

I Can Be...Me!

written by Lesléa Newman

illustrated by Maya Christina Gonzalez

About the Book

Genre: Realistic Fiction

Format: Hardcover
32 pages, 9-1/2 x 9-1/2

ISBN: 9781643792057

Reading Level: Grade 2

Interest Level: Grades PreK-5

Guided Reading Level: K

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points:
N/A

Lexile™ Measure: N/A

*Reading level based on the ATOS Readability Formula

Themes: Breaking Gender Barriers, Childhood Experiences and Memories, Diversity, Dreams & Aspirations, Friendship, Identity/Self Esteem/Confidence, Imagination, Kindness/Caring

Resources on the web:

leeandlow.com/books/i-can-be-me

SYNOPSIS

From bestselling author Lesléa Newman – a joyful picture book celebration of individuality, uniqueness, and children's freedom to express themselves while engaging in whatever kinds of play they choose.

*I can be everything I want to be,
I can be all of magnificent me!*

In this lighthearted story, a group of six, colorfully clad children exuberantly explore -- through play -- the many ways they can be themselves. They are free to embrace all kinds of activities, reveling in the fun of trying new things and discovering new ways of being. They can shoot baskets, dance around a room, weave ribbons through their hair, swim like a mermaid, and more. There is no right way or wrong way. There are no binary expectations. Children explore their individuality through whatever kinds of play appeal to them.

With lively, gender-neutral rhyming verses and fun, gender-bending images, author Lesléa Newman and illustrator Maya Christina Gonzalez invite young readers into a space where creativity and acceptance are enjoyed by all, and where each child will be inspired to say, "I Can Be... Me!"

All guided reading level placements may vary and are subject to revision. Teachers may adjust the assigned levels in accordance with their own evaluations.

BACKGROUND

Illustrator's Note from Maya Christina Gonzalez

I love how author Lesléa Newman dances back and forth with the text, and I could immediately sense the expansive play available within each couplet. I created a group of kids with the personal challenge of showing just how playful and fluid each of them could be in terms of everything! Clothes and costumes, actions and feelings . . . I encourage you fabulous readers to join me in not making assumptions about who any of these kids are. They are who they are, and they are everything they want to be. Notice, if you start thinking you know who a kid is, chances are they're much, much more than you think! The practice is to try to keep your mind and your heart open and see kids as people. This lets each of us play and grow into who we are in our hearts. Blessings on your good heart! And flow on. –Xo, maya

Children and Gender Identity

Gender binary describes the genders female/male or woman/man but is fundamentally limited in gender description and identity. Gender identity refers to how children identify themselves. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) says: "When children are able to express themselves, they will declare themselves to be a boy or a girl (or sometimes something in between); this is their 'gender identity.' Most children's gender identity aligns with their biological sex. However, for some children, the match between biological sex and gender identity is not so clear." (See links below for more information.) Children typically begin to recognize differences between boys and girls around age two, label themselves as a boy or a girl or non-binary by age three, and by age four, have an established sense of their gender identity. Supporting children in building inclusive understandings about gender helps lay the foundation for positive gender identity formation. Building a positive sense of identity and establishing trusting relationships with parents or adult guardians helps protect children against bullying, mental health problems, and even suicide.

Societal influences often lead children to associate certain toys and activities with specific genders. The AAP encourages parents and educators to give all children opportunities to explore all toys and all types of play. They also suggest sharing books that show people in non-stereotypical gender roles. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) provides a lengthy list of additional suggestions for preventing gender bias here: [https:// www.adl.org/sites/default/files/documents/assets/pdf/education-outreach/How-Can-I-Prevent-Gender-Bias.pdf](https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/documents/assets/pdf/education-outreach/How-Can-I-Prevent-Gender-Bias.pdf).

Teachers can challenge traditional gender bias and give children opportunities to explore a variety of roles and activities by carefully considering the materials and experiences they provide in the classroom. Read one teacher-researcher's story here: <http://www.naeyc.org/publications/vop/gender-identity-and-expression>.

