

Jacob's Room to Choose

by Sarah and Ian Hoffman, illustrated by Chris Case

Identities & Themes

- Black/African American
- White/European American
- Gender diversity
- Feelings
- Community
- Standing up for self/others
- School success
- Identity safety
- Identity affirmation

Teacher Reflection Questions

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

Background Information for Teacher

As children learn to categorize, they can become rigid in their understanding of what is acceptable around gender roles, leading to limiting gender stereotypes. Strict “rules” around gender can not only prohibit children from bringing their true selves to school but can also encourage criticism and mistreatment of students who do not fit into stereotypical gender roles. This book provides the opportunity to examine these “rules” and stereotypes. It provides an opportunity for children to discuss the ways they can evaluate them and be ethically responsible in rejecting them. This creates empathy and understanding for diverse gender roles and identities. The book also models how to stand up for a friend and be responsive in the face of bias-based mistreatment.

A note about gender diversity: In this story, Jacob is a gender creative boy who likes to wear dresses. His friend Sophie is a girl who has short hair, and wears pants and button up shirts. When Jacob tries to use the boys bathroom, he gets chased out by other boys who assume he's a girl. When Sophie tries to use the girls bathroom, she gets chased out by girls who assume she's a boy. When their teacher finds out what has happened, she teaches her students an impromptu lesson on gender diversity and basic respect in the bathroom. It is important to note with students that there are many ways to be a boy or a girl. Everyone should be allowed to dress how they feel comfortable, and not be bound to clothing choices stereotyped by gender.

To learn more about gender diversity and the difference between gender expression and gender identity, please see the **Gender Diversity Primer**.

Read the **Author's Note** in the back. You can choose what to share from this story with your students. You can also read this Time OpEd written by the authors about their son's experience (which the book is based on) and the impacts of this book being banned in some areas. <https://time.com/7266486/lgbtq-books-scotus-case-jacobs-room-choose-essay/>

Anti-Bias Education Tenets

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

Social-Emotional Learning Competencies

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

Read this to the students before reading the book:

Jacob and Sophie need to use the bathroom during library time at school. When Jacob tries to use the boys' bathroom, other kids chase him out, thinking he is a girl. The same thing happens to his friend, Sophie, when she tries to use the girls' bathroom. Jacob's and Sophie's teacher helps them get into the bathrooms and uses the incident as a learning opportunity for her class. They all take action and understand the importance of being able to choose which bathroom feels right.

Discussion Questions (essential questions bolded)

1. How are Jacob and Sophie similar? How are they different?
2. How are you similar to Jacob or Sophie?
3. Why didn't Jacob and Sophie use the bathroom when their teacher let them go?
4. Some people believe that people can only use a certain bathroom because of the way they look. How can this be hurtful?
5. What do the children in Ms. Reeves' class learn about gender when she asks them to stand under the drawing that looks like them?
6. Why is it important that we don't limit what children can do because of how they look?
7. What can you do to support your friends' choice in how to express their gender?
8. Discuss your school's bathroom signs. Do the signs indicate gender? Should the signs be different? If so, how?
9. Jacob likes to wear dresses. What are some things that you like to do or like to wear that people might say you can't do because you're a boy or because you're a girl? Does it matter if you like to do that thing and you're a boy or a girl?

Journal Prompts & Extension Activities

1. Write or draw about a time when you felt scared or confused because of something someone said to you about your gender expression or a rule you felt you had to follow. Try to describe how you felt through your writing and/or drawing.
2. Write or draw about a time when you helped a friend who was sad or a friend helped you like how Jacob helped Sophie in the story.
3. **All gender bathrooms:** Have your class draw their own All Gender signs for the bathrooms they use at school or in another public place they visit. Use the book for examples, and encourage students' creativity.



Literacy Connections

- Realistic fiction
- Compare and contrast events
- Compare and contrast settings
- Compare and contrast characters
- Identify theme or main message
- Describe setting
- Character point of view
- Make text connections (to self, text, the world)
- Describe major plot events