

Jacob's New Dress

by Sarah and Ian Hoffman, illustrated by Chris Case

Identities & Themes

- Feelings
- Friendship
- Kindness
- Standing up for self/others
- Identity affirmation
- Identity safety
- School success
- White/European American
- Bi/Multiracial identity or relationships
- Gender diversity

Teacher Reflection Questions

1. When did you become aware of gender stereotypes and expectations for yourself and others?
2. In what ways do those stereotypes and expectations fit your idea of who you are? In what ways do they not fit you?
3. What is your understanding of gender identity or gender expression as fluid and non-binary?
4. What else do you need to know in order to better support children in being their authentic selves around gender identity and expression?
5. What can you do to make your classroom/school a place where teasing and bullying about gender, gender identity, and gender expression are not allowed?

Background Information for Teacher

This book touches on all five Anti-Bias Education tenets. Jacob needs to feel supported in his gender expression as other children tease and reject him because he doesn't fit into their gender stereotypes and expectations. Jacob can help children learn about what it means to advocate for oneself. In the book, Jacob keeps asserting his gender expression, and even in the face of mistreatment, he continually manages his emotions and stress. Through Emily, Jacob's mother, and his teacher, children also learn different ways to support and stand up for others.

A note about gender diversity

In this story, the main character, Jacob, is gender non-conforming in his gender expression. He is a boy that wears dresses, but this does not mean that he is transgender. He does not necessarily identify as a girl. It is important not to conflate gender expression with gender identity. See also the **Gender Diversity Primer** in this guide.

Teacher Note: Many of us aren't used to the idea that it might be okay for a boy to wear a dress sometimes. But *Jacob's New Dress* is well worth reading to your class. In the book, Emily stands up for her friend over and over again, and with some help from his friends and family, Jacob finds the strength to stand up for himself. These are role models every child could use. This book gives you a wonderful opportunity to talk with kids about when to ask for adult help. Remember that even though sometimes it is challenging to find the time to respond to children's requests for help with social situations, we do want children to come to us when social situations are confusing or challenging.

Language Hint: Children don't need us to have all the answers. Sometimes a listening ear and a bit of sympathy are enough to let a child figure out their own solution. Telling children to "stop tattling" can be damaging. It can impede children's ability to come to us in the most challenging situations. In one recent study "stop tattling" was the response children found the least helpful in dealing with traumatic social situations. (Youth Voice Project 2014)

Anti-Bias Education Tenets

- ☒ Empathy & Understanding
- ☐ Healthy Complex Identities
- ☐ Respect Across Differences
- ☒ Notice, Name, & Reject Bias
- ☒ Responsiveness & Action

Social-Emotional Learning

- ☐ Self-Awareness
- ☒ Self-Management
- ☒ Social Awareness
- ☒ Responsible Decision Making
- ☒ Relationship Skills

Read this to the students before reading the book:

This is a story about Jacob. For a while, Jacob gets teased about something. But after getting help from his mom and his friend, he finds a way to stand up for himself. Listen to hear more about what he did.

Discussion Questions (essential questions bolded)

1. Jacob liked to play pretend. Raise your hand if you like to play pretend. What did Jacob like to pretend?
2. **Some people reacted pretty strongly when Jacob was wearing a dress.** (Christopher told him he should wear something different; the teacher thought maybe he should pretend to be something different; his mom was quiet, and his dad said, "Well, it's not what I would wear.") **Why do you think they reacted in these ways?**
3. **How do you think Jacob felt about those reactions?**
4. How do you think he felt when his mom helped him make a new dress?
5. **Has anyone ever told you that you shouldn't play something or wear something because of something about you, like being a boy or girl or how you look or sound?**
6. **How did that feel? How did you respond?**
7. **Some people helped Jacob when he was told he shouldn't wear a dress. Who helped Jacob? (Emily, his mom, and Jacob himself) How did they help?**
8. How do you think Jacob felt when people helped him?
9. Who do you get help from when people tease you? Who do you get help from when you see someone else being teased or hurt?
10. **How do you decide who to ask for help? When do you ask other kids for help? When do you ask a grown-up?**
11. Have you ever been like Emily and stood up for someone who was being teased? How did it feel to help a friend like that?
12. **Jacob felt like the dress his mom helped him make was "magic armor" that helped him stand up for himself when Christopher was teasing him. What helps you feel strong enough to stand up for yourself or other people?**

Journal Prompts & Extension Activities

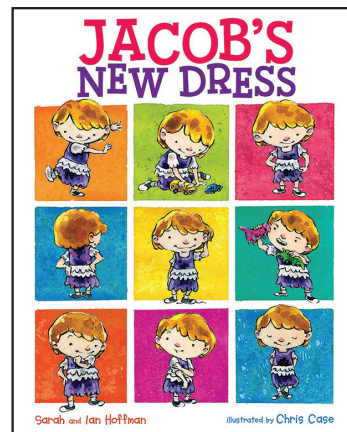
Magic armor, magic dress

MATERIALS NEEDED: string, paper plates, fabric scraps in a variety of colors and textures, (crayons or markers or paint or glitter glue or stickers).

After reading the book, remind the children that Jacob said his dress felt like "soft cottony magic armor," helping him stand up for himself in a way that didn't hurt anyone else. Ask what would help them feel safe enough to stand up for themselves or someone else.

Help the children decorate two paper plates as magic armor or a magic dress (or both). Help them write their words on the plates about what helps them stand up for themselves. It might be things like, "My friends help me feel safe enough to stand up for myself", or "I know it's wrong for people to use hurting words"; or even "My blankie helps me feel brave."

Punch or cut two small holes in each plate. Tie two pieces of string between the two plates (so one string hangs over each shoulder, making the two plates into a simple set of "magic armor/dress". As the children wear their magic armor/dress, help them notice all the times they stand up for themselves and each other.



Literacy Connections

- Realistic fiction
- Identify details in the text
- Compare and contrast events
- Identify theme or main message
- Describe characters/ Character development
- Character point of view
- Use illustrations/ pictures/photos to gain information
- Make inferences
- Make text connections (to self, text, the world)
- Describe major plot events
- Sequence events