Challenging gender stereotypes through reading

IT'S CHILD'S PLAY

national education union

FOREWORD FROM THE GENERAL SECRETARY

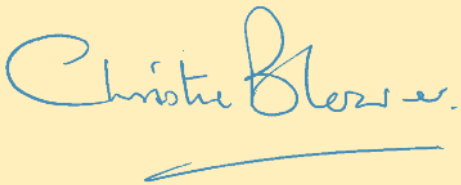
I want to introduce you to a project called 'Breaking The Mould' in which the National Union of Teachers has worked with a small group of primary schools to consider how 'traditional' gender stereotypes could be challenged in the classroom. The project report *Stereotypes Stop You Doing Stuff*, along with a range of support materials, are available at www.neu.org.uk/breakingthemould. *It's Child's Play* is a resource for teachers to use in class every day.

For all that has been achieved in terms of gender equality, women still face lower average pay, idealised stereotypes about motherhood and its expectations, domestic violence and sexual harassment. Meanwhile, boys are more likely to be excluded from school to their social and educational detriment, and bullying predicated on sexism, homophobia and transphobia is still a feature in many schools. Many men and women feel constrained by the narrow roles assigned to them by societal pressures, and girls and boys are expected to conform to narrow ideals of masculinity and femininity from a very early age.

Stereotypes and expectations about who provides care, whether for children or elder relatives, often prevent both male and female carers from finding a balance in their life that allows for their individual strengths or priorities. Women are not expected to express ambition or to ask for a pay rise whilst men are not expected to express a desire to spend time with their children or to shun leadership opportunities. Many of us will deplore gender stereotypes, but a few minutes spent in the children's section of any bookshop suggests a determination to affirm them like never before.

Inspired by the earlier *No Outsiders*[1] project, which sought to address LGBT equality in primary settings, the Breaking The Mould project team decided to help school staff begin their research by providing them with a range of children's books, which challenge gender stereotypes. In the course of the project, staff found other titles and introduced colleagues to their favourites. This booklet contains notes which we hope you might find helpful when using the books in your school, together with some suggestions based on feedback from children and staff, about how they can be used to challenge assumptions about what girls and boys might like or do.

I commend these books to you for use with the girls and boys you teach, or to whom you read bedtime stories.



CHRISTINE BLOWER
General Secretary

[1] http://projects.sunderland.ac.uk/archived/ell-nooutsiders/

INTRODUCTION FROM THE PROJECT CO-ORDINATOR

The following notes are intended to support the use of some of the most popular books from the NUT's *Breaking The Mould* project. Teachers and other staff used a range of approaches to consider how they could challenge gender stereotypes in the classroom.

A significant body of research confirms that gender stereotyping impacts negatively on young people in terms of everything from educational attainment and career choices to self-esteem and body image. Stereotypical views of what girls and boys 'should' like and do are established early so it is never too soon to start challenging these ideas and to talk about how we can all do whatever we like and shouldn't feel the need to conform to the expectations of others.

In the world of children's books, much of the real work still seems to be done by Postman Pat and Fireman Sam while girls, apparently, have less practical aspirations – such as being a princess or wearing anything as long as it's pink. Many books seem designed to exaggerate any inherent differences which may exist between girls and boys. Colouring books, for example, are frequently identified as being 'for' one sex or the other and contain completely different content. The implication is clear: boys and girls have nothing in common and anyone who enjoys things not typically associated with their gender is, at best, unusual.

The starting point for much of the work in schools was a wish to confront the idea that there are "girls' things" and "boys' things". Characters in all of these books challenge some of the conventional ideas of what girls and boys enjoy and aspire to – and act as positive role models as children seek to establish their own individual identities.

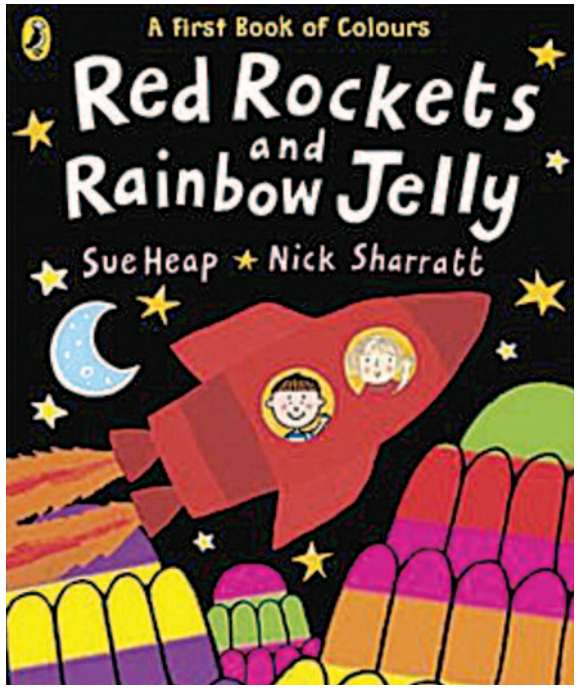
The notes should help school staff and parents/carers to bring out the rich subtext of the stories and to get the most out of reading them with children. They include suggestions for developing discussions around the key plot points in each book and for possible extension activities. It is hoped that schools will use them to inform their own wider discussions around gender and to develop lessons across the curriculum.

