by email at cleveland.evans@bellevue.edu, or by postal mail to him at Psychology Department, Bellevue University, 1000 Galvin Road South, Bellevue, NE 68005-3098, USA. Please include a rationale for your nomination, which can be included on the list of nominees to be presented at our annual meeting in January 2011.

Notes on contributor

Cleveland Kent Evans is Associate Professor of Psychology at Bellevue University in Bellevue, Nebraska. A member of the American Name Society for over thirty years, he served as its President during 2005 and 2006. Since January 2008 he has written a regular newspaper column on names in the *Omaha World Herald*.