Maya Christina Gonzalez's "Call Me Tree Gender Free: A Note to My Readers" explains the use of pronouns in her book, *Call Me Tree/Llámame Árbol* (leeandlow.com/books/call-me-tree-llamame-arbol), and how you can encourage gender free conversations and the importance of all children feeling like they belong (<http://www.mayagonzalez.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/call>

[me-tree-note-to-my-readers_maya-gonzalez.pdf](#)).

Lesléa Newman's *Sparkle Boy* is an award-winning, sweet and refreshing story that speaks to us all about acceptance, respect, and the simple freedom to be yourself. See more information about reviews, author and illustrator information, and awards at leeandlow.com/books/sparkle-boy and the accompanying Teacher's Guide.

LGBTQ+ Books for Young Readers

Welcoming Schools has a book list, "Great Diverse Children's Books with Transgender, Non-Binary, and Gender Expansive Children" for additional reading and complementary texts to I Can Be... Me! in your respective setting (<http://www.welcomingschools.org/pages/looking-at-gender-identity-with-childrens-books/>). Continue to add and curate books inclusive of all identities to ensure that your library captures the diversity and wide spectrum of students in our schools and communities. Check out the Lee & Low Blog Post, "Pride Month: Fifteen LGBTQ-Themed Books for Readers of Every Age" for additional Lee & Low books and titles from other publishers that celebrate Pride Month and people of different genders, identities, sexual orientations, families, and more (<https://blog.leeandlow.com/2015/06/25/pride-month-fifteen-lgbtq-themed-books-for-readers-of-every-age/>).

Little Feminist's "The 21 Best Children's Books about Gender Identity and Expression" provides additional title suggestions featuring books about pronouns and gender, stories about transitioning, and books about gender presentation and breaking gender stereotypes (<https://littlefeminist.com/2022/06/14/best-books-about-gender-identity/>).

Lee & Low Books LGBTQ+ Children's Books Webinar

Lee & Low's LGBTQ+ Children's Webinar features authors Kyle Lukoff (*When Aidan Became a Brother*), Lesléa Newman (*I Can Be... Me!* and *Sparkle Boy*) and Maya Christina Gonzalez (*I Can Be... Me!* and *Call Me Tree/Llámame Árbol*). They discuss the inspiration behind their books, the importance of LGBTQ+ children's literature in the classroom, and strategies for having conversations with educators, children and families (<https://blog.leeandlow.com/2019/06/13/watch-the-webinar-lgbtq-childrens-books/>).

Further Reading About Gender Identity for Parents and Teachers

Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves by Louise Derman-Sparks and Julie Olsen Edwards: <http://www.naeyc.org/anti-bias-education>

"When Kids Play Across Gender Lines" by Emanuella Grinberg: <http://www.cnn.com/2012/08/27/living/harrods-gender-neutral-toys/>

"What the Research Says: Gender-Typed Toys:" <http://www.naeyc.org/content/what-research-says-gendertyped-toys>

"The Gender Spectrum" by Carrie Kilman: <http://www.tolerance.org/gender-spectrum>

"8 Positive Ways to Address Children's Gender Identity Issues" by Dina Roth Porth: <http://www.parents.com/toddlers-preschoolers/development/behavioral/genderidentity-issues-children/?slideId=46657>

Raising My Rainbow: Adventures in Raising a Fabulous, Gender Creative Child by Lori Duron (blog): <https://raisingmyrainbow.com>

Sex? Sexual Orientation? Gender Identity? Gender Expression? From Learning for Justice: <https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/summer-2015/sex-sexual-orientation-gender-identity-gender-expression>

Talking about Gender with Children

Maya Christina Gonzalez, illustrator of *I Can Be...Me!* created the Gender Wheel as an opportunity for children and adults to see a range of bodies, the roots of the gender system, and how we can make room for all bodies and genders today. Consult the different resources about gender for more information about how everyone can be accepting and knowledgeable about how gender is a spectrum, and not necessarily finite categories (<http://www.reflectionpress.com/our-books/the-gender-wheel/>).

Planned Parenthood has more definitions and videos about how to talk about gender identity with young people (<https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/parents/preschool/how-do-i-talk-with-my-preschooler-about-identity>).