The notes here focus on picture books. The list of project books at the end of the resource also contains a few examples of longer fiction titles that address gender equality and many others can be sourced from the recommended booksellers.

Keen eyed readers will note that most of the books here feature male protagonists which might seem surprising in a resource which seeks to promote gender equality. The books we've included are the ones that schools found most useful, cover the broadest range of issues and are suitable for challenging gender stereotypes with both girls and boys. You'll find suggestions for other 'female led' stories in the text and many of these can be used to discuss the same issues highlighted here.

Look at the *Breaking The Mould* resources online for examples of other ways to challenge stereotypes about girls and boys. When reading with children, we would encourage you to include as many stories about unstereotypical children as you can!

Mark Jennett



Alongside learning the words for different objects and colours, we discover that girls and boys don't always like exactly what you might expect them to. Red Rockets and Rainbow Jelly is available as both a large format paperback and a board book, ideal for Foundation and KS1.

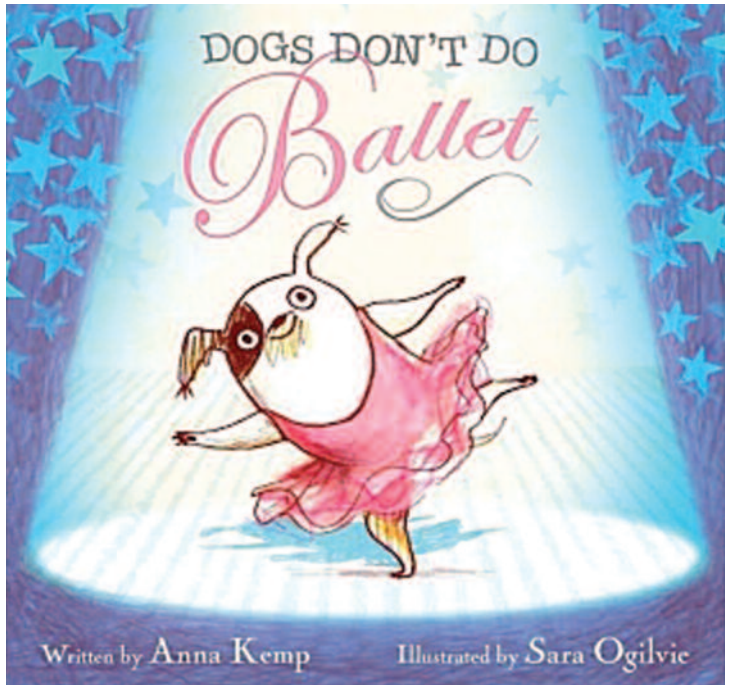
Some of the key things to consider when reading the story:

- This book questions whether certain things – cars, the colour pink – are "girls' things" or "boys' things" or whether we can all like them regardless of our gender. Young children are often more relaxed about these gender 'rules' and the story presents opportunities to endorse this. With older children in particular you may wish to ask questions like "some people think pink is just for girls – what do we think about this?" and use the discussions that ensue to challenge any emerging stereotypes.
- You can also talk about how we can all enjoy anything, regardless of our gender, and that we do not have to choose our friends just because they like the same things as we do.

Specific points to talk about:

- Some people think that boys and girls are very different but, like Nick and Sue, they actually like a lot of the same things. Nick likes apples and Sue likes pears; Nick likes yellow socks and Sue likes yellow ducks. While they seem to like different things, they have more in common than perhaps they realise – they both like fruit and the colour yellow.
- Nick likes orange hair and Sue likes purple hair – we see them both wearing fairly spectacular wigs. Talk about how we all enjoy dressing up and pretending to be other people. We can play at being anything when we dress up – including being a different gender. It's fun to try out different identities and see which ones suit us – for example, we can play at doing different jobs. Encourage children to sample all sorts of job roles and if any gender stereotypes emerge – or children suggest that 'only' girls or boys can do a particular job – take the opportunity to challenge these assumptions. Show them examples of men and women doing 'unstereotypical' jobs.

- Nick likes red cars and Sue likes pink and orange cars. Could a boy like pink and orange cars too? After all, as we discover on the next page, Nick likes pink and orange dinosaurs…
- Sue likes red rockets – does anyone find the idea of Sue as a spacewoman surprising?
- Nick likes green and red and pink and orange and yellow and purple jelly. The world is much more fun with lots of colours and identities in it. Isn't it great that we are all different? We don't all need to like the same things but we should celebrate our differences and be proud of our own abilities. Tell a partner about one thing you really like and why you like it – and your partner can feed this back to the whole group. Let's be proud of how different we all are and all the different things we are good at.
- Sue likes everything blue. Does that surprise anybody? What are our favourite colours? You could introduce the idea that some people think that boys and girls 'should' like (or not like) particular things – and point out how silly this is.
- Sue likes Nick, Nick likes Sue. We don't need to pick our friends because they are the same (gender) as we are. It is great to know lots of different people. People who are different from us can teach us all sorts of exciting things. Through them, we find out about things we didn't know about before – and discover all sorts of new things to enjoy.
- Also, look at *Super Daisy* (in which the eponymous hero saves the world from invasion by peas) and *Man's Work* (which shows one boy and his male carer sharing various tasks around the house). These stories show male and female characters doing things that some people believe are the preserve of only one gender – and can be used to question such assumptions.



