

Gender Detective Activities

Book detective – Lead characters – follow-on activity

Aim: To investigate gender stereotyping in fiction

Suggested time: about 20 minutes

Notes for parents: if girls and women are always shown as beautiful, good and caring for others, and boys and men are shown as brave, clever and breaking rules, what messages does that give children about suitable male and female roles? How does what your child see in books teach them about how they are expected to behave according to their sex? If there are certain roles in which women or men are under-represented (e.g. women as adventurers, men in caring or domestic roles), does it matter?

Activity:

- Ask your child to look at the piles of books you have sorted into female and male lead characters in the previous activity (Activity 2)
- Find the books where the lead character conforms to a gender stereotype or displays stereotypical characteristics e.g. female princesses and male rescuers, good girls/women and brave boys/men. Remove those books from the pile.
- How about the other characters in the books? How do they conform or not to gender stereotypes?

Discuss with your child:

What are your findings? Are lead characters shown mainly in gender stereotypical roles? Are male or female characters shown more often in stereotypical roles? Does it matter?

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 characters in each one and make lists instead of piles.

Remember to refer back to what a gender stereotype is: stereotypes are assumptions about a group of people based on a shared characteristic, and gender stereotypes are often seen in assumptions about behaviour, occupation, physical appearance and personality traits and they affect boys as much as girls.