



Reading Guide for Children's Books

The Gender Equity Reading Initiative is a Program of Safe Haven Ministries

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About this Reading Guide

The Reading Guide for Children’s Books is for the Gender Equity Reading Initiative (GERI) books targeted towards children aged 4-8 years old. The Reading Guide for Tween and Teen Books is for GERI books targeted towards children age 9-18.

The Reading Guide includes book summaries, an overview of themes in the book, discussion questions for ongoing conversations with your child(ren), and activities you can use to further promote healthy relationships, boundaries and social norms.

The GERI has also created a Parent Toolkit that provides an overview of topics including: ways to have developmentally appropriate conversations with your child(ren); safe, unsafe and unsafe touches; handling disclosures; and community resources for victims/survivors. This toolkit can be downloaded at www.GeriGR.org

Content Warning

Safe Haven acknowledges that some of the books included in the GERI will contain stories that show different forms of harm. These narratives are not meant to sensationalize or exploit violence. However, it is a reality in our world that violence happens and that many people experience it day-to-day. The GERI Parent Toolkit and Reading Guides will help readers or parents/caregivers process and handle difficult conversations around sexual assault, domestic violence, and other forms of violence.



Resources

This guide was created with the intent to give people who care for children and youth the tools to talk with them about tough subjects. Having these kinds of conversations can be hard.. Do your best and try speaking from a place of concern and care.

If you or someone that you know has or is experiencing violence or abuse, including yourself, the following are local resources that can provide free and confidential support:

Safe Haven Ministries

Website: www.shmgr.org

24/7 Hotline: 616- 452- 6664

YWCA West Central Michigan

Website: www.ywcawcmi.org

24/7 Hotline: 616-454 -9922

Children's Advocacy Center of Kent County

Website:www.cac-kent.org

Number: 616-336-5160

Michigan Coalition to End Domestic and Sexual Violence (MCEDSV)

Website: www.mcedsv.org

24/7 Hotline: 855-864- 2374 or text 866-238-1454

National Resources

Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN)

Website: <https://www.rainn.org/>

24/7 Hotline: 800-656-4673



Books for ages 4-6

Title and Author: *Miles is the Boss of His Body* by Abbie Schiller and Samantha Kurtzman-Counter

Description: On his 6th birthday, Miles' excitement is dimmed when he finds himself being pinched, noogied, hugged too tight, picked up and tickled by his well-intentioned family and decides he's had enough! When Miles decrees that he is the "Boss of his body," his whole family expresses support and respect for his personal boundaries.

Themes: Bodily autonomy, Consent, Respectful relationships, and Healthy communication

Discussion Questions and Activities

1. What made Miles's day so special? What are things that Miles likes/dislikes?
2. As you read through the book, talk about the different figures in Miles' life. Ask them to describe how Miles' Grandpa, Siblings, Parents, The Birthday Chicken, and the Pizza man made him feel? Name the feelings of each encounter.
3. Why did Miles get so angry? Talk to children about why Miles was upset and how he got to that point. Ask what they do when they feel frustrated/angry/upset?
4. Ask your child if they have ever felt the same as Miles. Has anyone ever made you upset, uncomfortable, or even happy? Normalize the feelings the child discusses.
5. Ask how they could become the "Boss of their Body"? Affirm that you support them in becoming bosses of their bodies.

Activity: The Barbara Sinatra Children's Center Foundation created a video for children talking about different types of touches. Check out the video on YouTube: [Protect Yourself Rules - Safe Touch / Unsafe Touch](#)



Activity: Create a little poster with the title “Boss of my Body”. Have children draw, cut out pictures from magazines and/or color it to describe what being the Boss of their Body means.

Title and Author: *All Are Welcome* by Alexandra Penfold, Suzanne Kaufman

Description: This book follows a group of children through a day in their school, where everyone is welcomed with open arms. A school where kids in patkas, hijabs, and yarmulkes play side-by-side with friends in baseball caps. A school where students grow and learn from each other's traditions and the whole community gathers to celebrate the Lunar New Year.

Themes: Diversity and Inclusion, Community, Acceptance

Discussion Questions and Activities

1. As you read along, have children look through the pictures. Ask them what they see and notice about the different people?
2. Ask them about their friends in school/daycare. Do all your friends look the same and think the same? Talk with them about the differences and similarities they share with their friends and the different people they see in their lives.
3. Have a conversation about what it means to be different. Is being different ok? How do we treat people who are different from us?
4. One of the major themes in this book is about being inclusive of others. Talk with children about times they have felt included or times they have been excluded. How did it make them feel when they were included in something?
5. A phrase repeated throughout the book is “all are welcome here”. Ask children what does it mean to welcome someone? How can you be welcoming to people who are different from you? Encourage them to talk about a time they saw someone being welcoming then come up with different ways they can make someone feel welcome.