Biff is not like some other dogs. He doesn't do 'dog stuff' like weeing on lampposts, scratching his fleas or drinking out of toilets. Biff likes moonlight and music and walking on his tiptoes. You see, Biff doesn't think he's a dog, Biff thinks he's a ballerina, which is all very well but dogs don't do ballet – do they?

This book could be read with or by KS2 children and also read to younger children. Adapt the suggestions for discussion as appropriate depending on the age of the children.

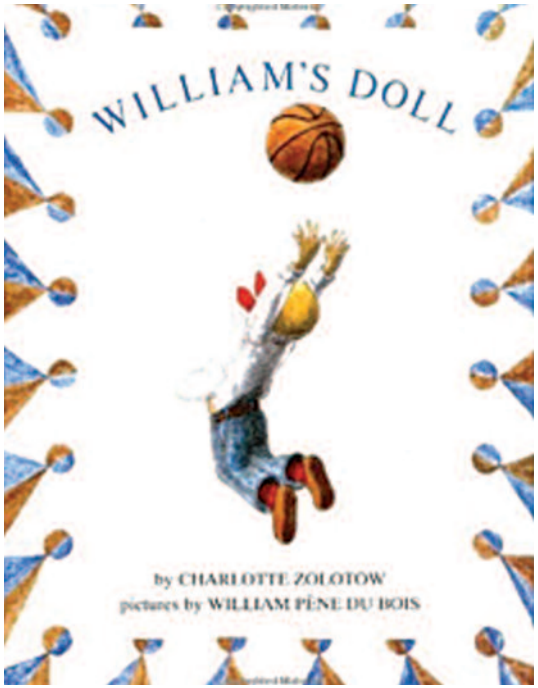
Some of the key things to consider when reading the story:

- This story can help us to think about why some people believe that certain things are 'not for' girls or boys – or dogs. In other words, it is an opportunity to talk about stereotypes. Think of examples of things that some people think are 'just' for girls or boys. Where do these ideas come from? Are they correct? Where does that leave girls and boys – and dogs – who like to do things that other people think aren't for them?
- Can we know what somebody could or should like just because we know they are a boy or a girl? What effect can these stereotypes associated with girls or boys have on how we feel about ourselves? Are there things we don't do because others think we shouldn't? What can we do to help other people live the lives they want to live – rather than feeling they have to do what some people think they should?

Specific points to talk about:

- What does Dad mean when he says that "dogs don't do ballet"? Why does he think that? For example, could it just be that he hasn't met a ballet dancing dog before – or perhaps because he has some stereotypical ideas about what dogs do – and what they don't?
- What about Miss Polly? Why does she think that "dogs don't do ballet"? How can stereotypes be perpetuated? What are the dangers of just accepting statements like this without question? Start by thinking about how it makes Biff feel…
- At the end of the story, Biff is very nearly prevented from saving the day because of other people's attitudes and beliefs. What helps him to go ahead and 'dance like no dog has ever danced before'? Has it anything to do with the attitude of the little girl who looks after him?

- What does everybody in the story learn as a result of Biff's triumph? What would have been the consequences – for Biff and for all of us – if their stereotypical ideas had prevented Biff from doing what he loves?
- Just as there are no dogs in Miss Polly's class, there don't appear to be any boys either. Is this actually realistic? Can't we think of any male dancers? Children will have watched Louis Smith, Ben Cohen and others on *Strictly Come Dancing*, seen or heard of *Billy Elliot*, watched dancers on programmes like *Britain's Got Talent* or seen men dancing in a pantomime at the theatre. So why do some people think that boys (and dogs) don't do ballet?
- Think about all the skills that you need to be a dancer or a footballer. Aren't many of them very similar? So why do some people think that one is 'for' girls and the other 'for' boys? Isn't that rather silly?
- Have any of us ever not done something we wanted to do because other people thought we shouldn't – or because we were afraid of what other people might think? Perhaps you could share an example with the children of when you didn't do something – or when you did it anyway, despite other people's ideas.
- Identify women and men who have done unstereotypical things – and people who have fought against prejudice, like the suffragettes. Point out that, once upon a time, people thought it was 'normal' for women not to vote or go out to work. This is no longer the case in the UK – so we can break down these prejudices by behaving or thinking differently ourselves. You could also think about the experience of women in wartime (particularly the last World War) and how many of them enjoyed taking on new roles and responsibilities. For example, ask older children to research the women who worked as spitfire pilots for the Air Transport Auxiliary.
- With older children, you could talk about how many people still face discrimination because of people's attitudes to gender (or race, faith, sexual orientation…) and talk about people who are trying to change this. Can you imagine a world in which everyone is like Biff and the little girl he lives with – people who think that anyone can do anything they want whether they are a girl or a boy – or a dog? Would you like to live in that world?



