

Resources for Pre-school and Elementary Grades: Themes of bodies, babies, consent and gender

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C is for Consent

Eleanor Morrison - Phonics with Finn, 2018

Ages 3 - 5

A boy learns about giving and receiving consent for physical affection with family and friends in this debut picture book. Finn, a young white boy, attends a party with a diverse group of relatives and friends. Some of them want--or might expect--a kiss or hug. In each case, he's able to choose what he prefers: A kiss on the cheek from Grandpa is OK, for example, but he's not in the mood for a hug from Grandma. Finn's parents provide reminders to adults and encouragement to their son, which helps him speak up for himself. The book suggests alternatives to kissing/hugging, like a high-five or fist bump, but adds: "Maybe" Finn "doesn't want to be touched at all. It's his choice what happens to his body." Later, Finn asks to hold his best friend Ru's hand, adding that saying no is OK. Nearly all children's books about physical affection assume that kids want hugs and kisses. Morrison provides a valuable service for children and their parents in her tale by showing how consent works and what good boundaries look like. The advice falls in line with today's parenting experts, who recommend that kids not be forced into unwanted touching; the volume also includes worthwhile discussion questions for older children and caregivers. A simple story about consent that provides solid and useful information. - Kirkus Reviews

Consent (for Kids!) Boundaries, Respect, and Being in Charge of You

Rachel Brian - Little Brown Books for Young Readers, 2020

Ages 6 - 10

Consent for Kids guides readers through understanding consent and navigating various uncomfortable or confusing social situations involving their bodies. Stressing the concept of bodily autonomy, Brian lays out unambiguous rules for both giving and receiving consent, especially with regard to personal boundaries. She covers how to know when consent is or isn't given (directly or indirectly); how people abuse power to pressure others; how clothing communicates (it cannot give consent); having the right to change your mind; identifying unhealthy and healthy relationships; and how, when someone betrays your trust, it is not your fault. More modern situations involving technology (sharing photos, videos, etc.) are considered as well, and the lessons are related through lighthearted cartoons, making this difficult topic approachable, easily consumable, and even fun. Brian's artwork is laid out in bold typeface and clear-flowing panels and spot illustrations, starring a cast of simple, stick-limbed characters that is inclusive of race, gender, and ability. Throughout, the value of building strong friendships and support systems is emphasized, and after prompting readers to reflect upon their own experiences giving or receiving consent, Brian closes by offering resources to help those in need. Amusing, edifying, and empowering, this should be required reading for all consenting, corporeal human beings. - Booklist

It Feels Good to Be Yourself: A Book about Gender Identity

Theresa Thorn - Henry Holt, 2019

Ages 5 - 8

This expansive, straightforward framing of gender emphasizes curiosity, joy, and positive self-expression. In Thorn's uplifting picture-book debut, young readers meet four children: Ruthie, a thin, transgender girl with light brown skin; Xavier, Ruthie's cisgender brother, who also has brown skin; Alex, a pale-skinned, round-bodied kid who is "both a boy and a girl"; and JJ, a brown-skinned child who uses a wheelchair and who is "neither a boy nor a girl." Through plain, intentional language, Thorn normalizes each child's gender identity and skillfully introduces the multifaceted concept of nonbinary gender: "Just like there are many different ways to be a boy or a girl, there are many different ways to be non-binary--too many to fit in a book!" As the main characters move through their vibrant neighborhood, families and children are portrayed with a prismatic array of gender expressions, skin colors, and physical features. Nonbinary illustrator Grigni's full-bleed images are magical in their jewel-toned palette. Among gender-centered picture books, this one stands out for its dazzling #ownvoices art and its simple yet nuanced phrasing--particularly when Ruthie shares her true gender with her family, and her parents (an interracial couple) respond with a loving group hug. "Oops! Ruthie was a girl all along--they just didn't know it at first." Giving kids and adults a hopeful model for discussing (and embracing) one another's gender is just one of the gifts offered by this valuable narrative. - Kirkus Reviews

