



## USING CHILDREN'S BOOKS TO LOOK AT GENDER STEREOTYPING

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**SUGGESTED GRADE LEVEL:** K – 2

**LENGTH OF TIME:** 35 minutes

### GOALS

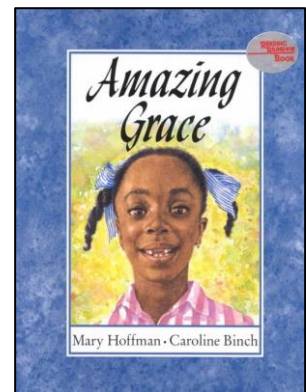
- To use literature to examine gender roles and recognize gender stereotyping.
- To expand students' perception of activities and possibilities for all genders.
- To help students cultivate allyship around gender and personal expression.
- To help students understand that there are many ways to be a girl, boy, both or neither.

### OBJECTIVES

- Students will read and discuss a story to examine gender stereotyping.
- Students will learn the impact of gender stereotypes and gender norms.
- Students will talk about ways to include other children in activities.

### 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 and 2.1)
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.1.2.2: 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 and 2.2)
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.1.5: Add drawings or other visual displays to descriptions when appropriate to clarify ideas, thoughts and feelings. (Also SL.K.5 and 2.5)



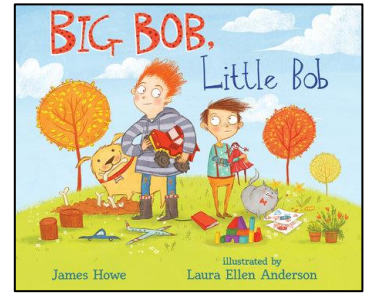
### EDUCATORS' NOTES

Children receive formal and informal messages about gender from a multitude of sources—their families, peers, communities and the media. Many of the messages empower them, and many of the messages limit them.

This activity provides an age-appropriate way to talk about the serious issues of gender stereotypes, gender-based discrimination and the limitations that traditional gender roles and expectations place on individuals. It provides messages that empower students to see the entire range of human behaviors as possible and positive ways to be, not limited by the gender binary.

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Television, movies and toys are examples of places in our culture that divide the world into binary expectations—socially reinforced roles for people around their gender. At school, it is important for educators to create gender-inclusive environments where children can be free to express every part of their personality and interests outside of the restrictions of the gender binary.



It is often important to review classroom rules about respect and being an ally when having discussions about gender. Gender-based bullying has a high frequency of occurrence in elementary schools and needs to be interrupted and addressed by educators.

Talk with your students about how characters are affected by stereotyping and bias around race, language, disability, etc. For example, talk to your students about how in *Amazing Grace*, Grace is excluded from the play because she is a girl and because she is Black. How did this make Grace feel? What can students and teachers do to stop this?

Remember that books provide mirrors for students to see themselves and windows to learn about differences. Take the time to develop empathy for the characters in books with your children. Talk about your classroom community and ways you can take care of and support each other.

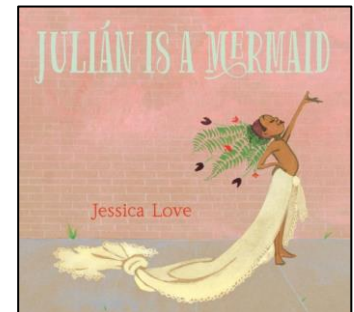
Give time for students to share from their own personal experiences around stereotypes and bias, if they would like to do so. Be careful not to single out any student. It is the job of the educator to work with students around bias; it is not the job of a marginalized student to teach the class about their identities. Be mindful, sensitive and prepared if you read a book that may echo one of your students' experiences.

## MATERIALS

- Chart paper
- Sticky notes or small pieces of paper and tape

## SUGGESTED BOOKS

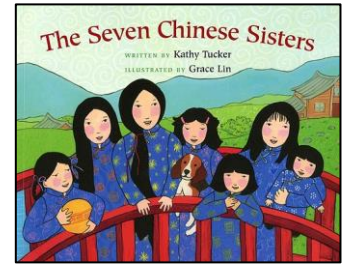
Choose one of the following books: *Big Bob, Little Bob* by James Howe, *Amazing Grace* by Mary Hoffman, *Brothers of the Knight* by Debbie Allen, *Julián is a Mermaid* by Jessica Love, *The Seven Chinese Sisters* by Kathy Tucker and Grace Lin or *The Sissy Duckling* by Harvey Fierstein.