Activity: In *All are Welcome*, everyone comes together for a community meal. Have children draw who is all a part of their community. You could also encourage them to invite friends of different backgrounds over to have a community meal.



Activity: Check out [HiHo](#) Kids on YouTube. They have a series called “Kids Meet” where children meet kids of all different backgrounds. Kids meet doctors, people with disabilities, and many more diverse folks. Please watch videos ahead of time as some may be too advanced for younger ages.



Title and Author: *Giraffes Can't Dance* by Giles Andreae and Guy Parker-Rees

Description: *Giraffes Can't Dance* is a touching tale of Gerald the giraffe, who wants nothing more than to dance. With crooked knees and thin legs, it's harder for a giraffe than you would think. Gerald is finally able to dance to his own tune when he gets some encouraging words from an unlikely friend.

Themes: Bullying, Stereotypes, Self-esteem

Discussion Questions and Activities

1. The book starts by talking about Gerald the Giraffe and all the things that he is good at. Ask children about the things they are good at? What are some things they aren't so good at? Normalize that it is okay to not be good at everything.
2. When Gerald tries to dance the lions tell him he can't dance because he is a giraffe. Talk with children about times people said they couldn't do something because of who they are.
3. Ask your children how Gerald might feel being laughed at by everyone. Explain what it means to bully someone. You can even ask children if they have ever been bullied or be treated mean by someone. How did this feel?
4. The cricket tells Gerald that "sometimes when you're different, you just need a different song". Talk with children about what they think they need to be successful. Did a change in music help Gerald become a better dancer or did he become a better dancer once he believed he could be a better dancer?
5. Ask children how Gerald changed from the beginning of the book to the end of it? In the beginning Gerald said he was a bad dancer but, by the end he says he can dance. Are there times you have felt like you couldn't do something until someone encouraged you to do it?

Activity: Have children draw different animals dancing.



Activity: Have children create their own song and dance like the different animals in the story. Bonus for having a dance party!

Title and Author: *Hug Me* by Simona Ciraolo

Description: Ever feel like you need a hug, a really big hug from someone? That's how Felipe the young cactus feels, but his family isn't the touchy-feely kind. Cactuses can be quite prickly sometimes, you know? . . . and so can Felipe. But he'll be darned if this one pointy issue will hold him back, so one day Felipe sets off on his own to find a friend and just maybe, that long awaited hug.

Themes: Healthy Boundaries, Consent, Friendship

Discussion Questions and Activities

1. Ask children what they notice about Felipe's family. Are they good at giving hugs?
2. Talk to children about what it means to give a person their personal space. Are there times when they don't want to be touched? How can they let people know when they want to be hugs?
3. When are you told you have to keep still and quiet even though you might want to play?
4. How do you think Felipe feels about not being able to get a hug from his family?
5. Felipe and his friend Ballon have a great time together but when Felipe hugs his friend he hurts them. What can you do when you hurt someone but not on purpose? Who can you talk to when someone hurts you? How do you think Felipe felt after hurting his friend?
6. When Felipe meets Camilla the Rock he notices that she is crying and needs a hug. Ask children how they know someone wants to be hugged? Are there times when people don't want hugs and is that ok? What should you do if you know someone does not want a hug?

Activity: After reading the book, have children keep count of all the times they touched or were touched by someone without getting permission. Maybe even give them a



notebook to keep track (or you can keep track for them!) Talk to them about how they felt at the end of the day and use Felipe the Cactus to explain why people sometimes want hugs and other times they don't.

Title and Author: *Pink Is for Boys* by Robb Pearlman, Eda Kaban

Description: Pink is for boys . . . and girls . . . and everyone! This timely and beautiful picture book rethinks and reframes the stereotypical blue/pink gender binary and empowers kids -- and their grown-ups -- to express themselves in every color of the rainbow. Featuring a diverse group of relatable characters, *Pink Is for Boys* invites and encourages girls and boys to enjoy what they love to do, whether it's racing cars and playing baseball, or loving unicorns and dressing up.

Themes: Healthy Masculinity, Gender Equity, Gender Stereotypes

Discussion Questions and Activities

1. Ask your child what their favorite color is? Why? What does it remind them of? Affirm that they can have any favorite color that they want.
2. Ask children if there are colors they aren't supposed to like? Example: boys can't like pink. Ask them to explain why they think they aren't supposed to like that color and what would happen if they did?
3. Ask children are there things that only boys/girls are supposed to do? Ask them if they have ever wanted to do something or enjoyed doing something that didn't go along with the "normal" things boys and girls are supposed to like. Affirm that it is okay if they still want to do these things.