Welcoming Schools has a page titled, "Lesson Plans to Help Students Understand Gender and to Support Transgender and Non-Binary Children" with several different ways to teach books pertaining to these topics and ways to get young people involved in advocacy and change (<http://www.welcomingschools.org/resources/lesson-plans/transgender-youth/transgender-with-books/>).

The Trevor Project's "Understanding Gender Identities" (https://www.thetrevorproject.org/resources/article/understanding-gender-identities/?gclid=CjwKCAiA0JKfBhBIEiwAPhZXD-A4GFiuEWODxBykqhBQXx6GsOmSwJIPJfpANI0XCwm1cv0YK1xhoCI18QAvD_BwE) also provides explanations on ways people can express their gender or sex.

LGBTQ+ Curriculum

For LGBTQ+-inclusive curriculum, lesson plans, and booklists, consult the following organizations for more information:

Welcoming Schools: https://www.hrc.org/resources/schools?utm_source=GS&utm_medium=AD&utm_campaign=BPI-HRC-Grant&utm_content=276041283782&utm_term=lgbt-inclusive%20curriculum&gclid=Cj0KCQiAmKiQBhCIARIsAKtSj-lqvPXTXDTm4dtrKEvuq5-OqccdgD_30xQjQ5aKRZK9Eiv0x13SdbMaAqtQEALw_wcB

Garden State Equality: <https://www.gardenstateequality.org/trainings/safe-schools/>

Learning for Justice Gender & Sexual Identity: https://www.learningforjustice.org/topics/gender-sexual-identity?gclid=Cj0KCQiAmKiQBhCIARIsAKtSj-kvW8E3-NJzTyCIDmqB-HSOp55n6lRyz4cUfwYAbgcNWkCRtUwE4bkaAhzIEALw_wcB

GLSEN Inclusive Curriculum Guide: <https://www.glsen.org/activity/inclusive-curriculum-guide>

Safe Schools Project Curriculum: <https://safeschoolsproject.org/curriculum/>

BEFORE READING

Prereading Focus Questions

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 5 and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

Before introducing this book to students, you may wish to develop background knowledge and promote anticipation by posing questions such as the following:

- Why are differences important? What would it be like if everyone was the same? Why is it important to be unique?
- What do you like to wear? Why? How can clothes help you express yourself? How does it make you feel when you wear what you like?
- What do you think about when you hear “boy clothes” and “boy toys” and “girl clothes” and “girl toys”? Why? What do you think about those different expectations for girls and boys?
- Have you ever been told you can't do something because it's only for girls or only for boys? What did you think? How did you feel?
- What are some things that you like to do for fun? Why? How does that make you feel?
- How can you show someone that you care about them? What are some things that you do to show that you respect someone?

Note: This book requires teaching about gender norms and stereotypes. Consider referring to the different organizations and resources provided in the Background section of this guide for further information on how to properly prepare prior to engaging with *I Can Be...Me!* For example, the first step could be to address “girls” and “boys” as “friends” or “people” to promote inclusivity.

Exploring the Book

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1; Craft & Structure, Strand 5; and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

- **Book Title Exploration:** Talk about the title of the book, *I Can Be...Me!* Then ask students what they think this book will most likely be about and whom the book might be about. What do they think might happen? What information do they think they might learn? What makes them think that?
- **Read Lesléa Newman's Biography:** Read about author Lesléa Newman on the back flap as well as on her website (lesleakids.com). Lesléa has written many books for children,

including *Heather Has Two Mommies* (Penguin Random House) and *Sparkle Boy* (leeandlow.com/books/sparkle-boy). Encourage students to think about what the writing process is like and how Lesléa come up with ideas for her new books. What do you think inspired her to write *I Can Be...Me!*?

