



## CALL ME TREE / LLÁMAME ÁRBOL: EXPLORING A GENDER-FREE BOOK

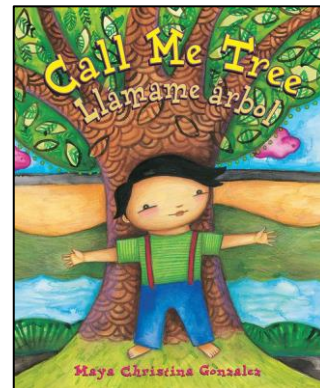
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**SUGGESTED GRADE LEVEL:** K – 2

**LENGTH OF TIME:** Reading and discussion 20 minutes; Yoga Activity 10 – 15 minutes

### GOAL

- To help students share and explore a gender-free book without pronouns.
- To explore the practice of not assuming a person's gender identity based on their gender expression.
- To explore the concept of gender expression with students.
- To appreciate nature and to learn the Tree Pose in Yoga as a tool for balance and grounding.



### OBJECTIVES

- Students will listen to a book read aloud and discuss its meaning.
- Students will understand that some people do not use pronouns. Some people might use their name such as the child in the book who uses Tree.
- Students will learn to accept and embrace the many ways people might choose to express who they are through clothing and hairstyles, free of gender norms.
- Students will learn a basic yoga pose – the tree pose.

### ACADEMIC STANDARDS

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.1.1: Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 1 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups. (Also SL K.1, 2.1)
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.1.2: Confirm understanding of a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media by asking and answering questions about key details and requesting clarification if something is not understood. (Also SL K.2, 2.2)

### EDUCATORS' NOTES

It is natural for young children to notice differences. Discussing gender expression serves as a familiar starting point for kids and adults to expand their ideas about gender. *Call Me Tree / Llamame árbol* is a short book written in verse. It offers an opportunity to build classroom community by giving students a chance to share with each other and to learn about gender via a character in a book who does not use pronouns.

As author Maya Gonzalez said, “You may or may not notice something different about my new book, *Call Me Tree*. Nowhere in the story are boy/girl pronouns used. No ‘he’ or ‘she’

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anywhere! I found it easy to write this way because that's how I think of kids, as kids, not boy kids or girl kids.

I even requested that no 'he' or 'she' be used anywhere else in the book, like on the end pages or the back cover when talking about the story. I also asked the publisher to only refer to the main character as a child or kid when they talked about my book out in the world, because I wanted *Call Me Tree / Llámame árbol* to be gender free!"

Pronunciation: Llámame – **ya**-ma-may; árbol – **are**-bowl

### **MATERIALS:**

- *Call Me Tree / Llámame árbol* by Maya Gonzalez
- [Video of the author reading the book](#) (Optional)

### **BEFORE READING *CALL ME TREE / LLÁMAME ÁRBOL* TO YOUR STUDENTS**

- Read the book yourself and think about what questions you and your students might have. Practice how you want to respond. Being prepared will help you to be comfortable with a topic that you might be unfamiliar discussing. To help you prepare:
  - Check out the guide created by author Maya Gonzalez, [Call Me Tree Gender Free: a note to my readers](#).
  - Review ways to define words and concepts related to gender for children to prepare for questions and lead a class discussion on gender topics. See the Welcoming Schools' handout: [Defining LGBTQ Words for Elementary School Students](#).
  - For ideas on ways to respond to questions or put-downs about gender, take a look at the Welcoming Schools' handout: [Be Prepared for Questions and Put-Downs on Gender](#).
  - Note: If a student asks you a question and you're unsure of the answer, it's okay to say that you don't know! You could say you'll figure it out and get back to them.
- Finally, before you begin the lesson, review classroom rules about respect and being an ally when having discussions about gender, given that gender identity and gender expression are common targets for identity based bullying.
- As author Maya Gonzalez writes: "People who don't fit into the boy or the girl box get teased more than anybody. This is extra not cool to me. I happen to know all kids rock, so I want to make sure the ones that get picked on the most know they rock! Right?! So *Call Me Tree* is gender free! Because all trees belong!"

### **TREE POSE**

The tree pose in yoga can help students learn balance and focus while feeling rooted to the ground as they reach for the sky. To prepare for doing this pose with your students, you can check out these links below that show you how to do the pose. The first one includes step by step instructions with an illustration. The second one includes a video.

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Both of these links include modifications to tree pose that would make it easier for younger students to do.

