

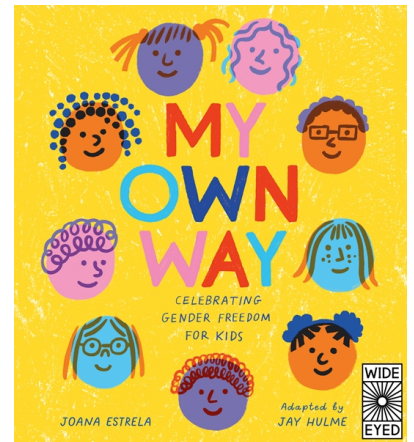
Educator Guide

MY OWN WAY

CELEBRATING GENDER FREEDOM FOR KIDS

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ISBN: 9780711265868

Imprint: Wide Eyed Editions

USD: \$16.99, CAN: \$19.99

Hardcover, 40 pages, ages 3-6

"Offers support and acceptance"—*Booklist*

"Encouraging"—*Publishers Weekly*

"Cheerful"—*School Library Journal*

Book Description:

Celebrate the beauty of gender diversity and freedom with kids. My Own Way helps kids explore the idea that gender is not defined by what you look like or what you wear, but by how you feel. My Own Way is simple, direct, and inclusive in its introduction to gender freedom.

Reflection for educators:

As adults we can recall back to our childhood and the lessons we were taught both implicitly and explicitly. It is important as an educator to reflect on bias you might hold and on the ways your understanding of gender identity and expression have evolved and developed over the years before beginning this conversation with your students.

Children notice differences naturally. Be ready to offer opportunities for students to build on their classroom community by sharing about their own gender identities if they choose. Certainly, they will be learning about gender expressions and identities of others. One of the biggest objectives of this guide and My Own Way is to empower children to be their authentic selves and to recognize that they are in charge of their own gender identities. When children learn this to be true, they can translate that sense of autonomy to others by building empathy through understanding of self.

When we talk about gender in a school setting, it is very important to have your rules and expectations in your classroom community well established. Gender-based bullying happens frequently in elementary schools and needs to be interrupted and addressed by the educators in charge. Please also be mindful that you likely will have students in your school and classroom who are transgender or non-binary. Make sure not to single anyone out or put those students in the position of educating other students about their identities. This is our job as educators. Lastly, be aware that student privacy is priority. A trans or non-binary student's safety can be jeopardized if they are outed to their peers or non-affirming adults. It is never up to us as educators to require a student to share, but instead we should aim to create a safe space where kids can share if they choose to do so.

Key Objectives:

- Gender is diverse and not limited to what we see on the outside (i.e., how someone looks or chooses to dress)
- All genders are valid, and no one can tell you what your gender is but you
- You can be yourself: you get to choose what you do, what you wear, and how you express your gender
- Being kind to all is what matters most!
- Be brave and say, "I will follow my own way!"

Mini-unit summary:

Lesson 1: Read the book and have discussion

Lesson 2: Journaling and Artwork

Lesson 1 – Reading and discussion

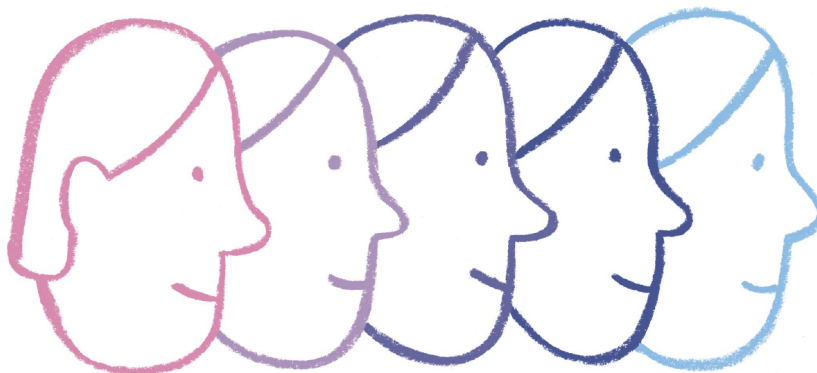
Mini-lesson:

This mini-lesson is best done on the carpet or gathered in a group together. Before reading *My Own Way*, have students think about this question: What is gender? Have students share their ideas out loud. Once students have shared, follow up by the following: Gender Identity is...How you feel. Girl, boy, both or neither. Everyone has a gender identity.[1]

Read *My Own Way: Celebrating Gender Freedom for Kids* out loud to kids.

Group Discussion after the book:

- Can we know a person's gender identity (who they are and how they feel) based on the ways they like to express themselves through items such as clothing, jewelry, and hair?
- Can we know a person's gender identity (who they are and how they feel) based on what activities they like to do?
- How do you know a person's gender identity? (Remember, only an individual can determine their own gender identity!)
- What are some ways you like to express your gender identity – are there things you like to wear or activities you enjoy doing? What makes you your own person?
- What are ways we can be kind to others who might have a gender identity or expression that is different than us?



Lesson 2 – Journaling and Artwork

Supplies needed:

- *My Own Way: Celebrating Gender Freedom for Kids*
- Notebook or worksheet with lines and room to draw
- Pencils
- Coloring supplies such as markers, crayons, colored pencils

Mini-lesson:

Lead students in a discussion to recap what they've learned. Prompt them to think of the big ideas: Gender Identity, Gender Expression, only you can say what your identity is, you can't tell someone's gender by looking at them. Have them pair up and share about the things they love about their identity. This can include activities, gender expression, and gender identity. Remind students that they can share as much as they would like to and feel comfortable with.

Journaling:

Demonstrate how to make a list of things they enjoy about their identity and expression. This is something you can model on the board before they go to their seats. This should be done in their journals or the back of their worksheets. Demonstrate for them that once they have a list they will write about their list in sentence form. You might want to have some sentence starters for students.

Examples could be:

"I go my own way by . . ."

"I love expressing myself when I . . ."

Once students have done their journaling call them back together to show them an example drawing you made ahead of time. This drawing should have a sentence below it and a drawing showing what the sentence is about. They should make their drawing unique and colorful.

Optional closing:

Invite students to share their sentences with each other. This could be done in small groups or a large group share. It is up to you and to the students, and no one should feel obligated to share.

Resources on Gender Identity and Diversity for Educators:

1. Welcoming Schools: Human Right's Foundation – Educational resources (lessons) and trainings <https://welcomingschools.org/>
2. Gender Inclusive Schools: Trainings for school districts, educators, PTA, families, and caregivers <https://www.genderinclusiveschools.org/>
3. GLSEN: Resources for educators <https://www.glsen.org/>

Guide created by Hannah Edwards

