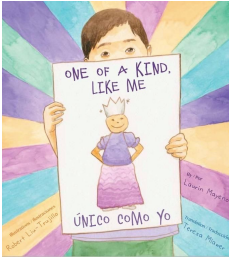


# One of a Kind Like Me/Único como yo Guide for Educators



Thank you so much for checking out this guide and considering how to use the book *One of a Kind, Like Me/Único como yo* as a learning tool for your classroom or school. Use this guide to find ideas for starting conversations with children about gender diversity, gender stereotypes, what makes each person unique, and more. The guide can also help you prepare for addressing concerns that parents and caregivers may have. Selected resources are listed at the end that you can use for your own learning or with your students.

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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 story is based on a multiracial, multigenerational, bilingual family with a single mom.

**Suggested ages/grade levels:** The book is geared primarily towards children ages 4-8 Pre-K – 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. It has also sparked great conversations among 4<sup>th</sup>– 6<sup>th</sup> graders. Written by Laurin Mayeno. Illustrated by Robert Liu-Trujillo. Translation by Teresa Mlawer. Published by Blood Orange Press, 2016

## Getting Ready to Read to Students

The topics in the book may be new to you or controversial in your school, so it may be helpful to do some prep before you read it to students. Don't worry about responding to all questions. You can always come back to the topic later. Here are some ways to prepare:

- Read the book and think about topics you want to touch on and what questions you might use. See [Topics and Prompts for Dialogue](#) for some ideas.
- Think about questions or concerns that may come up. See [Responding to Children's Questions](#) and [Talking with Parents and Caregivers](#) for ways to respond.
- Familiarize yourself with basic gender terminology and concepts. See [Selected Resources](#) for more information.

## Talking with Children About the Book

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 children explore things they are already thinking about. Children are heavily influenced by expectations related to gender, and may be absorbing ideas about gender that are harmful. *One of a Kind, Like Me/Único como yo* can help you open up conversations for

those who are open and curious and can also provide you with a starting point for questioning gender stereotypes and biases.

Many children aren't concerned that a boy wants to wear a dress. Others may have questions or strong reactions. Allow space for different points of view, and encourage children to question, while also making sure that hurtful statements are challenged.

Assume that there is gender diversity among the children in your classroom, even if it isn't obvious to you. Be aware that not everyone identifies as either boy/girl or man/woman. A growing number of children and adults identify as non-binary, agender, or other genders. Use language that is inclusive of everyone such as "friends", "children", "students". See "Using Gender Inclusive Language with Children and Families" in [Selected Resources](#).

Be aware that some children may have had (or may be having) difficult experiences related to gender at home or at school. Reading the book may provide an opening for them to talk about their experiences. Be supportive of children who share personal experiences, and encourage dialogue that nurtures empathy.

## Topics and Prompts for Dialogue

The book has many themes that can be explored in conversation with children. Sometimes children bring up questions that touch on these themes without being prompted. Below are ideas for topics and prompts, plus some follow-up questions.. Adjust questions as appropriate for your classroom.

**Gender and Self-expression** – Gender doesn't have to limit what you like, what you wear, or what you do. Be yourself and let your friends be who they are too.

- Are there any toys that only girls or only boys can play with? Follow up: What if a girl likes trucks or a boy likes dolls?
- Do you think there are any clothes or colors that only girls can wear or only boys can wear? Follow up: What if a boy likes to wear skirts or dresses? Do all girls like pink?
- Has anyone ever told you not to do something because of your gender? How did you feel?

**Gender Diversity** - There are many different genders and no one gender is better than another. It's not better to be a boy, a girl, or any other gender.

- What is gender? What makes someone a boy, a girl, or another gender? Encourage exploration without having to have a definitive "answer".

**Valuing Diversity** – No two people are exactly the same. We are all “one of a kind” and we all belong.

- How are you one-of a-kind? What do you like about yourself?

**Being a Friend** - Sometimes people get teased and bullied. Having a friend can make a big difference.

- What can you do so that nobody at our school feels left out?
- What can you do if someone is being teased? If you were teased, what would you want your friends to do?
- What makes someone a good friend? (Focus on character traits, highlighting that these traits are what matter, not someone’s gender or what they wear.)

**Other Topics:** Family Diversity, Language Diversity, Determination, Creativity

- What is unique or different about your family?
- What language(s) do you and your family speak? What do you like about speaking more than one language?
- Is there a language that you want to learn to speak? What is it and why?
- Have you ever had to try more than once to do something you wanted to do? What was it?
- What are creative things you like to do?

## Responding to Children’s Questions

Some of the best conversations happen in response to children’s questions or statements. On the next page, you will find common questions children may have. When possible, respond with questions that invite exploration and critical thinking.

You might ask: “What do you think?” or “What do other people think?” or “Do you know anyone who thinks differently about that?” Or, you can check out the examples provided for possible follow-up questions.