## INTRODUCTION

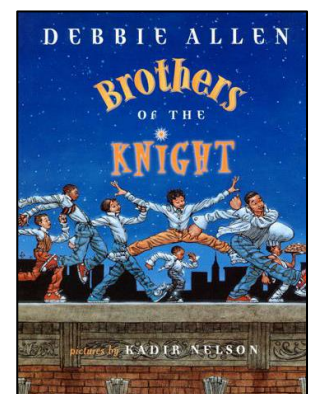
- Write the word “gender” on the chart paper. Ask students to turn to their neighbor and talk about what that word might mean. Have students share out their responses. Usually, young children will say that gender is if you are a boy or a girl. Let students know that there are lots of genders and that gender can be defined as she, he, a blend of both or neither (see definitions below). Also let students know that there are many, many ways to be a girl, boy, both or neither and that you will be discussing this as you read the book.

- Write the words “gender stereotype” on the chart paper. Ask students what the word “stereotype” means.
  - Let students know that a stereotype is a way of thinking about a group of people that is often negative and not true.
  - Stereotypes can also be positive and not true.
  - Let students know that a gender stereotype is a message that there is a certain way you have to be if you are a girl or boy. Explain that there are many ways to be a girl, boy, blend of both or neither, but that often we are told that certain things or ways to be are for boys or girls. For example, “All girls like dolls, and all boys like to play sports.” Ask your students if that is true.
  - It is also important to let students know that your gender is how you feel. We do not know someone’s gender until they share that with us.
- Let your students know that you are going to read a book to help you talk about this important topic because you want all of your students to work together so that everyone can be who they are, wear what makes them happy, and be included in play without being teased.



### READ AND DISCUSS ONE OF THE BOOKS

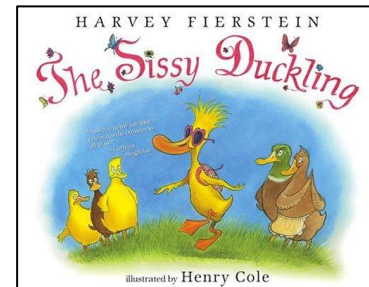
- Discussion Questions:
  - What things do the main characters do that surprise others?
  - How are characters breaking out of gender stereotypes and being who they are?
  - Are they being teased? How do the main characters feel when others make fun of them?
  - Are characters being included or excluded in the book?
  - Are they being helped? What makes them feel better?
  - Which characters are showing ally behavior?
- How could you be an ally and help them if you were there? (Answers might include: talking with or befriending the targeted person, getting an adult for help, talking with the person who is being mean, causing a distraction to help stop the harassment or speaking up in the moment and saying, “STOP.”)



### ACTIVITY

- Post a chart with the heading: “What kinds of things do you like doing?”
- Have a few students share ideas such as, “I like to skateboard, draw, run, sing, read, ride my bike, bake cookies, take care of my pet, etc.”
- Give each student one sticky note and have them draw and/or write the name of something they enjoy doing. (For younger students you could also just write the things that they like to do on the chart paper as they share out).

- Have each student place their sticky note on the chart paper.
- When all of the sticky notes are posted (or after you have written each student's idea on the chart paper), read each item, asking, "Who likes to (fill in all of the activities from the list)?" Generally, many children will raise their hands for the different activities. Point out that lots of kids in the class enjoy doing these things. Also, note that if there is an activity that only one or two children like, point out that it's great to have unique interests as well. That's part of what makes us individuals. Point out how exciting it is that all of them can do all of these things.
- Ask the children if they ever feel excluded from an activity because it is supposed to be for boys or girls instead of all children.
- Have the students think of ways they can help all kids at school feel included in the activities they like. Ask them to think about how they could help others in trying new things and playing with lots of new friends.



### **EXTENSION**

- The lesson [Red: A Crayon's Story](#) is an excellent tool to further explore the concept of gender stereotypes and people's assumptions about someone based on appearance.
- Have children break into small groups and act out parts of the story where someone could behave in a way that would make a main character feel better sooner than they do in the story. This gives students a chance to demonstrate ally behavior.

### **ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION**

- Ongoing teacher observation on whether or not students feel comfortable making choices outside the gender binary.
- Ongoing teacher observation of kindness, respect and ally behavior when children participate in all kinds of traditional and nontraditional work and play.
- Ongoing teacher observation and class discussions on whether or not gender-based bullying behavior is recognized more often, becomes less frequent or is interrupted.

### **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](#)

[Be Prepared For Questions and Put-Downs Around Gender](#)

[Defining LGBTQ Red for Elementary School Students](#)

[Professional Development Training](#)

Credit: Adapted from a lesson developed by Emmy Howe, [nationalseedproject.org](http://nationalseedproject.org), with Aimee Gelnow, M.S.