Activity: *Pink Is for Boys* shows different children doing various activities. Have your child use as many colors as they can to draw their friends and families playing together.

Activity: amaze.org is a great parent tool. It offers various videos that are age-appropriate and medically-accurate concerning sex education. This following video can be helpful to watch alongside children [Gender Roles and Stereotypes](#) by amaze.org

Activity: Gender lightbulb. Using paper, cut out a lightbulb and have children answer question 3. Have them hold up their lightbulb if anyone has ever told them to stop doing something or that they couldn't do something because of their gender.



Activity: Using craft paper have children draw two people. One a boy and the other a girl. Have them draw on one side all the things girls are supposed to like and other the other side all the things boys are supposed to like. In the middle have them draw the things that boys and girls can share in liking. Have them explain their drawings to you.

Books for age 7-8

Title and Author: *Some Secrets Should Never Be Kept: Protect children from unsafe touch by teaching them to always speak up* by Jayneen Sanders and Craig Smith

Description: We teach water and road safety, but how do we teach body safety to young children in a way that is neither frightening nor confronting? *Some Secrets Should Never Be Kept* is a beautifully illustrated children's picture book that sensitively broaches the subject of keeping children safe from inappropriate touch. The comprehensive notes to the reader and discussion questions at the back of the book support both the reader and the child when discussing the story.

Themes: Child Sexual Abuse, Consent, Safe Touch and Unsafe Touch

Discussion Questions and Activities

1. When Lord Henry tickled Alfred in a way that made him bad, was it right for him to tell Lord Henry to stop? Talk to children about ways they can tell someone to not touch them.
2. Lord Henry tells Alfred to keep a secret. What does it mean to keep a secret? Are keeping secrets bad or good? Sometimes secret can be good like when you want to have a surprise birthday party. But, in the case of Henry and Alfred was keeping a secret a good thing?
3. Why was the secret King Henry told Alfred to keep a bad thing? We can talk to children about how Alfred might have felt, like being scared that his Mom was going to get fired or that he might get into trouble if he didn't keep the secret.
4. When do you think Alfred should have told his Mom about what Lord Henry did?
5. What should you do if someone tells you to keep a secret but it makes you feel bad? Do you know who you can tell/ talk to? Give children a list of people they can talk to and help remind them that if a bad thing keeps happening keep telling someone till they do something.

Talk with kids about the PANTS acronym:



- P- Private parts are private
- A- Always remember that your body belongs to you
- N- No means No
- T- Talk about secrets that upset you
- S- Speak up so someone can help you

Title and Author: *Don't Touch My Hair!* by Sharee Miller

Description: It seems that wherever Aria goes, someone wants to touch her hair. In the street, strangers reach for her fluffy curls; and even under the sea, in the jungle, and in space, she's chased by a mermaid, monkeys, and poked by aliens...until, finally, Aria has had enough!

Themes: Racism, Girl Empowerment, Consent

Discussion Questions and Activities

1. Aria loves her hair. Have children name things about themselves that they love and ask them why. Why does Aria love her hair so much?
2. How does Aria feel about everyone wanting to touch her hair all the time? Does she feel good about them touching it all the time? What does she do to try to get people to stop touching her hair?
3. Aria is an African American girl that wears her natural hair. Natural hair means that she wears it without chemical alteration such as relaxers or perms. Talk with children about why her hair is important to her. Watch [Keke's Black Hair History](#) by Keke Palmer on YouTube to learn more about Black people's hair.
4. From aliens in outer space to mermaids in the deep sea, everyone wants to touch Aria's hair without her permission. Why do you think she doesn't tell them no right away? Are there times when you are afraid to tell people no? Talk about those times with children when they feel like they can't say no to something. Explore with them who they could go to if they felt scared saying no.
5. Have children share how they can tell someone not to do something when they are uncomfortable. Like when a friend wants to borrow their favorite toy but they don't want to share it. How would they tell their friend no?
6. How did Aria get everyone to stop touching her hair without her permission? Do you think it was easy for her to tell everyone no? Does it still make it right?



Activity: Watch the Oscar-winning short film [Hair Love](#) by Matthew A. Cherry. The film tells the story of a father doing his daughter's hair for the first time. Watch as the daughter advocates for what she wants and needs from her father. The video can be found on YouTube.

