

One of a Kind Like Me/Único como yo

Guide for Educators

Suggested age/grade level: 4-7 years old. Pre-K – 2nd grade.

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About the Book

One of a Kind Like Me/Único como yo is a bilingual story (Spanish/English) about a child named Danny who wants to be a princess in the school parade. Danny and his mom go searching for the perfect dress. Will they find it in time?

The book can be used to spark dialogue about gender diversity, appreciating what makes each person unique, and being true to one's self. It can also be used to explore other themes, such as being determined and being creative.

Getting Ready to Read the Book

Some children and adults will have questions and others may react negatively to the book, so it's a good idea to be prepared before you read it to your class. Here are some recommendations:

- Read the book carefully and think about some of the questions or criticisms that may come up.
- Check out the resources at the end of this guide and at oneofakindlikeme.com

- Don't worry if you can't answer every question that might come up. You can always come back later with a response.

Important tip: When answering questions that may come up, it will be very helpful to understand the difference between gender identity (our internal sense of who we are), sex (assigned at birth based on our physical traits), expression (clothes, behavior, how we present ourselves to the world), and sexual orientation (who we are attracted to.) See the "Gender Unicorn" and other resources listed at the end of the guide for information.

Talking with Children About the Book

Many young children are very open-minded about gender, and won't find it strange that a boy wants to wear a dress. They may be more concerned about the story line than Danny's choice of costume. Others may have been raised to think that boys shouldn't wear dresses, so it's good to be prepared for a range of responses.

Some people are concerned that children are too young to learn about gender. The reality is that children are learning about gender from what they see and hear around them all the time. One of a Kind, Like Me/Único como yo can help you talk with children about things they may already be thinking about.

Key Points to Highlight

The book has many themes that can be explored in conversation with children. Some are focused on gender expression and diversity. Others are themes that are embedded in the story line. Here are a few to pick from:

- **Gender and Expression** – Everyone can express who they are in many ways. How you play and what you wear doesn't have to be limited based on gender. Have fun and be yourself.
- **Being True to One's Self** – It's great to be who you are and do the things you like to do.
- **Valuing Diversity** - It's great when you are different than someone else, or someone is different than you. We are all "one of a kind" and we all belong.

Other Themes in the Book: Family diversity, Language diversity, Determination, Creativity

Prompts for Dialogue

1. How is Danny one of a kind? What do you like about Danny?
2. What are some of the things that Danny likes? Do you like any of the same things? Different things?
3. How are you one of a kind? What do you like about yourself?
4. How do you think Danny felt when he got to dress up as a princess? What would you like to dress up as?
5. What can we do so that nobody at our school feels left out?
6. Do you like to make things? How do you feel when you make something special?
7. What language(s) do you and your family speak? What do you like about speaking more than one language?

Questions Children May Have

Here are some common questions children may have, with sample responses.

Important tip: Though the Danny in the book is based on a real person who is now a grown man, the book leaves room for children to imagine. Sample responses leave open many possibilities about the character Danny, his family, and his identity. Information about the “real-life” Danny is also provided for those who are curious to know.

1. Why does Danny want to be a princess? I thought only girls could be princesses?

Danny likes princesses and the idea of being a princess makes him happy. In our school we think that anyone can dress up as whatever they like as long as they aren't hurting anyone else's feelings.

2. Aren't dresses for girls?

Dresses are for whoever wants to wear them. Just as pants are for whoever wants to wear them. Clothes are just clothes and don't need to be labeled boy clothes and girl clothes. Clothes do not have a gender.

3. Why does Danny act like a girl?

Danny just acts like Danny. There's no one way a boy, or girl, or any child has to be.

4. Why does Danny live with his grandpa and his cousin?

Sometimes children live with different members of their family, including grandparents and cousins. There are many different ways to be a family. Sometimes families are people who are related to you and sometimes they are people who care for you, but aren't related.

In real life: Danny lived with his grandparents and his mom when he was very young.

5. Where is Danny's dad?

We don't know. Some families have only one parent. Some have more than one mom or more than one dad, or stepmoms and dads. Some children are raised by other people in their families or by foster families.

In real life: Danny's dad died before Danny was born.

6. Is Danny gay?

What you like to wear doesn't determine who you love. A gay man loves other men in a romantic way. Some boys who wear dresses grow up to be gay, and some don't.

In real life: Danny grew up to be a gay man.

7. Is Danny really a girl? (see below)

Danny likes to dress up like a princess, but what you like is different than who you are. We don't really know anyone's gender unless they tell us. Danny may be exploring his gender identity.