- Read Maya Christina Gonzalez's Biography: Read about illustrator Maya Christina Gonzalez on the back flap as well as at Maya's website, [mayagonzalez](https://mayagonzalez.com). Maya Christina Gonzalez has written and illustrated many Lee & Low titles. Have students look at Maya's other illustrations and compare the different works. How are Maya's illustrations similar? How are they different? Does the subject matter influence Maya's illustrations? How would you describe Maya's artistic style?
- Encourage students to stop and jot in their reading notebooks during the read-aloud when they: learn new information, see a powerful image, have an emotional reaction or an idea, have a question, or hear new words.
- Have students quickly write a feeling in their notebooks during reading. After reading, ask students why they wrote that feeling down and have them write a journal entry about it.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

Have students read to find out:

- how we can be accepting of all people, no matter their gender
- how you can express yourself any way that you want
- what things you can do to make people feel welcomed
- how and why it's important to express yourself and identity
- how the joys of everyday life can inspire creativity and imagination
- why acceptance and love promotes a welcoming community

Encourage students to consider why the author, Lesléa Newman, would want to share a story about self-expression and the joys of childhood with young readers.

VOCABULARY

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 4)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

The story contains several content-specific and academic words and phrases that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary below.

Encourage a variety of strategies to support students' vocabulary acquisition: look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, create a specific action for each word, list synonyms and antonyms, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

Many words can be found in the glossary at the end of the book, but there are also some that are not included. Students could be encouraged to create a log of these words—they will not be listed here.

Content Specific

pose, tutu, twirl, glittery, warty, jeeps, lullabies, supermodel, astronaut, parade, jewelry, glamour, hammer, rocker, ice skates, rink, knit, fuzzy, princess, splendiferous

Academic

magnificent, decorate, delight, trembling, weave, spectacular, twirling, fancy, pummel, hoist

AFTER READING

Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop appreciation for the content. Encourage students to refer to passages and/or illustrations in the book to support their responses. **To build skills in close reading of a text, students should cite textual evidence with their answers.**

Literal Comprehension

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. What pattern do you notice in the book? How does each page start?
2. What are some of the different outfits that the children wear in the book?
3. What are some of the different ways that the children play in the book? What do they like to do?
4. What emotions do the children experience during the story? What do they do to express themselves and their feelings?

5. What do you notice about the last word of each sentence on each page?
6. Find all of the words that rhyme in the story. How did you know that they rhyme?

Extension/Higher Level Thinking

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 2 and 3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4 and 6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. What does it mean to “be yourself” or to “be you”? Why is it important for people to feel comfortable and free to express themselves? Why should we respect how other people choose to express themselves? How can we show others that we respect and accept their decisions?
2. What do you like to do for fun? How does it make you feel? How can you connect what you like to do with the characters in *I Can Be...Me!*?
3. Why is it sometimes difficult to express yourself and make choices without worrying about what others think? Do people’s opinions or thoughts affect how you think about yourself? Why or why not?
4. Describe a time that you or someone you know made a choice without worrying about what other people said and/or did. How did it make you feel? What advice might you give to someone who is always worried about what other people say and/or do?
5. How does illustrator Maya Christina Gonzalez show that children can be different? What are some of Maya’s techniques to show the children’s individuality throughout the book?
6. What would you think or say if you saw a boy wearing a skirt or a dress? Or a girl playing with a truck? Do you think you would react any differently they were not doing or wearing those things?
7. In *I Can Be Me...!* the children featured in the story are illustrated without distinguishable genders. What is the effect of that decision? Why do you think the illustrator Maya Christina Gonzalez chose to illustrate the book in a certain way?
8. How do the children in the book use things around them to have fun and enjoy the wonder of the world around them?
9. Why do you think the author uses figurative language in the story? What figurative language do you see throughout *I Can Be...Me!*? How do you think the figurative language helps you to picture what the children are describing in the story?
10. What is the message of this story? What does this story teach about why young people should feel proud of who they are? What do you think author Lesléa Newman wants to share with her readers?

Reader’s Response

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)

Use the following questions and writing activities to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to the book. **Suggest that students respond in reader’s response journals, essays, or oral discussion.** You may also want to set aside time for students to share and discuss their written work.

