



Book Title: *What Are Your Words? A Book About Pronouns*

Written by: Katherine Locke

Illustrated by: Anne Passchier

Age Range: 3–9

Grades: PreK–3rd

Identities/Lived Experiences/Themes in This Book

- Feelings
- Identity affirmation
- Community
- Gender diversity
- General racial/ethnic diversity

Literacy Connections

- Realistic fiction
- Identify details in the text
- 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)
- Figurative language

Anti-Bias Education

- **Empathy and Understanding**
- **Healthy Complex Identities**
- **Respect Across Differences**
- Notice, Name, and Reject Bias
- Responsiveness and Action

Social-Emotional Learning

- **Self-Awareness**
- **Self-Management**
- **Social Awareness**
- Relationship Skills
- Responsible Decision-Making

Background Information for Adults

Gender is experienced by people in many different ways. Children need to see different gender identities reflected positively in order to affirm and respect their own and others' identities. This book can be one tool to discuss gender diversity with students. Those discussions help foster healthy complex identities, respect across differences, and give children language to notice, name, and reject bias when it comes to gender diversity.

This book focuses on unpacking gender identity and the language associated with gender. To learn more about gender identity and language, please see the **Gender Diversity Primer**.

Be sure to read **"A Note About Pronouns"** to students from the back of the book. You may also want to read the **Author's Note** and **Illustrator's Note**. Use the section **"Some Helpful Terms to Know"** from the back of the book for important vocabulary words and definitions (sex assigned at birth, intersex, gender identity, gender expression, cisgender, transgender, nonbinary).

Discussion Hint: It's important to point out respectful language to use when talking about people's bodies and their identities. For example, don't ask a person about their body unless they tell you they are comfortable talking about it, and believe someone when they tell you what gender they are and respect their pronouns. Normalize that we are all likely to make mistakes with our language, and what to do when that happens - apologize, fix it, and work not to make that mistake again.

It might also be helpful to show some images of real people (perhaps, celebrities) who identify as transgender, gender non-binary, or gender non-conforming to help children better understand what gender diversity looks like.

Reflection Questions for Adults Reading This Book to Children

1. Thinking back to your childhood, what did you learn about gender identity and expression? How has your understanding of gender expression, gender stereotypes, and gender identity changed as an adult?
2. What language do you use to address children, students, or other young people in your life? Do you tend to use gendered language? How might you be assuming children/students' gender identity?

Book Summary to Read to Children Before Reading the Book

Ari's Uncle Lior always asks a thoughtful question when they visit: "What are your words?" Some days, Ari feels like 'she/her' fits. Other days, 'he/him' feels more right. But when the neighborhood's big summer celebration arrives, Ari feels uncertain—no words seem to fit just yet. As Ari and Uncle Lior prepare for a big summer party and meet friends and neighbors along the way, each with their own words, Ari explores different pronouns and realizes that it's perfectly okay not to have all the answers right away—sometimes, your words find you when you're ready.

Discussion Questions
(essential questions in **bold**)

Note: Adults must protect and honor each child's safety and confidentiality during these discussions and activities. Adults should never force a child to out themselves as LGBTQ+ and should make sure that children have a safe space to share only as they are comfortable with doing so.

1. **What is a pronoun?** (A word that can take the place of a name.) **What are examples of pronouns?** (I, me, you, she, he, they, etc.) (Note: *ze/zir*, *xe/xir*, and *ey/em* are neopronouns and are gender neutral pronouns that some people use instead of or in addition to *they/them*.)
2. **Based on the pictures and words in the book, what words describe Uncle Lior?**
3. **Do any of the characters in the book use words that you have questions about?** (Note: *ze/zir*, *xe/xir*, and *ey/em* are all gender neutral pronouns that some people use.)
4. **Why does Ari have a hard time finding words to describe Ari?**
 - a. Do you ever have a hard time finding words to describe yourself?
5. Ari describes waiting as, *"Waiting makes me buzzy like a bee and makes my skin feel itchy."* When was a time you had to wait for something you really wanted? How did that feel?
6. *"Sometimes I know my words right away. Sometimes I have to think about my words. Sometimes I have to try my words out. But sometimes I have to wait for my words to find me."* When was a time that you had a hard time finding your words? What helped you find them?

Journal Prompts and Extension Activities

Note: Adults must protect and honor each child's safety and confidentiality during these discussions and activities. Adults should never force a child to out themselves as LGBTQ+ and should make sure that children have a safe space to share only as they feel is appropriate and comfortable with doing so.

1. **Self-Portrait – What Are Your Words?:** What are three descriptive words that describe you right now? Have children draw a self-portrait and then write their three words above their heads, similar to the illustrations in the book. Children can choose to include their pronouns if they choose. In a classroom setting, have children pair up and share their portraits and words, and explain to their peers why they chose their words for today.
2. **Similes practice:** “Waiting makes me buzzy like a bee” is a simile – a way to describe something by comparing it to something else using the words like or as. Take turns using the following prompts (or add your own) to identify how you each do the following things to build pride and self-confidence in children's abilities. You can have children draw images to support their similes or act them out.

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|---------------------------------|----|--------------------------------|
| a. Waiting makes me...like a... | // | <i>I wait as if I am a...</i> |
| b. Talking makes me...like a... | // | <i>I talk as if I am a...</i> |
| c. Moving makes me...like a... | // | <i>I move as if I am a...</i> |
| d. Dancing makes me...like a... | // | <i>I dance as if I am a...</i> |
| e. Singing makes me...like a... | // | <i>I sing as if I am a...</i> |

3. **Journal Reflection:** In the book, Ari struggles to have patience with finding the right words to describe themselves on the day of the summer bash. Use the following prompts, based on the lines from the book, to have children reflect on their own social-emotional regulation when they get frustrated with something.

*Sometimes I know*_____.

*Sometimes I have to think about*_____.

*Sometimes I have to try*_____.

*But sometimes I have to wait for*_____.

Find more lessons in the
**AmazeWorks Gender Identity
book set, available here:**
[https://amazeworks.org/product/
book-set-gender-identity/](https://amazeworks.org/product/book-set-gender-identity/)