In real life: Danny is now a grown up man and still likes to wear dresses sometimes.

8. Is Danny transgender? (see below)

We don't really know if someone is transgender unless they tell us.

In real life: Danny does not identify as transgender. He sometimes liked to pretend that he was a girl, but didn't feel that he was a girl.

Responding to Questions About Gender Identity

If questions about gender identity come up, it might be useful to explain what gender identity is. Here's one way to explain it to young children:

When a baby is born, adults usually look at the baby's private parts and say "it's a boy" or "it's a girl". But, some people identify as a different gender than they are told. This is because our brains, not our private parts, tell us our gender identities, or who we are.

Here is an alternative, using more explicit language:

When a baby is born, adults usually say "it's a boy" or "it's a girl". They guess the child's gender by looking at the baby's genitalia (penis, vagina, or intersex body parts). But, they don't always guess right. This is because our brains, not our private parts, tell us our gender identities, or who are. A child who has a vagina can identify as a boy. A child who has a penis can identify as a girl.

The term *transgender* is sometimes used by people who have a different gender identity than what they were told when they were born. Some people don't identify as a man or woman, boy or girl, and might identify as *nonbinary*. These differences are natural, just like being left or right handed.

Important tip: Avoid saying: "born in the wrong body" "born a boy (or girl) and became a girl (or boy)" "a boy (or girl) in a girl's (or boy's) body". These explanations may seem easy to understand, but they can be hurtful and lead to misunderstanding of transgender people.

Talking with Parents and Caregivers About the Book

Key Points to Highlight

Although the book content has numerous themes, it is likely that adults' main concerns about the book will be related to gender. Here are some points that you can highlight on that topic.

- **Our school is committed, and legally required (see resources below) to create a safe, welcoming environment for all children and families.** This includes children with diverse gender expressions and identities. This book is one of the tools we are using to have this conversation with children.
- **It is healthy to allow children to explore different ways of playing, dressing, and expressing themselves, without restricting them based on gender.** This gives children the freedom and safety to explore their interests, their identities, and develop into healthy, well-rounded adults.
- **Children learn about gender from the time they are very young.** They pick up a lot from what they hear around them. It's crucial to help children learn healthy attitudes about gender diversity when they are young. It's also important for adults to "unlearn" any biases that might get in the way of supporting our children.
- **Gender is much more diverse than most of us are taught to believe.** It is natural and healthy for children to express gender in many different ways and to identify as boy, girl, or some other gender. A child's gender identity may or may not match the sex they were assigned at birth.

Responding to Concerns and Disagreements

Parents' and caregivers' questions may come from a variety of places. Some just want to understand better so they can be supportive. Others may be worried about their children's safety. Some may be uncomfortable with the idea of a boy wearing a dress.

Everyone needs to be heard, even if you don't agree with them. Make sure they feel heard before sharing your perspective. Respond in a way that affirms their underlying concern. Examples:

"Can you tell me more about your concerns?"

"I can see how you might be worried about..."

Try to avoid engaging in debate or arguments with parents, especially if they are rigid in their thinking about gender.

Questions Parents and Caregivers May Have

1. Why doesn't the book touch on bullying?

Children are often bullied because they don't act the way others expect them to based on gender. There are already books that deal with this important topic. This book is about a child who is affirmed by parents, teachers, and friends. It allows children to see this vision so that they can learn about gender diversity in an affirming way, not just in relationship to bad things that happen. Encouraging children to see people who are different in a positive light is one way to prevent bullying.

2. Why are you introducing this topic to children at such a young age? They are too young to understand these things.

Children pick up a lot of information about gender from the world around them starting at a very young age – from their peers, teachers, media, families. Some of these messages are affirming and others may be limiting and even harmful. It's important that adults talk with them about gender in a way that is positive and affirming.

Children aren't too young to understand gender. Most children have gender identities from a very young age. Adults don't usually question them, unless their gender is different than expected.

It's important for children to learn to respect all genders and expressions as valid. This can help them feel positive about themselves and others.

3. Isn't it the parents'/caregivers' responsibility to teach a boy how to behave like a boy? And a girl how to behave like a girl?

Nobody can tell parents how to raise their children. We respect and understand that parents have different views on this topic. At our school, we uphold the value that children have a right to express their gender freely. This is crucial for creating a safe environment for all children to learn and build healthy self-esteem.

