

Gender Detective Activities

Book detective – lead characters

Aim: To investigate gender stereotyping in fiction

Suggested time: about 45 minutes (dependent on age of child and number of books!)

Activity:

- Ask your child to take all their fiction and story books from their bookshelf. Siblings can do this together if they'd like to – younger siblings can look at picture books with their older brother or sister.
- Ask children to look at the pictures or read enough of the book to work who is the lead character (or they may just know, if it's a well-loved book!)
- Make different piles of books – how many do you need?
 - male lead characters
 - female lead characters
 - sex or gender of lead character is not specified (e.g. some picture books with animals)
 - maybe the book has a mixed group of characters in the story, or in older fiction do a boy and girl feature together?

Discuss with your child:

What are their findings? Are there lead characters of one sex more than the other? Why do they think this is? Does it matter if lead characters in children's books are dominated by one sex?

For older children: what would it be like if the lead character is a different sex? Would it be a better or worse story if the main character's sex were changed – or would it not make any difference? Is there a version you would prefer?

If you don't have enough books at home, you could do this activity with children's TV shows, films or well-known fairy stories instead.

Think about the lead character in each one and make lists instead of piles.