1. What is one big thought that you have after reading this book? Think about the different things that the children like to do and wear in the story. How do they express themselves?
2. What do you think author Lesléa's message is to the reader? Think about possible motivations behind Lesléa Newman's intentions in writing this book. What do you think he wanted to tell her readers?
3. Have students make a text-to-self connection. What kind of connections did you make from this book to your own life? What do the children's experiences, thoughts, and feelings mean to you?
4. Have students make a text-to-text connection. Did you think of any other books while you read *I Can Be...Me!*? Why did you make those connections?
5. Have students make a text-to-world connection. What kind of connections did you make from this book to what you have seen in the world, such as on television or in a newspaper? Why did this book make you think of that?
6. What does identity mean to students after reading? After reading *I Can Be...Me!*, what does it mean to you to "be yourself"? Why? How might your understanding of 'being yourself' have changed after reading *I Can Be...Me!*?

Multilingual Learners Teaching Activities

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4–6)
(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English Language Learners.

1. Assign Multilingual Learner students to partner-read the story with strong English readers/speakers. Students can alternate reading pages, repeat passages after one another, or listen to the more fluent reader.
2. Have each student write three questions about the story. Then let students pair up and discuss the answers to the questions.
3. Depending on students' level of English proficiency, after the first reading: 1) Review the illustrations in order and have students summarize what is happening on each page, first orally, then in writing. 2) Have students work in pairs to retell either the plot of the story or key details. Then ask students to write a short summary, or opinion about what they have read.
4. Have students give a short talk about how they connected to the story and ways that they like to express themselves and their identities.
5. The book contains several content-specific and academic words that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary. Expose Multilingual Learners to multiple vocabulary strategies. Have students make predictions about word meanings, look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, list synonyms and antonyms, create an action for each word, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

Social and Emotional Learning

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1-3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4-6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1-3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-2 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4-6)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 6)

Social and emotional learning involves being aware of and regulating emotions for healthy development. In addition to understanding one's own feelings, strong socio-emotional development allows individuals to develop empathy for others and to establish and maintain relationships.

Use the following prompts to help students study the socio-emotional aspects of this book.

1. Select an illustration and describe what emotions are being conveyed. How can you tell that particular emotion is being shown in the illustration? Why?
2. Identify the spreads from the story where the children are expressing emotions. How do they handle their feelings? How do you express yourself when you're going through those feelings? How does that help you?
3. What are the different ways that you can create a welcoming environment at school, in your home, and in your community? Create a chart in the classroom so that students can refer to it throughout the year. Why do students think those things are helpful?
4. What are ways that you like to express yourself? What does it mean to express yourself? What makes you feel good? Students can share the ways that they like to show their identities through art, a writing piece, or any other kind of visual or written presentation.
5. What does it feel like to try something new? Were you inspired to try something that you don't typically do from *I Can Be...Me!*? What would you like to do? Why? How do you think it would make you feel?
6. Which illustration in *I Can Be...Me!* do you think best shows an emotion? Explain which emotion you think it is. How do you think the author and illustrator portray that emotion in the story?
7. How does Magic Like That inspire you to use your imagination? How can we use our imagination more in our everyday lives? Why is using your imagination and creativity important?
8. Did *I Can Be...Me!* help you to think differently about yourself? What do the children in the story inspire you to appreciate about yourself?
9. Choose an emotion that interests you: happiness, sadness, frustration, anger, etc. Discuss or write about what that emotion looks like in *I Can Be...Me!*

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

(Introduction to the Standards, page 7: Students who are college and career ready must be able to build strong content knowledge, value evidence, and use technology and digital media strategically and capably)

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas. These can also be used for extension activities, for advanced readers, and for building a home-school connection.