- [Flow and Grow Kids Yoga](#)
- [Yoga Foster](#)

### **INTRODUCTION TO *CALL ME TREE* / *LLÁMAME ÁRBOL* AND PRONOUNS**

Read some of Maya Gonzalez' [note to readers](#) to your students:

- You may or may not notice something different about my new book, *Call Me Tree*. Nowhere in the story are boy/girl pronouns used. No 'he' or 'she' anywhere! I found it easy to write this way because that's how I think of kids, as kids, not boy kids or girl kids.
- I even requested that no 'he' or 'she' be used anywhere else in the book, like on the end pages or the back cover when talking about the story. (Point out those sections of the book.)
- I also asked the publisher to only refer to the main character as a child or kid when they talked about my book out in the world. Because I wanted *Call Me Tree* to be gender free.
- Why? I'm glad you asked! Two reasons come to the top of my mind.
  - First, I know a lot of people. Some don't feel that they fit into the boy or the girl box and of course, some do! By not using 'he' or 'she,' I could include everyone! This is very important to me. I want everyone to know that we all belong!
  - I just remembered another top reason! People who don't fit into the boy or the girl box get teased more than anybody. This is extra not cool to me. I happen to know all kids rock, so I want to make sure the ones that get picked on the most know they rock! Right?! So *Call Me Tree* is gender free! Because all trees belong!
- Let your students know that as you read the book, we won't try to guess or assume the gender identity of the characters in the book based on their gender expression.

### **READ AND DISCUSS *CALL ME TREE* / *LLÁMAME ÁRBOL***

- Read the book to your students – in English or Spanish (or both). Or you could show [this video where the author reads her book](#).
- Remind students to call Tree by Tree's name because Tree does not use any pronouns.
- As you look back through the images and verses in the book. Ask: What do you think the author means by the verse, "Some sing songs. Some Sing along. Some have roots. All trees belong?"
- How would you imagine yourself as a tree?
- Why do you think Tree doesn't use pronouns like she, he or they?

- Can we guess Tree’s gender identity?
  - The answer is no. You cannot know someone’s gender identity unless they share that with you. In books we can look for pronouns in the text for clues.
  - If students says they think Tree is a boy because Tree has short hair, ask your students questions such as, “Do only boys have short hair?” Or, “Do all boys have short hair?” Or, “Do some girls have short hair?” “Can anyone have short hair?” (The answer is yes. Though some children will point out that there are people with no hair.)
  - If students say that Tree is a boy because Tree is wearing blue, ask your students a question, “Do only boys wear blue?” Or, “Who likes the color blue or wears clothes that are blue sometimes?” “Colors are for everyone!”
  - Can you tell how someone feels by looking at their hair or clothes? No, we cannot tell someone’s gender identity- girl, boy, both or neither from their gender expression. Clothes are for everybody! We all have hair! Here at our school we all get to wear our clothes and hair in ways that express who we are.
- Because the gender of Tree is purposely not used in the book, Tree could be seen as non-binary.
  - **Non-binary:** People who do not feel like the words “girl” or “boy” fits. They may feel like both or neither. They sometimes use pronouns such as they, them, theirs. Some non-binary people like Tree do not use any pronouns at all.
- When you finish the book, ask your students what the last page might mean. How is Tree free?

## BE LIKE A TREE: YOGA ACTIVITY

- In a location where students can have enough room, have each student try the tree yoga pose.
- You may want to start with a modified version of tree pose so that your students have a chance to practice their balance.
- Modifications include standing against a wall, stretching your arms out to your side or placing your foot against your ankle or calf instead of your thigh.
- As your students try the tree pose, remind them that deep breaths help you get centered and have a stable tree.



Credit: [Flow and Grow Kids Yoga](#)

## EXTENSIONS

- Read the book *They She He Me: Free to Be!* by the same author to continue to explore gender, gender expression and pronouns. See the Welcoming Schools lesson, [They She He Me: Free to Be! Understanding Pronouns](#).

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- Read the books *Jaime is Jaime* by Afsaneh Moradian or *Are You a Boy or Are You a Girl?* by Sarah Savage to continue discussions about gender and non-binary children.
  - **Draw a Tree:** Have each student trace their hand on different shades of brown paper to make a tree trunk like Maya Gonzalez' illustrations in *Call Me Tree*. Then have each student make a unique tree with collage or paint or stamping. Here is an example of one classroom that made [Kandinsky Circle Trees](#).



Image from *Call Me Tree/ Llámame árbol* by Maya Gonzalez

### ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

- Assessment for this lesson will be mostly informal. Observe your students' reactions and their discussion during class by paying attention to their conversations and individual responses.
- Are your students refraining from assuming someone's gender identity based on their gender expression?
- (If you did the optional art project). Offer an opportunity for students to share their artwork with each other in pairs. Direct students to share one thing they like about their picture with a classmate. Next, ask students to give an appreciation to their partner about their picture



Kandinsky Circle Tree by a 1st Grade student in Leah Vanden Bush's class.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FROM WELCOMING SCHOOLS

- [Lessons to Understand Gender](#)
- [Books that Look at Gender and Support Transgender and Non-Binary Students](#)
- [Resources for Gender Inclusive Schools and to Support Transgender and Non-Binary Students](#)
- [Defining LGBTQ Words for Elementary School Students](#)
- [Welcoming Schools Professional Development](#)