More than anything, William wants a doll – to hug, to feed, to tuck in, and kiss goodnight. His brother and the boy next door don't understand – but someone does, and makes it easy for others to understand as well.

This book could be read with or by KS2 children and read to younger ones. Adapt the suggestions for discussion as appropriate depending on the age of the children you are working with. Younger children may well find it easier to empathise with William – and the story may stimulate lively debate in KS2.

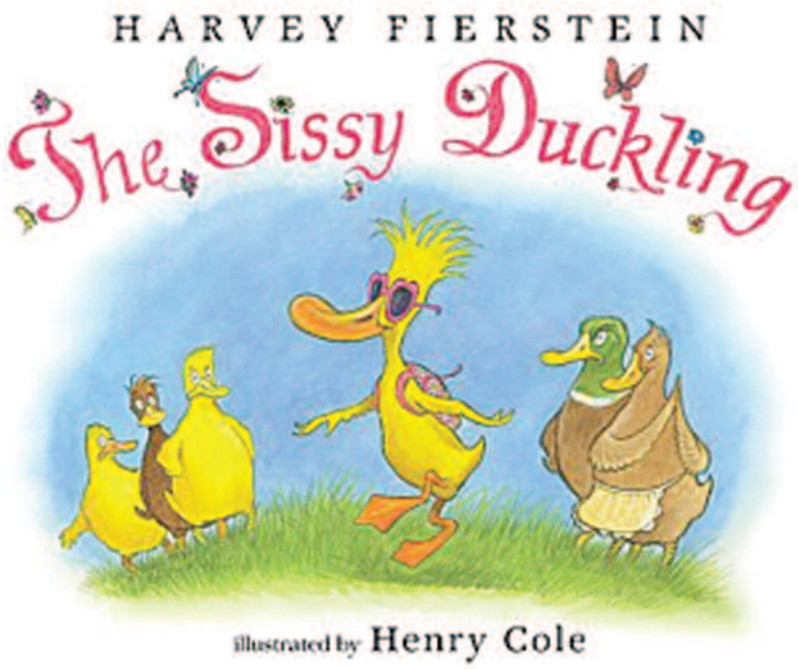
Some of the key things to consider when reading the story:

- This book offers an opportunity to think about whether some of the 'differences' between girls and boys are learnt rather than innate. Everyone can understand why William wants a doll – and yet many people still think that dolls are only for girls. Where do these ideas come from and what do we think about them? If dolls can be for boys too, then what about other toys, games or jobs?
- We all say 'it's good to be different' but people who are different can still make us uncomfortable. *Why is that?* Encourage children to think about how meeting people who are different can sometimes be challenging – but that accepting these differences means we can find out more about the world. Knowing people who are different can introduce us to things we hadn't thought about – and we might find we like doing things we haven't tried before.

Specific points to talk about:

- Think about all the reasons that William wants a doll. What do you think about them?
- What do you think about his brother and the boy next door calling William 'a creep'? Why do they tease William about wanting a doll? Does it make them feel uncomfortable? Why?
- Why did William's father buy him a basketball and a train? What did William think of the other presents his father bought him? Did he like them?
- Look at the conversation between William and his grandmother on page 26. Have William's brother and father made him feel differently about wanting a doll? What do you think about this? Why do some people think that boys should like some things and girls should like others? Why are people sometimes unkind to others who like different things?

- Why does William's father think that he doesn't 'need' a doll? What do you imagine he thinks about what William's grandmother says in response?
- Is William's grandmother right to buy him a doll?
- Thinking about what William's grandmother says, does it matter whether or not William will be a father someday? We don't all become parents – so is being able to look after and take care of other people a useful skill anyway? Is it OK just to want a doll so that you can look after it – whatever your gender?
- Do boys and girls play with different toys in real life? Do we sometimes feel we shouldn't play with something because it is a "girls' toy" or a "boys' toy"? Do people sometimes get teased at school for liking different things? What could we do about that?
- Ask children about the toys and games they like. Encourage them to think about things they like to do that are unusual. Endorse their choices. Talk about something that you enjoy that some people might think is 'for' people of a different gender – or who are older or younger, for example.
- Encourage them to play with toys and games or to read books that they wouldn't normally try and to talk about what they like about them. With the children, make a list of "boys' things" and "girls' things". Gently challenge some of the reasons they give for designating them as one or the other – and show them examples of boys and girls, men and women doing these things. Encourage the girls to talk about why they like some "boys' things" and vice versa.
- Organise drama activities that give children the opportunity to play characters who are different genders, ages, ethnicities etc. Encourage them to think about how these characters might react or feel in different situations. You will find examples in the *Breaking The Mould* online resources or use some of the other project books as a starting point for this.