English/Language Arts

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Conduct an investigation on gender stereotypes.** What are some examples of toys, clothing, and other objects that are typically thought of as only for boys or only for girls? Why do you think this is so? How do you think this happened? What are some “girl” or “boy” things that you like to use, wear, or play with? Do you think toys, clothing, and other objects should be thought of as only for boys or only for girls? Why or why not? Welcoming Schools’ “Using Children’s Books to Look at Gender Stereotyping” for additional information on exploring gender norms (https://hrc-prod-requests.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/welcoming-schools/documents/WS_Lesson_Childrens_Books_Gender_Bias.pdf?mtime=20200713131915&focal=none). Welcoming Schools also has a lesson plan dedicated to gender stereotypes and toy companies (https://hrc-prod-requests.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/welcoming-schools/documents/WS_Lesson_Examining_Gender_Marketing_Persuasive_Letter.pdf?mtime=20200713131922&focal=none). Have students share their findings, write a persuasive letter to toy companies (as shown through the Welcoming Schools lesson plan), and discuss what they learned about gender stereotypes and norms that we encounter in our everyday lives.
- **Have students select a quote or a few sentences from the book and write a reaction to it.** Why did they choose to write about that quote? What are their reactions to those statements? Have students choose additional quotes from the beginning, middle, and end of the book.
- **Ask students: What can *I Can Be...Me!* teach us?** Have students share their findings. What lessons did the book teach readers over the course of the story? What did they learn from the story’s message? Students can talk with partners, in small groups, or with the whole class. Consider creating a word cloud to find out what words came up the most often (<https://www.wordclouds.com>). Then students can come up with a big idea or statement about what they learned from *I Can Be...Me!*
- **Come up with questions to interview the author, Lesléa Newman.** What was her process behind creating *I Can Be...Me!*? What was her inspiration for the book? Read the Author’s Note with students and have them discuss what they learned and how it made them think about the book differently. Why did she write this book for young readers? Consider reaching out to Lesléa Newman for an author visit, either in person or virtually.

- **Read Lesléa Newman's Lee & Low title, *Sparkle Boy* (leeandlow.com/books/sparkle-boy) along with *I Can Be...Me!*** As students read both titles, have them think about the following questions: are there similar themes in both books? What do you think Lesléa's message is in both titles? How does she show readers that it's important to be true to who you are? What did students learn from both *Sparkle Boy*, and *I Can Be Me...!*? Start with a graphic organizer outlining the details, and then have students discuss in small groups or write or draw a reaction piece to their experience after reading *Sparkle Boy* and *I Can Be...Me!*
- **Encourage students to write a piece about something that is meaningful to them about their identities.** Using inspiration from *I Can Be...Me!*, have students think about what they want to communicate about themselves. What do they want to share and why did they pick that thing to write about? What makes them proud to be who they are? Students can share their work with a partner, a small group, or the whole class. Consider creating a class book with illustrations and have the book available to students in the classroom library.
- **Have students do an adjective scavenger hunt in *I Can Be...Me!*** Students can use the text and identify all of the adjectives that the author uses throughout the story. Students can make a list of all of the adjectives, and write a piece inspired by *I Can Be...Me!*, using descriptive language and adjectives to make their writing come alive. Students can share their writing pieces with a partner, small group, or the whole class.
- **Conduct a figurative language study with students.** Have students go on a figurative language scavenger hunt in *I Can Be...Me!* Refer to Read Write Think's "Figurative Language Resource Page" as a tool for students to use during their search (http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/lesson_images/lesson79/figresource.pdf). Create a chart with different rows for figurative language terms (i.e. simile, metaphor) and students can fill it in with specific examples from *I Can Be...Me!* Afterwards, students can experiment using figurative language in their own writing piece or poem inspired by the book.
- **Learn about the terminology behind binary norms.** Use author Maya Christina Gonzalez's Gender Wheel website to learn more about gendered language, interrupting stereotypes, and individual expression (<https://www.genderwheel.com/what-makes-us-different/>). Learn about lesson plans, resources, books, and more to help guide your teaching about gender nonconformity and expression, creating welcoming spaces, and utilizing important educational tools to further support student's identities. Learning for Justice's "Sex? Sexual Orientation? Gender Identity? Gender Expression" (<https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/summer-2015/sex-sexual-orientation-gender-identity-gender-expression>) provides additional context on how to use appropriate terminology when it comes to identity.

Social Studies

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9, and Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Have students investigate the resources provided in the Background section of this guide.** Conduct additional research on LGBTQ+ that are happening in schools and in

the government today. How can students get involved with helping advocacy groups with and supporting and fighting for LGBTQ+ rights? Brainstorm different ways that they can enact immediate change in their classroom, in their school, and in their community.