Questions Children May Have	Suggested Follow-up Questions
<b>Why does Danny want to be a princess? I thought only girls could be princesses?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Why do you think Danny wants to be a princess?</li> <li>● Has anyone here ever dressed up as a princess? What did you like about it?</li> <li>● If a girl wanted to dress up as Darth Vader what would you say?</li> </ul>
<b>Aren't dresses for girls?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Why should only girls wear dresses?</li> <li>● Who likes to wear dresses? Why do you like to wear them?</li> <li>● If someone said pants were only for girls, what would you say? Do you think that would be fair?</li> </ul>
<b>Why does Danny act like a girl?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What is a girl? Who can be one?</li> <li>● What is acting like a girl? Do all girls act that way?</li> </ul>
<b>Is Danny gay?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What does the word gay mean to you?</li> <li>● Can you know if someone is gay if they don't tell you?</li> </ul>
<b>Is Danny really a girl?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Do you think Danny is a girl? What makes you think that?</li> <li>● Can you know what someone's gender is if they don't tell you?</li> <li>● What are some different genders that people can be?</li> </ul>
<b>Is Danny transgender?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What does the word transgender mean to you?</li> <li>● Do you think Danny could be transgender? Why do you think that?</li> <li>● Can you know someone's gender if they don't tell you?</li> </ul>
<b>Where is Danny's dad?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Where do you think Danny's dad is? Why do you think there's no dad in the story?</li> <li>● Who do you think takes care of Danny? Who takes care of you?</li> </ul>

## Phrases to Avoid

When responding to questions about transgender people, avoid phrases like “born in the wrong body”, “born a boy (or girl) and became a girl (or boy)”, “brain and body don't match”, “a boy (or girl) in a girl's (or boy's) body”. These explanations may be hurtful and don't reflect many transgender people's experience.

# Talking with Parents and Caregivers

## About the Book

### Key Points to Highlight

- **Our school is committed to creating 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's 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 information from all 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's natural and healthy for children to express gender in many different ways and to identify as boy, girl, or some other gender.

### Responding to Concerns and Disagreements

Although the book touches on numerous themes, it's likely that adults' main concerns about the book will be related to gender. 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. If they are open to learning more, refer them to the resources listed below or at [oneofakindlikeme.com](http://oneofakindlikeme.com).

## Questions Parents and Caregivers May Have

Below are some questions that may come up with sample responses.

### **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, and 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.

It's also important to send a message that all children belong and are worthy of love and respect. This can help them feel positive about themselves and the people in their lives.

### **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 themselves freely, without limits based on gender. 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. Children can be happier, healthier, and more successful if they aren't pressured to behave according to gender expectations. When children are pressured to fit gender expectations, they may feel that something is seriously wrong with them, which can lead to depression and even suicide.

### **If you encourage a boys to wear dresses are you setting them up to be bullied?**

It's important to be concerned with a child's safety. That's why we're working to create awareness and compassion among children and in the school community. If you have a boy who wants to wear a dress at school, or any child who isn't limited by gender stereotypes, it's important to make sure that the environment is as safe as possible and there are people there to support them.

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 them or the clothes they like – you just want them to be safe because there are people who don't understand.

### **Don't books like this confuse our children?**

Children get many messages about gender from all around them, which can be very confusing. Conversations about gender can help clear up some of that confusion. Our school is responsible for

creating an environment that's 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.

### **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 learn about gender diversity in an affirming way, not just in relationship to bad things that might happen. Encouraging children to see people who are different in a positive light is one way to prevent bullying. Bullying and being an ally can be part of conversations about the book.

### **I think my child might be transgender. What should I do?**

If you think a child might be transgender, especially if they are insistent about their gender over time, it is important listen and make sure they get the support they need. Affirming a child's gender lowers the risk of depression and anxiety and supports their mental health. If you need support to deal with your own feelings and reactions, or information on how to support your child, there are resources available for families of transgender children.

### **Aren't you teaching our children to be gay or transgender?**

It's impossible to teach a child to be gay or transgender, but we can make our schools welcoming and supportive for children of all genders and sexual orientations, as well as 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's important that all children feel safe and supported at our school. .

### **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 passive 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 another child is being mistreated.



# Selected Resources

[Gender Spectrum: Understanding Gender and Gender Terminology](https://bit.ly/11x31gl) <https://bit.ly/11x31gl>

[Schools in Transition: A Guide to Supporting Transgender Students in K-12 Schools](https://bit.ly/2nobNHW)  
<https://bit.ly/2nobNHW>

[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?](https://bit.ly/2kgm79x) <https://bit.ly/2kgm79x>

[Welcoming Schools: Book lists and lesson plans for addressing gender diversity in schools.](https://bit.ly/2mfO6XF)  
<https://bit.ly/2mfO6XF>

[Using Gender Inclusive Language with Children and Families](https://bit.ly/2kwYbz3) <https://bit.ly/2kwYbz3>

More resources are available at [oneofakindlikeme.com](http://oneofakindlikeme.com) and [mayenoconsulting.com](http://mayenoconsulting.com).

## A Final Note and Thanks

I hope you have found this guide useful and wish you great success in your conversations with children. I would love to hear from you about what comes out of your dialogues.

This new version of the guide was made possible thanks to the wisdom of Mauro Sifuentes and Ellen Tuzzolo whose recommendations resulted in significant improvements. I'm also immensely grateful to the many children I've talked with since the book was published, and the educators who have invited me into their classrooms and shared their insights. I am forever learning and inspired by children's brilliance.

I've done my best to use language that is accurate, respectful, and accessible in this guide. Language is constantly changing as are ways of understanding and talking about gender. This guide will be updated periodically to reflect those changes. Please check for the latest revisions at [oneofakindlikeme.com](http://oneofakindlikeme.com). I welcome your feedback on this guide. Please email me at [Laurin@mayenoconsulting.com](mailto:Laurin@mayenoconsulting.com).

All my best,

Laurin Mayeno,  
Author & Consultant