Elmer is not like the other boy ducklings. While they like to build forts, he loves to bake cakes. While they like to play baseball, he wants to put on the half-time show – and this makes some people uncomfortable. However, when somebody needs his help, Elmer's special skills save the day – and everyone learns something about the benefits of valuing difference in others.

This book could be read to, with or by KS2 children. Adapt the suggestions for discussion as appropriate depending on the age of the children you are working with.

Some of the key things to consider when reading the story:

- The great strength of this story lies in its affirmation of difference. While some people seem to have a problem with his identity, Elmer likes who he is and does things that he *likes* to do rather than what others think he *should* do.
- As with other books in this resource, you could start by thinking about why some people believe that some things are 'just' for boys or girls and where these ideas come from. Perhaps every girl in the class can think of one activity that she likes that some people think of as a "boys' thing" – and every boy can think of something they enjoy that some people think is just for girls. Encourage them to think widely (i.e. beyond the obvious choices like football and reading) and to share with you what they like about the things they enjoy. Encourage other children to affirm these choices.

Specific points to talk about:

- Why do some people call Elmer a 'sissy'? What does the word mean? Is it a word some people use about boys who don't like things that other people think they should like? Why do you think some people single out for criticism others who are different? What does it say about Elmer that he continues doing the things he likes even though some people are unkind to him?
- What is Elmer's father concerned about at the beginning of the story and what changes his mind? Encourage the children to think not just about the events of the story but also why they think the relationship between Elmer and his father has changed.
- Imagine that Elmer wrote you a letter and told you that people were calling him names because of the things he liked to do. What would you write back to him?

- Why do you think there (apparently) isn't a 'single other little boy duckling' who likes the same things as Elmer – after all, the things he enjoys aren't very unusual. Might it be because some people avoid doing certain things – or pretend they don't like them – because they feel they have to behave in a certain way in order to 'fit in'? Why is this? Link this to the discussion of why some people think certain things are only for girls or boys.
- Can you think of things that some people might think little girls (or little girl ducklings) shouldn't like? Is it easier or more difficult for little girls to make unstereotypical choices than boys? See the notes for *The Paper Bag Princess* for more ideas.
- Why does Papa Duck think Elmer will 'get along' better if he learns to play baseball? Is there anything we can do (in our school and beyond) to challenge the idea that you have to like certain things in order to fit in?
- Is Elmer right not to care about being good at baseball because he doesn't like it? Are there some things it is important to work hard at even if we find them difficult? If so, how do we decide what these things are? Should we allow other people's opinions to influence us – or should we think about what we really need to practice in order to do the things we want? Does it really matter if we are good at sport (or not)? On the other hand, are there certain skills that will help all of us to achieve our goals in life – regardless of our gender?
- Mama Duck is very proud of Elmer even before others in the story recognise him as a hero. Why is this? Why does she think that Elmer is "just as strong as any other duckling"?
- What do you think about Mrs Hennypecker's approach to challenging bullying – "you'll all stay after class until you learn to get along". Is that helpful? Can we think of a better way to support Elmer? What would happen at our school?
- Why does Elmer run away? Is there something else he could have done? Encourage children to think about how we can ask for the help we need.
- Why do you think Elmer is so self-sufficient? Some people might think it is because he has been bullied and has had to learn to be resilient but could it also be because his mother loves him so much and accepts him as he is – and because he likes himself and so is able to enjoy his own company?
- What has Drake learned when he says to Elmer "You haven't changed, but maybe I have"?

Princess Elizabeth is beautiful, rich, and about to marry Prince Ronald. One day, a dragon attacks the castle and carries Ronald away. Elizabeth sets off to get him back and, along the way, proves that there is more than one way to slay a dragon.

This book could be read with or by KS2 children and also read to younger children. Adapt the suggestions for discussion as appropriate depending on the age of the children you are working with.

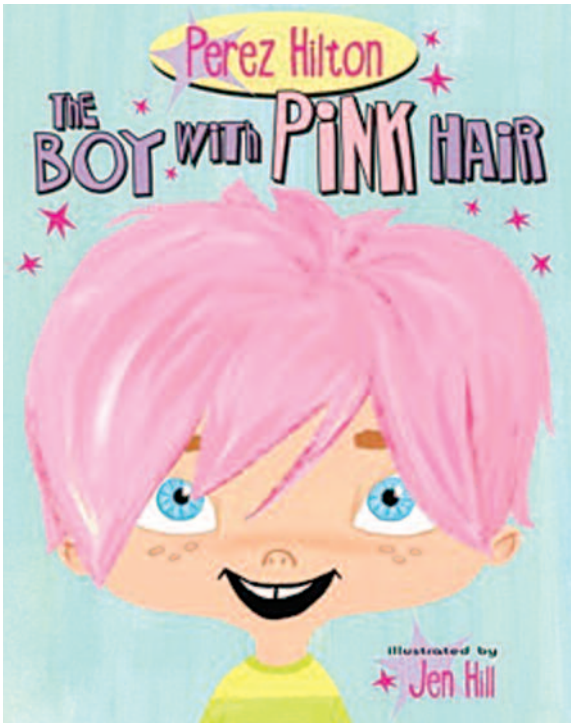
Some of the key things to consider when reading the story:

- Princess Elizabeth is a great role model for all children – and challenges the traditional view of what it is to be a 'princess'. However, she also questions our assumptions about how girls 'should' behave – and, most interestingly, questions whether it is necessary to act 'like a (stereotypical) boy' to achieve things. With many women still feeling they have to be 'one of the boys' to get on in the workplace, the story could be seen as an opportunity to question whether there is only one way to act in order to achieve success in life – and whether, indeed, we couldn't all benefit from taking a different approach, regardless of our gender.
- Think about introducing children to other women from fiction or real life who have achieved success in their lives. Encourage them to think about the barriers such women have faced and how they overcame them.
- You could also ask them to think about men who do work that some people think is primarily 'for' women. Ask them to consider why, while men still hold most of the 'top' jobs, they are significantly under-represented in some professions. Is there a good reason for this – or is it more to do with stereotypical views about what women and men are good at? Do they think that (unlike Princess Elizabeth) some girls and boys might not do the things that they want to do in life because they are wary about what others might think?

Specific points to talk about:

- What do you think of Princess Elizabeth's life at the beginning of the story? She has expensive clothes and is going to marry a prince. Do you think there are things that Elizabeth CAN'T do at the start of the story? What might they be? Is wearing expensive clothes particularly fun – or interesting – compared with what happens later? How do you think Elizabeth feels about losing her clothes – does she really mind that much?

- Why do you think Elizabeth employs the method she does to defeat the dragon? A prince might decide to fight but, given what we know, would he be likely to succeed? It may be that Elizabeth chooses the strategy she does because she isn't as physically strong as some princes – but is her approach something we could all consider should we find ourselves confronted by a dragon?
- Is she just as 'brave' as any other dragon-slayer even though she doesn't use weapons? Is she even braver, perhaps?
- Look at the pictures of Elizabeth later in the story – do you think she enjoys fighting the dragon? Why?
- Why is Ronald angry with Elizabeth even though she has saved him? Is it just because of how she looks – or could what she has done have something to do with it as well? What do you think about his reaction – could he have behaved differently?
- Does it matter that Elizabeth is "a mess"? Why do some people (like Ronald) think that it does? Is it OK for boys to look 'a mess' but not girls? Why?
- Why does Elizabeth decide not to marry Ronald? What sort of qualities do you think she is looking for in a partner?
- How is Elizabeth different from some other princesses in fairytales? Can you think about other female (or male) characters in stories you have read that challenge some of the traditional ideas of how such characters should behave?
- Some people think that fighting dragons is a man's job – why do you think that is? Does Elizabeth do a good job? Are there any jobs that women or men can't do? Are there jobs that some people think are just for one gender? Think about what they involve and remind children that anyone who has the appropriate skills could do these jobs.
- Ask older children to think about the clothes we wear. We all know that, while people think it's OK for girls to wear trousers, many people are less accepting of boys who like dresses or make up – why is this? Do young women also face pressure to dress in certain ways? Look at images in magazines aimed at young women and talk about the sort of messages they give about how women should look in order to be 'attractive'. Could these messages be part of the reason that Prince Ronald finds it so difficult to see what an amazing person Princess Elizabeth is? How could they make girls and women like Elizabeth feel about themselves – and what can we do to challenge them?
- Sometimes, girls are expected to have attributes such as being the peacemaker, shying away from competition or wanting people to like them. Similarly, boys may be expected to be fearless, always boisterous and gregarious – and not to be interested in nurturing or caring for others. Use Princess Elizabeth's story as a starting point for talking about why it is silly to expect all girls (and boys) to behave in the same way or enjoy the same things. You could also read *William's Doll* in which the central character challenges some people's expectations of what boys 'should' like.
- Consider reading *Amazing Grace* (which questions whether you need to be a boy – and white – to play Peter Pan in the school play) and, for younger children, *Super Daisy* (in which the eponymous hero saves the world from invasion by peas). Like *The Paper Bag Princess*, these stories show girls doing things that some people believe are the preserve of boys – and they can be used to question such assumptions. The *Worst Princess* by Anna Kemp (978-1847388766) is another excellent book that covers similar themes to *The Paper Bag Princess*.



The Boy with Pink Hair was just born that way. Despite this, some people are unkind to him. Nevertheless, he is happy because his family and best friend love him and, in time, others around him learn why there are benefits for all of us in accepting and celebrating each other's differences.

