

Pink Hair and Paper Bags – challenging gender stereotypes in literacy hour

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A previous article discussed the NUT's *Breaking The Mould* project in which primary schools explored ways of challenging 'traditional' gender stereotypes. Teachers engaged in the work used books as the starting point for many discussions and activities. Stories offer glimpses into unfamiliar lives and help children to question received notions and established ways of being. In particular, the books outlined below challenge assumptions about what girls and boys might like or do.

In nursery and early years, *Red Rockets and Rainbow Jelly* prompted discussions about how we can like all sorts of things, regardless of our sex, and that girls and boys have more in common than some people seem to think. *Super Daisy* is one of a small but growing band of female superheroes and *The Odd Egg* and *Man's Work!* demonstrate that boys can be just as caring and helpful as girls.

For slightly older children, *The Paper Bag Princess*, *Amazing Grace*, *Dogs Don't Do Ballet* and *The Sissy Duckling* show female and male characters freeing themselves from the constraints of stereotyping and doing what they want to do regardless of other's preconceptions about what is 'appropriate'. These stories generated conversations about doing what you love, rather than what others think you should.

Both *The Sissy Duckling* and *The Boy With Pink Hair* served as starting points for talking about how people are sometimes bullied because others cannot accept their identity. *The Different Dragon* epitomizes a phrase that became the title of one of the resources developed through the project – *Stereotypes Stop You Doing Stuff* – when gentle Noah counsels the eponymous character "I know that there are lots of different ways to be a

dragon - and being fierce isn't the only way you have to be." **10,000 Dresses** is about Bailey – who feels like a girl even though many people seem to think she is a boy. It tells the story of someone who has been assigned a gender role which does not suit them in a way that children can relate to.

Amongst reading books for KS2, **The Turbulent Term of Tyke Tiler** brilliantly illustrates the effects of gender stereotyping when the central character - who readers assume to be a boy - turns out to be a girl. In **The Boy In A Dress**, Dennis is a 'typical' boy in some ways but has a secret that he is afraid to share. The book reminds us how much we all have in common, even with people we perceive to be 'different', and the final scenes demonstrate how we can defeat discrimination by standing in solidarity with minorities. **Girls Are Best** discusses a number of extraordinary women – some of whom even feature in the new KS2 History curriculum!

More information about these and other books, along with a range of teaching resources, can be found on the project website at

<http://www.teachers.org.uk/educationandequalities/breakingthemould>.