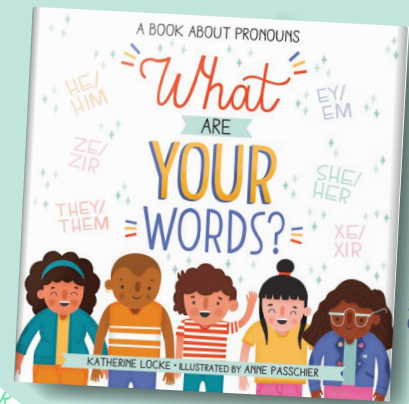




What ARE YOUR WORDS?

BY KATHERINE LOCKE
ILLUSTRATED BY ANNE PASSCHIER



TEACHING TIPS



Readers respond in many ways including: making connections to themselves, their communities, and their literacy experiences; pursuing their curiosity through discussion, inquiry, and self-expression; and changing their attitudes and behaviors. This guide provides suggestions and resources for supporting and extending students' authentic reading responses and positive identity development. Select activities and resources that best meet the needs and interests of your students.

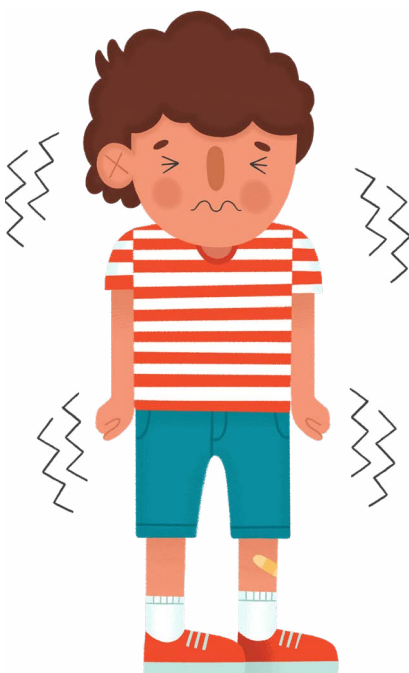
If you need guidance or suggestions for discussing gender identity and gender pronouns with young people, start with [Learning for Justice's Best Practices for Serving LGBTQ Students: Section II: Classroom Culture](#) and [The University of Pennsylvania's The Educator Playbook: Respecting Pronouns in the Classroom](#). There are additional resources listed at the end of this guide.



READ AND DISCUSS

Read *What Are Your Words?* aloud and discuss the book with students. What information or ideas stood out? What questions do they still have? Collect students' questions and ideas on chart paper or online platform like Flipgrid, and/or invite students to record their thinking in their notebooks. Students can add to these shared notes and use them for writing and discussion topics for the following activities.

1. Children internalize gender norms and stereotypes at an early age. When young people feel they do not "fit" into traditional gender norms, they can feel isolated from their peers or develop a negative self-image. Work with students to develop an accessible definition of "gender" and "stereotype" using examples students recognize such as "girls like pink" or "boys are good at math." Provide additional examples as needed. Ask students guiding questions if they need scaffolding. How have you been taught that boys and girls are supposed to behave? What likes/dislikes are connected to boys? Girls? Work with students to create a chart of your working definitions and the stereotypes students identify. Talk with students about where stereotypes come from and invite them to notice the gender stereotypes they experience and observe over the next several days. How can these stereotypes be harmful? You can add these observations to the class





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chart or students can record them in their notebooks. Model and set expectations for inclusivity and acceptance of all students—recognizing that many young people can feel uncomfortable sharing opinions, preferences, or experiences that reveal differences. Encourage interest and respect for each other.

PERSONAL CONNECTIONS

2. Using your class charts and students' notes, invite students to reflect on their experiences with gender norms and stereotypes. Have they felt pressure to behave in specific ways or express likes or dislikes that don't fit their feelings or how they see themselves? Encourage students to go deeper than outward expressions such as clothing styles and consider personality traits and actions. What can students say or do if someone tries to limit or define them because of gender stereotypes? Working with students, brainstorm phrases they can use if someone tries to define them by gender stereotypes or judge their behavior because it doesn't "fit" biased expectations. Focus on empowering language such as, "Everyone is different!" or "I am loved just the way I am."



3. Ari's Uncle Lior explains that "there are lots of words to say who people are and how they feel. Some of those words are pronouns." Encourage students to draw or sketch themselves engaged in activities they enjoy, then brainstorm words to describe themselves such as, "creative, singer, cousin," and so on. Do not require or expect students to add their pronouns or share them. Encourage students to use all of their language experiences to brainstorm words (España & Herrera, 2020). Like the book's illustrator, students can add these descriptive words to their drawings. Invite students to share their drawings and words with a partner.

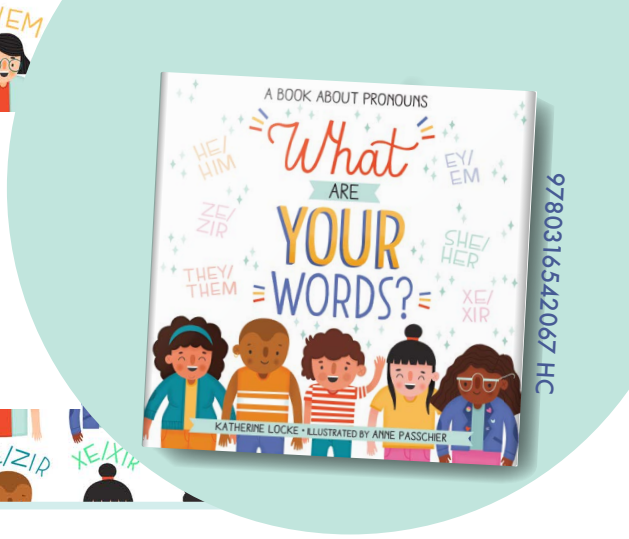


4. Invite students to use their drawings and words from the first activity as inspiration to write a descriptive poem or paragraph celebrating themselves. Create a museum display of students' artwork and writing in the classroom or take photographs and share in your online classroom space.



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TEACHING TIPS



COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

5. Throughout the story, Ari encounters people in the neighborhood who celebrate and accept each other's differences. Revisit pages in the book that illustrate when characters show this acceptance and celebration. What makes people unique? Why is it important to be different? How does Ari's community support each other and embrace their differences? How can students show this support and acceptance to others? Invite students to list a few specific examples in their notebooks of tangible ways to show support and model inclusivity. Encourage students to become "upstanders" who speak up when they see others treated unfairly or show support for other people's experiences and differences (Ahmed, 2018).



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[The American Academy of Pediatrics: Gender Identity Development in Children](#)

[GLSEN: Pronoun Guide](#)

[Learning for Justice: Best Practices for Serving LGBTQ Students: Section II: Classroom Culture](#)

[The Trevor Project: A Guide to Being An Ally to Transgender and Nonbinary Youth](#)

[The University of Pennsylvania: The Educator Playbook: Respecting Pronouns in the Classroom](#)

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