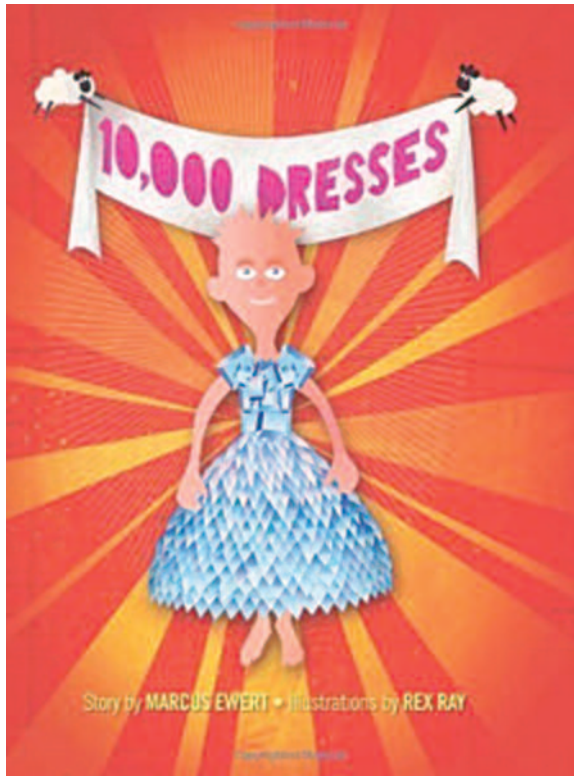
This book could be read with or by KS2 children and also read to younger children. Adapt the suggestions for discussion as appropriate depending on the age of the children you are working with.

Some of the key things to consider when reading the story:

- You might like to start by thinking about some of the differences that exist between people. Depending on the age and knowledge of the children, you could think about things like height and eye colour – or other differences like race, religion, gender or sexual orientation. Draw the distinction between things which we can chose for ourselves – like our clothing or the sort of games we like to play – and things which, like the Boy with Pink Hair, we are 'born with' like our race or our gender.
- Encourage them to think about how we all have things in common with other people and yet we are all special and unique in ourselves – we all share *something*, but not *everything*, with all the other people we know. We could belong to any number of different groups depending on our identities or things that we like to do – and each of these groups will be made up of different people. In other words, there is nobody who is exactly like us – and nobody with whom we have nothing in common.
- With older children, and as part of wider discussions, talk about the extent to which we can determine our own identities (for example, some of us may feel our race or gender to be different from that which we were assigned at birth; some of us may acquire or relinquish a particular faith). Whether these differences are 'chosen' or something we are 'born with', we still have the right to be accepted as we are.

Specific points to talk about:

- Even though the Boy with Pink Hair's parents were surprised that he was different from both of them, how did they feel about him? Did they love him anyway?
- Why do you think some people laughed or stared at him? Would it be different if he were a girl? Why?
- Even though he was happy most of the time, how do you think this made him feel?
- The Boy with Pink Hair really enjoys cooking. Who in our class likes it? What other things do each of us like to do? Can you find someone else in the class who likes the same thing? Are there certain things – like cooking or football – that some people think are 'just' for girls or boys? Why is this? Can you think of girls or boys, women or men, who are good at things that some people think are only for one gender? What does this tell us?
- What do you think about the fact that his parents don't pressure the Boy with Pink Hair to do things he doesn't like?
- Why do you think the Boy with a Bad Attitude feels compelled to make fun of The Boy with Pink Hair?
- Why does the Girl with Ponytails like him at first? When they get to know each other, do they find they have other things in common?
- Why do you think the Boy with a Bad Attitude is eventually persuaded to help the other children make lunch on parents' day?
- The Boy with Pink Hair learns to 'be just who he is'. Why is this important? What can we do to make others feel good about their identities and what helps us to feel good about ours?
- If you like this story, you might like to read *The Different Dragon* in which a young boy counsels a dragon who does not want to be fierce anymore. "I know that there are lots of different ways to be a dragon", he tells him, "and being fierce isn't the only way you have to be. You can be however you want."



Every night Bailey dreams about magical dresses – but when Bailey's awake, no one wants to hear about these beautiful dreams. Then Bailey meets an older girl called Laurel. The two of them begin making dresses together and Bailey's dreams come true.

This book could be read with or by KS2 children and also read to younger children. Adapt the suggestions for discussion as appropriate depending on the age of the children you are working with.

Some of the key things to consider when reading the story:

- This story is about someone who feels they have a different identity from the one which others have assigned to them. This is not an unusual experience – most of us can think of a situation in which somebody else expected us to like something which we didn't or vice versa. For example, some people think all boys are interested in sport and all girls like pink – even though we know that this isn't the case. Sometimes people will tell us that we don't or shouldn't like certain things – perhaps because they are surprised or think that things would be easier if everyone were the same.
- But there is a little more to Bailey's story. The author describes Bailey as a girl – but some of the characters in the story seem to think she's a boy. Later in the story, Laurel accepts Bailey just as she is. The story is also an opportunity to talk about how most of us are assigned a gender when we are born – and that for some people, as they grow up, the choice that others have made for them doesn't feel right.
- As with some of the other stories discussed in this booklet, you could start by thinking about all the things we like to do, how some of these are thought of as being 'for' girls or boys – but that we know better. You could also talk about how people make assumptions about other people – based on their sex, race or faith for example – and how, as we grow up, we start to form our own identities and discover what we like to do. While some of our choices might surprise other people – perhaps because we like things that they didn't expect us to – this doesn't mean they are wrong.