Some parents try to change their children to protect them, but are actually doing harm. There is strong evidence that children can be happier, healthier, and more successful if they aren't pressured to behave according to gender expectations. It is also important to allow children to be themselves or they may feel that something is seriously wrong with them, which can lead to depression and even suicide.

4. If you let a boy wear a dress you are setting them up to be teased by the other kids?

It is always important to be concerned with a child's safety. That is why we are working to create awareness and compassion among children and in the school community at an early age. If you have a boy who wants to wear a dress at school, or any child who is gender-expansive, it is important to make sure that the environment is as safe as possible and there are people there to support them.

Sometimes it isn't safe for a boy to wear a dress in public, because he will be teased and bullied. If you restrict what a child wears so that they are safer, it's important to help them understand that there is nothing wrong with wearing a dress – you just want them to be safe because there are people who don't understand.

5. Don't books like this confuse our children?

There is a lot of confusion in our society about gender, which leads to discrimination. Conversations about gender can help clear up some of that confusion. It is our school's responsibility to create an environment that is safe for everyone. This means we need to teach respect for gender diversity.

Teaching awareness and understanding from an early age can reduce teasing and bullying and make it safer for all children. Children who express gender freely may feel alone because they are different than children around them. Seeing themselves in books can help them feel less isolated and build positive self-esteem.

1. Is Danny gay or transgender?

We don't know someone's gender identity or sexual orientation until they tell us. It's important not to make assumptions based on how a child expresses themselves. (See Gender Unicorn under resources for distinction between gender identity, expression, and sexual orientation.)

In real life: Danny now identifies as a gay man, but his mom didn't know this until he was older.

Important tip: Parents and caregivers may be worried about their child's identity or sexual orientation and may want answers now. Here's are additional comments that might be helpful:

Adults often worry about their children's future, but people change and grow and it's not possible to predict. The important thing is to love and respects kids as they are and be open to the possibility that they may express themselves and identify in a variety of ways as they grow.

Children often develop a strong sense of gender identity at a young age. If a child is persistent, consistent, and insistent that their gender is different than the sex assigned at birth, it is important to listen and make sure they get the support they need. Each person is different and some people's gender journeys extend past adolescence and into adulthood.

6. Aren't you teaching our children to be gay or transgender?

It is impossible to teach a child to be gay or transgender, but we can make our schools welcoming and supportive for children of all gender identities and sexual orientations and children who are exploring who they are. Many children come out as lesbian, gay, or bisexual at early ages. Many children also identify as transgender or gender-nonbinary at early ages. It is important that these children feel safe and supported.

7. How can I support my child to be an ally?

Children learn a lot by the behavior they see from people around them. When children bully, it's often because they feel powerless in some area of their lives and want to feel more powerful. Appreciate your child and help them value the things about themselves that are unique or different. Help them build positive connections to others, a sense of belonging, and compassion.

You can also teach your child not to be a bystander. Show your child the importance of speaking up if they see someone being teased or bullied. Encourage them to talk to a teacher or other adult if a child is being mistreated.

Final Note and Thanks

I have done my best to use language that is accurate, respectful, and accessible in this guide. If you have feedback, please email: Laurin@outproudfamilies.com. Language is always changing, new questions may come up from people who use the guide, and new understandings of gender diversity will arise. This guide will be updated periodically to reflect these changes. Please check for the latest revisions at oneofakindlikeme.com.

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Selected Resources

1. Confused about Gender? The Gender Unicorn is Here to Help!

<http://weareheremovement.com/2016/01/confused-gender-gender-unicorn-help/>.

2. Understanding Gender and Gender Terminology

Gender Spectrum: <https://www.genderspectrum.org/quick-links/understanding-gender/>

3. Guidance to Schools for Creating a Safe and Supportive School Environment for Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Students

http://www.p12.nysed.gov/dignityact/documents/Transg_GNCGuidanceFINAL.pdf?_sm__au_=iVV1fFGP4rNsrSNF

4. Schools in Transition: A Guide to Supporting Transgender Students in K-12 Schools

<http://www.hrc.org/resources/schools-in-transition-a-guide-for-supporting-transgender-students-in-k-12-s> (This guide includes information on legal requirements)

5. Queering Schools: How do we create classrooms and schools where each child, parent and staff member's unique and beautiful self is appreciated and nurtured?

http://www.rethinkingschools.org/static/archive/28_03/edit1283.pdf

6. From the Dress-Up Corner to the Senior Prom: Navigating Gender and Sexuality Diversity in PreK-12 Schools (Book by Jennifer Bryan)