



Welcoming Schools

A PROJECT OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN FOUNDATION

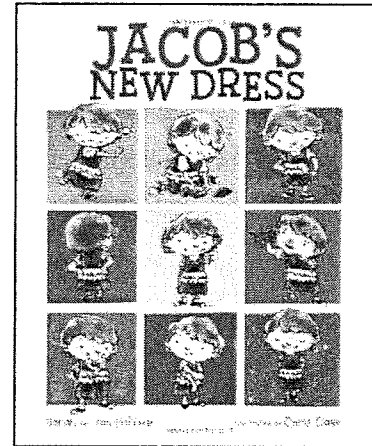
JACOB'S NEW DRESS : UNDERSTANDING GENDER EXPRESSION

SUGGESTED GRADE LEVEL: K – 2

LENGTH OF TIME: 35 minutes

GOALS

- To explore the concept of personal expression with students and to embrace differences in the classroom community.
- To use the book *Jacob's New Dress* to introduce the concept of gender expression to students.
- To help students understand that gender expression can vary personally, culturally and globally.
- To help students cultivate allyship around gender and gender expression.



OBJECTIVES

- Students will listen to a book read aloud and discuss its meaning.
- Students will participate in a class activity to help them explore the concept of gender expression.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.2.1: Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 2 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups. (Also SL.K.1, 1.1)
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.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, 1.2)
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.2.5: Add drawings or other visual displays to descriptions when appropriate to clarify ideas, thoughts and feelings. (Also SL.1.5)

EDUCATORS' NOTES

It is natural for young children to notice differences. This lesson offers an opportunity to build classroom community by giving students a chance to share and learn about each other's differences around personal expression in clothing and hairstyles. The book *Jacob's New Dress* provides a wonderful opportunity to discuss identity and gender expression with children.

One of the learning objectives of this lesson is to teach children to accept and embrace the many ways students may choose to express who they are through clothing and hairstyles, free of stereotypical gender norms. It is important to help students understand that clothing

and hairstyles are unique and different for each of us depending on our individual expression, family, and cultural traditions.

It is 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.

If, for example, you have students in your school or classroom who are transgender or non-binary, be mindful not to put those students in the position of teaching other children about their identity. That is the job of the educator, not the student.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- *Jacob's New Dress* by Sarah and Ian Hoffman
- Optional video: *I Love My Hair* by Sesame Street

READ AND DISCUSS THE BOOK JACOB'S NEW DRESS

Introduction to the Book:

Before reading this book to your students, share that the book is called *Jacob's New Dress* and that Jacob, the child on the cover of the book, uses the pronouns he/him/his and identifies as a boy. Ask your students to look at the cover of the book and tell you what they see. They may notice that Jacob is wearing a purple dress, is playing with a truck, is playing with dinosaurs, looks happy, etc.

Let your students know that you are going to be talking about gender expression—how we present our gender to the world through clothing, hair and mannerisms. Everyone has a gender expression and we cannot assume someone's gender identity (how they feel) from their gender expression.

CLASS DISCUSSION GUIDE:

Page 3. “Jacob, why do you always wear girl clothes? Put on the knight armor. That's what the boy wears!” “Christopher, Stop telling us what to do!” said Emily.

- Pause on this page and ask students to share what they hear and see happening in the story.
- Ask, “Is Christopher being kind to Jacob?”
- Ask, “What is Emily doing?” (She is being an ally).

Page 8. Jacob pulled on his witch's dress and twirled. He loved the way the black lace swirled around him.

- Pause and ask your students how Jacob feels when he wears his witch dress.

Page 15. Christopher sneaked up, yanked off Jacob's towel, and ran away whooping... Jacob watched Christopher wave the towel like a captured flag and started to cry.

- Ask, “How is Christopher making Jacob feel?”
- Ask, “What is the behavior called when someone is being unkind to another person?” (Students may say that Christopher is being mean or a bully. Make sure to remind

students that what Christopher is doing is called bullying behavior. This is important because behaviors can change—we do not want to cast students into a role. We want their behavior to change.)