Specific points to talk about:

- What are some of the things we dream about? If you could do or be anything at all, what would it be? Ask children to write about somebody who does something they want to do that other people thought was impossible. Encourage them to think about how that might feel. Use drama and other activities to explore how it feels to be told you can't do something because you are, for example, a boy or a girl.
- Make drawings of Bailey's dresses – what is the most amazing dress you can imagine? Involve the whole class in making a collage of one of her dream dresses. Remember that they have mirrors, crystals and flowers – you can taste and smell them as well as see them. And that's only the three we know about! You can see all sorts of different places on them (what if you could actually step into the Great Wall of China dress and go there?). Let your imagination run wild.
- Make some dresses. If some children don't want to make dresses you could make cloaks. Try and get all your thoughts and ideas onto one big cloak which could be displayed in the classroom. Isn't it exciting that we all have different dreams?
- Bailey's family seem confused about her gender. The author tells us she is a girl but her family seem to think she is a boy. Talk about how some children will grow up knowing that their gender is different from the one they were assigned at birth – and that many more (perhaps most of us) will like things that some people think are associated with a different gender.
- It might be useful to keep in mind the difference between biological sex and gender – the latter being a much more complex range of behaviours linked to how we express our identity. In simple language you could talk about how, while many of us may be happy to be thought of as either a girl or a boy, we all express this in different ways – and that many girls will like lots of things associated with boys and vice versa.
- When somebody isn't comfortable with the gender they have been assigned, this makes some people uneasy. Do most of us have times when we feel ourselves to be different from the way other people see us? Should we all be allowed to be the people we want to be? Point out that Laurel seems to accept Bailey the way she is. Why do you think Laurel reacts this way?
- What do you think about Bailey's brother's reaction when she tells him about her dream? How would you like a brother or sister or a friend to react if you told them about something as special as a dream? How should we react if someone told us something surprising about themselves?
- What do you think about Laurel and Bailey's relationship? Why do they like each other?
- On the last page, Bailey says that the dresses they have made out of mirrors 'show us OURSELVES'. What do you think she means by that?
- What do you think Bailey and Laurel will do when they are older? Perhaps they will dream up dresses for other people. Is that something anybody could do or is it just a career for girls? Why shouldn't a boy be interested in dresses – or a girl in cars?
- Research well known trans people like Professor Stephen Whittle, Paris Lees or Christine Burns alongside feminists or activists who have campaigned around race, LGB or transgender rights. Why are people like this important? Do they help to make the world a better place for all of us?
- *Mermaids* is a support group that helps families, children and teenagers with gender identity issues. You may find some of the information on their website useful – www.mermaidsuk.org.uk

THE PROJECT BOOKS

Some of the books used by the project schools have, sadly, gone out of print and are not included below. There are many other titles which address the issues highlighted in the above notes and teachers are encouraged to search them out. The two sources below are a good starting point.

When purchasing copies readers may like to consider supporting *Gay's The Word* bookshop – one of the world's few remaining LGBT specialist bookshops. They stock a range of children's books and can be found at www.gaystheword.co.uk and contacted on sales@gaystheword.co.uk or 0207 278 7654.

Letterbox Library, www.letterboxlibrary.com, also stocks an extensive range of children's books which address gender and other areas of equality and diversity.

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Red Rockets and Rainbow Jelly – Penguin Books

Dogs Don't Do Ballet – Simon & Shuster, S&S UK Ltd

William's Doll –Simon & Shuster, S&S UK Ltd

The Sissy Duckling – Simon & Shuster, S&S UK Ltd

The Paper Bag Princess – Annick Press

The Boy With Pink Hair – Penguin Group (USA) Inc.

10,000 Dresses – Seven Stories Press, Inc., New York, USA

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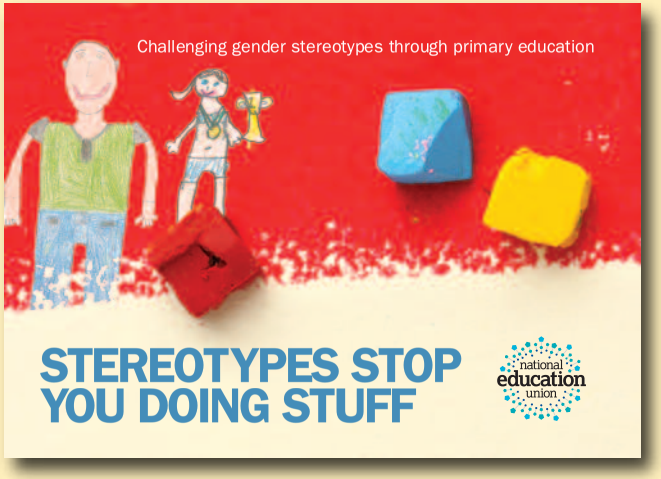
NOTES



To order companion volume, *Stereotypes Stop You Doing Stuff*, email **equality@neu.org.uk**

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www.neu.org.uk/breakingthemould

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