It's Perfectly Normal: Changing Bodies, Growing Up, Sex, and Sexual Health

Robie Harris - Candlewick Press, 2014

Ages 5 and up

Harris' highly acclaimed titles have been go-to guides for a whole generation of children, teens, and their parents wishing to address these delicate, often difficult-to-discuss topics. They are noteworthy for their straightforward and accessible style, reliable information, and warm, inclusive artwork. *It's Perfectly Normal*, which is geared toward children nearing puberty, has sold more than one million copies, been translated into more than 35 languages, and has been endorsed and used by teachers, librarians, clergy, health care and mental health professions across this country. It also has the distinction of being listed as #7 on the American Library Association's list of most frequently challenged books of the 21st century. This edition has been revised for a new generation, including updates in scientific and medical information about reproduction, birth control, abortion, sexual abuse, and sexually transmitted diseases. Harris and Emberley have also included information on gender identity and online safety. *It's So Amazing!*, written for a younger audience, has also been revised to include up-to-date scientific and medical information and also addresses being online and using the Internet. - School Library Journal

It's So Amazing: A Book About Eggs, Sperm, Birth, Babies, and Families

Robie H. Harris - Candlewick Press, 2002

Ages 6 and up

Talking to children about where babies come from can be difficult - on the parents and on the kids. But *It's So Amazing* might make it a little easier. Give it to your child to read or better yet, sit down and read it together. Interesting discussions are sure to follow. Written in comic-book style, this book addresses many topics, including conception, birth, love, sexuality and family,

in a gentle and respectful manner. In the chapter "Becoming a Family," for example, a variety of families are mentioned, including those headed by a single parent, by parents who are gay or straight, and by parents who are married or divorced. Illustrations help validate each combination as a real and loving family. In a direct and nonthreatening manner, Harris discusses cesarean births, premature babies, adoption, sexual abuse, and HIV and AIDS. Colorful drawings depict people of different cultures, races, shapes and sizes. An eager-to-learn bird and a more reticent bee serve as an audience within the book. They ask questions, make comments and learn along with the reader. Offering comic relief throughout, they also help readers recognize that not everyone shares the same comfort level discussing these issues and that however one feels is okay. This is a book you'll wish someone had given you as a child. - Scientific American

My Body Belongs to Me from My Head to My Toes

Dagmar Geisler - Sky Pony, 2014

Ages 5 - 8

Clara is growing up, and she is proud of who she is becoming. She is happy and healthy and enjoys spending time with family and friends. There are times that she likes to be touched--tickling with friends, hugging Papa, or snuggling on Granny's lap. However, there are other times when she does not want to be touched, and Clara is confident in her ability to say no. Created by a German organization that provides information on sexuality, relationships, and family planning, this informational picture book is intended to empower children to develop a positive self-image. Readers are also encouraged to speak up when they are uncomfortable with the behaviors of others. Written with a clear, specific text, and illustrated with full-page, colorful paintings, it gives children the "good touch, bad touch" message in a safe and comforting manner. The beginning contains a message for adults from the International Center for Assault Prevention, recommending the book as a teaching tool for self-awareness and empowerment. Resources for adults are listed at the end of the book. An effective instrument for general nonfiction or picture-book shelves. - School Library Journal

Sex Is a Funny Word: A Book about Bodies, Feelings, and You

Cory Silverberg - riangle Square, 2015

Ages 7 - 10

Silverberg and Smyth follow up their book for younger readers, *What Makes a Baby* (Triangle Square, 2013), with this engaging introduction to gender, bodies, and relationships. A diverse cast of cartoon kids--in terms of appearance, ability, and point of view--explore the multiple meanings of the word sex with their teacher, friends, and family members. There is a heavy emphasis on the importance of thinking for oneself and developing one's own opinions. The language is conversational and accessible, as well as direct, fastidiously accurate, and entirely gender-neutral. Each section ends with conversation-provoking questions, reinforcing the suggestion that the book be read and shared in conversation with a trusted adult. What makes this volume exceptional is its introduction of the subjects of transgender identity, intersex conditions, and masturbation. The quality text is enhanced and brought to life by comics drawn with bold lines on bright, full-bleed pages. Smyth's illustrations are interactive, fun, and edifying, presenting a range of body types and diversity. Despite the title, the topic of sexual intercourse is not covered; but Silverberg prepares readers for this information by introducing concepts such as respect, trust, and joy. - School Library Journal

They, She, He easy as ABC

Maya Gonzalez - Reflection Press, 2020

Ages 4 - 7

Inclusive pronouns are learned alongside the alphabet in this joyously illustrated take on the classic ABC book.

They, She, He easy as ABC shows that including everyone is all part of the dance. It's easy. It's fundamental. As the dance begins the kids proclaim, "No one left out and everyone free," in a sing-song rhyme about inclusion. This sets the stage for readers to meet 26 kids showing us their dance moves.