- Ask, “What did the other children on the playground do to help Jacob? Did they show ally behavior?” (No one helped except for Emma. Emma is an ally.) Point out the children to the left of Christopher. They are laughing, which is also bullying behavior. A person who laughs or watches is called a bystander. Sometimes people do not help because they are afraid.
- Ask, “What could the other children have done to make the situation better?” (Answers might include: talking with or befriending the targeted student (Jacob), confiding in an adult, talking with the student who is being mean (Christopher), causing a distraction to help stop the harassment or speaking up in the moment and saying, “STOP.”)

Page 20. Dad nodded back and smiled. “Well it’s not what I would wear, but you look great.”

- Pause and ask your students, “Do Jacob and his dad like to wear the same things?”
- Ask, “Do you like to wear different clothing than people in your family?”

Page 24. “My mom and I made this dress!” ... He could hear Ms. Wilson and the other kids talking, but their words sounded far away.

- Pause on this page. Ask your students, “Why do you think Jacob wears dresses?”
 - Let your students know that there are lots of different ways that children can dress. There are lots of ways to be a boy or a girl or both or neither.
 - Let your students know that those are the clothes Jacob likes to wear. (If you are pairing this lesson with the lesson *Children Just Like Me: Gender Expression*, let them know that later in this lesson, they will be doing an activity to show what kinds of clothing and hairstyles they like to wear.)
 - This is a good time to message students that at [NAME OF SCHOOL], everyone gets to wear what makes them feel happy and comfortable without being teased.
- In response to Christopher’s dad saying that boys don’t wear dresses, let your students know that home and school can be different. One response can be, “Home and school can be different. Here at _____ school, students can wear what makes them happy.”

Page 26. On the playground, Christopher yelled, “Let’s play tag! Boys versus girls-- Jacob, you’re on the girls team!” A bunch of kids laughed.

- Revisit these teaching points from earlier in the book:
 - Ask, “How is Christopher making Jacob feel?”
 - Ask your students, “Do you know what Christopher’s behavior is called?”

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- Ask, “What did the other children on the playground do to help Jacob? Did they show ally behavior?”
 - Ask, “What are some things the other children could have done to make the situation better?”
 - Remind students that we cannot assume someone’s gender identity (she, he, both or neither) based upon their gender expression. There are lots of ways to be a girl, boy, both or neither, outside of the gender binary (see vocabulary above).

Page 29. Jacob sprinted across the playground, his dress spreading out like wings.

- Pause and ask your students, “How does Jacob feel when he wears his purple dress?”
- Ask, “Why does it say his dress is like wings? How might you feel if you had wings?” (Free, happy).

Closing discussion or comments for after the book.

- Ask your students, “What are some ways we can work together in our classroom so that everyone can wear clothes and have their hair the way that makes them happy and comfortable?”
- Ask, “What are some ways we can include everyone in play and activities?”

EXTENSIONS

- Read the book *Julián is a Mermaid* and compare the two books. While riding the subway with his abuela, Julián notices three women spectacularly dressed up. When Julián gets home all he can think about is dressing up just like them. But what will Abuela think about the mess he makes — and even more importantly, about how Julián sees himself? A story about the power of been seen and affirmed.
- Do this lesson along with *Children Just Like Me: Understanding Gender Expression*. This book and lesson provide a wonderful opportunity to discuss identity and gender expression with children through a global lens.
- Read the book *I Am Jazz* and compare the two books. Jazz Jennings is transgender, while Jacob identifies as a boy and has a gender expression that includes wearing the purple dress he and his mother sewed together.

ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

- Assessment for this lesson will be mostly informal. Notice if your students are using the term gender expression and if they understand the meaning of the word.
- Observe your students and notice whether they are showing ally behavior around gender expression. The goal is for students to accept the ways that each individual in their class chooses to express their gender throughout the school year without being teased or bullied.
- As an accepting climate is developed in your classroom, notice if more students feel welcomed to express themselves freely in clothing, hairstyle or forms of play and interactions with peers.

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 Words for Elementary School Students](#)

[Professional Development Training](#)

Credit: Developed by Michele Hatchell, Madison, WI.