Title and Author: *Mango, Abuela, and Me* by Meg Medina, Angela Dominguez

Description: Mia's abuela has left her sunny house with parrots and palm trees to live with Mia and her parents in the city. The night she arrives, Mia tries to share her favorite book with Abuela before they go to sleep and discovers that Abuela can't read the words inside. So while they cook, Mia helps Abuela learn English ("Dough. Masa"), and Mia learns some Spanish too, but it's still hard for Abuela to learn the words she needs to tell Mia all her stories. Then Mia sees a parrot in the house window and has the perfect idea for how to help them all communicate a little better.

Themes: Girl Empowerment, Immigration, Different Family Structures

Discussion Questions and Activities

1. Mia is hesitant when her Abuela (Grandmother) moves in. Have children describe why Mia might be unsure being around her Abuela.
2. Abuela has a hard time adjusting to living with the family. Can children think about why she may be sad and having a hard time?
3. To make her Abuela feel less homesick she tries cooking with her, teaching her new words, and giving Mango to her. What are ways you have made a friend or a family member feel better when they were sad or felt left out?
4. Mia begins to teach her Abuela new words and vice versa. What have your grandparents or older people in your life taught you?

Activity: This activity will work best for groups who have students or children from multiple backgrounds. Have children share how they say hello in their own language. This is a great way to learn about other cultures and new vocabulary!

Activity: Family is an integral part to this story. Mia and her Abuela would cook with each other and go to the park. Have children draw a picture of their family during a holiday, a vacation, or at home.



Title and Author: *Julián Is a Mermaid* by Jessica Love

Description: While riding the subway home from the pool with his abuela one day, Julián notices three women spectacularly dressed up. Their hair billows in brilliant hues, their dresses end in fishtails, and their joy fills the train car. When Julián gets home, he begins daydreaming of the magic he has seen and all he can think about is dressing up just like the ladies in his own fabulous mermaid costume: a butter-yellow curtain for his tail, the fronds of a potted fern for his headdress. But what will Abuela think about the mess he makes — and even more importantly, what will she think about how Julián sees himself?

Themes: Healthy Masculinity, Family Acceptance, Self-Esteem

Discussion Questions and Activities

1. While riding the train with his Abuela Julián notices the mermaids. Julián describes himself as a mermaid to his Abuela. Have children describe themselves. What are things they like/dislike?
2. How do you think Julián feels after having “become” a mermaid? Are there clothes you wear that make you feel great about yourself?
3. Julián creates his tail and is seen by his Abuela. Have children describe what Julián might be feeling after having Abuela see him. Does he think that Abuela is mad with him? Why?
4. Do you think at your school Julián would be allowed to be a mermaid? Would people be unkind to Julián for being a mermaid? What could you do to make Julián feel welcomed?
5. Abuela supports and accepts Julián being a mermaid. What are ways that you can show someone that you support them? How can you make sure people feel comfortable to be themselves no matter what they wear?

Activity: Have a mermaid parade! Julián and his Abuela attend a parade of mermaids which is based off of a real one held on Coney island in New York City. Use items from



around the house or other crafter materials to dress up as mermaids and have children celebrate what makes them special.

Activity: Julián creates a mermaid's tail with things around the house. Using craft material have children create what their ideal mermaid tail would look like.

Title and Author: The Day You Begin by Jacqueline Woodson, Rafael López

Description: There will be times when you walk into a room and no one there is quite like you. There are many reasons to feel different. Maybe it's how you look or talk, or where you're from; maybe it's what you eat, or something just as random. It's not easy to take those first steps into a place where nobody really knows you yet, but somehow you do it.

Themes: Respecting Difference, Mindfulness, Healthy Friendships

Discussion Questions and Activities

1. Ask children what they notice in the story. What objects are obvious to them? One thing to notice is the hidden rulers. Ask children to tell you why rulers are in the story and what do they mean?
2. The rulers in the story show Angelina and other children measuring or comparing their differences to others. Ask children if they ever feel like they don't quite measure up?
3. The story shows multiple children feeling different and not like others. Ask about times they have felt like no one was like them? What did it feel like? What could they do for someone that feels this way to make them feel a part of the group?
4. What do you do when you begin to feel overwhelmed? Work with children to find ways they can calm down when upset. Such as breathing activities, doing jumping jacks or singing a song quietly to themselves.
5. Ask children what is one thing they think is special about themselves? Have them explain why and celebrate why that makes them special.

Activity: Being new and different can be a challenge. Help children come up with positive affirmations they can repeat to themselves when they don't feel like enough.



Example: “ I get my rest, because I am the best. I am the best because I can pass any test. But I don’t need a test to tell me that I am the best”