Fast-paced rhyming keeps the flow of text upbeat and rhythmic, and naturally models how to use a wide range of pronouns. There's no room for stereotypes on THIS dance floor with spirited imagery that keeps names, clothes, hair and behavior fresh and diverse. The combination creates a playful and effortless practice to expand ideas about gender while learning the alphabet and makes being inclusive as easy as A-B-C. - Publisher Marketing

The Gender Wheel - School Edition: a story about bodies and gender for every body

Maya Gonzalez - Reflection Press, 2018

Ages 6 - 10

"This is our world. Like many things in nature it's round and holds everyone at the same time. This is the Gender Wheel. Like our world it's round and holds everyone at the same time too..."

In 2010 Maya introduced the Gender Wheel and the Gender Team in the Gender Now Coloring Book. It was a jammed packed coloring extravaganza exploring bodies, nature and history in relation to multiple gender identities. It also opened up the possibility of play and expansion around our still limited language of "boy" and "girl."

Now the Gender Team returns, expanded and stronger than before, inviting you on a picture book journey through the Gender Wheel. This School Edition takes the original book, The Gender Wheel (2017), and puts clothes on all the kids to be more conducive to school environments. It is a powerful opportunity for kids to understand the origins of the current binary gender system, how we can learn from nature to see the truth that has always existed and revision a new story that includes room for all bodies and genders. The Gender Wheel offers a nature-based, holistic non-western framework of gender in a kid-friendly way. Also included are Teacher Tips on how to hold a holistic perspective on gender in the classroom. - Publishers Marketing

What Makes a Baby

Cory Silverberg - Triangle Square Press, 2013

Ages 3 - 7

Intending to be "a book for every kind of FAMILY and every kind of KID," this title has lofty aspirations that are mostly successful. It emphasizes that not everyone goes about having a baby the same way. Silverberg explains that the genetic material in a sperm or egg has stories to tell "about the body [it] came from." The bold, stylized illustrations show non-gender-specific people in a rainbow of hues, some with internal parts to make a baby and others without. Refreshingly, anatomically correct terminology is used in most cases, although when describing a birth, the author writes, "Some babies are born by coming out through a part of the body that most people call the vagina," as if that term were debatable. The text also states that many babies are born with other kinds of medical intervention at the hands of midwives

and doctors, providing a well-rounded view of modern birth. The final spread asks, "Who was waiting for you to be born?" and successfully makes the point that the people waiting for the birth to occur are excited. This is a solid, occasionally quirky book on an important topic.

- School Library Journal

What's in There? All about Before You Were Born

Robie Harris - Candlewick Press, 2013

Ages 4 and up

Nellie and Gus and their parents are expecting a new baby. In simple and clear language, Harris describes the pregnancy. With the family's daily routine as the backdrop, she explains that babies start out as just a few cells about the size of a pencil dot, continue to grow throughout nine months, and are finally ready to be born when they're around the size of a watermelon. Correct names for male and female anatomy are used throughout. The illustrations depict the passing seasons as the baby begins to grow and develop in utero. Westcott's illustrations are digitally produced, and a cut-away view of Mom's abdomen shows the baby's general growth during the interim. The text explains the changes the baby goes through; soon it can hear, grow hair, suck its thumb, etc. Before long, the big day comes and Gus and Nellie welcome their new brother. This book is suitable for young children who are just beginning to ask the question, "Where do babies come from?" Inquiring minds wishing for more information regarding conception and fertilization will need to look at the myriad other books on reproduction. However, *What's in There?* is a good first book to recommend to parents.

- School Library Journal

Who Are You?: The Kid's Guide to Gender Identity

Brook Pessin-Whedbee - Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2016

Ages 4 - 7

This primer on sex, gender, and identity is an ideal title for caregivers and educators to share with children. An opening "Note for the Grown-Ups" instructs adult readers on how to use and discuss the book with kids. The text addresses young readers directly ("This is a story about you") and goes on to define sex (a guess based on body parts observed at birth) and gender identity ("who you feel like inside, who you know yourself to be"). A middle section features a number of illustrated clothes, toys, and accessories accompanied by the question, "What do you like?" A removable "Gender Wheel" that students can turn to complete three sentences ("I have," "I am," and "I like") using a range of terms/expressions (gender neutral, trans, not sure, etc.) is also included. Bardoff's illustrations are colorful and bright and depict a diverse group of carefree children playing together in a variety of settings. A solid package for families and educators interested in an introduction to gender identity.

- School Library Journal

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