- **Encourage students to research other gender non-conforming books with from the lists provided in the Background section of this guide.** What did they find from their search? What similarities and differences do they notice in the books with transgender characters? What do students think could be done in their schools or the publishing industry to encourage more books with transgender characters? Have students brainstorm different ways to advocate for more books with transgender characters, through a letter, petition, or other ways to get involved in the community and their library.
- **Consult Welcoming Schools' "Lesson Plans to Create Gender Expansive Classrooms and Support Transgender and Non-Binary Students" for more ideas on how to create spaces that are free of gender norms and stereotypes** (<https://welcomingschools.org/resources/lesson-plans-gender-identity-transgender-non-binary>). Have students get involved with creating classroom guidelines about how to speak with each other and use appropriate language that encompasses all of children's identities.

Art/Media

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9, and Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Read Maya Christina Gonzalez's "Illustrator's Note" in the beginning of the story.** What did students learn from her note? Why do you think she illustrated the book in the way that she describes? What do you think she means by "I encourage you fabulous readers to join me in not making assumptions about who any of these kids are." How can you apply that in your own life? Students can share their thoughts with a partner, small group, or whole class.
- **Watch Lesléa Newman's interview, "America's Unfinished Business: An LGBTQ+ Summit"** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ntRKwMM2jps>). What did you learn from Lesléa during her talk? How are her books revolutionary? How were they controversial at the time they were published? How does she think the world of children's literature has changed? Why do you think Lesléa's books are important for all young readers?
- **Afterwards, have students watch Maya Christina Gonzalez's "Seeing Ourselves in Books"** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MaigpT29pAs>). What did you learn from Maya in her interview? Why does she think it's important to see yourself in a book? How do you think her mission is reflected in the illustrations in *I Can Be Me...!*?
- **Come up with questions to interview the illustrator, Maya Christina Gonzalez.** What was her process behind creating the illustrations for *I Can Be...Me!*? Why did she choose a particular artistic medium to create the illustrations? What was her inspiration to depict the children the way that she did in the book? What were some of her favorite illustrations and why?

- **Conduct an illustrator study on Maya Christina Gonzalez with her following titles from Lee & Low: *I Know the River Loves Me/Yo sé que el río me ama* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2802>) and *My Colors, My World/Mis colores, mi mundo* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2780>).** Ask students to compare one or both of these books to *Call Me Tree/Llámame árbol* ([leeandlow.com/books/call-me-tree-llamame-arbol](https://www.leeandlow.com/books/call-me-tree-llamame-arbol)). What does each book teach about the environment? What does Maya Christina Gonzalez believe about the relationship between children and nature/their environment? How can we draw inspiration from the world around us? Why might Maya Christina Gonzalez want to encourage young readers to think about nature today?
- **Have students create a piece of art that reflects themselves.** What are the things that make them different and unique? How would they create a self-portrait that reflects the things that they care and are passionate about? How did the children from the story inspire them in creating their artwork? Students can use whatever materials are readily available, including collage, paint, crayons, etc.
- **Then, using their ideas and realizations about themselves from creating their self-portraits, have students create a piece of art that reflects themselves and a friend or sibling.** What are the things that they want to show others about their relationship? How can they show the best parts of being a sibling or friend in their artwork? Students can create their piece with whatever materials are readily available in your respective setting.
- **Encourage students to select an illustration that resonated with them the most from *I Can Be...Me!*** Have students write a reflection about the illustration. What stood out to them? How did it make them feel? What did it make them think about?

School-Home Connection

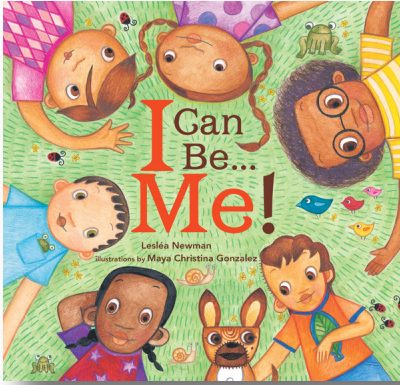
(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 7 and 9)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strand 4, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7-9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1-3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4-6)

- **Provide students with the list of organizations from the Background section in this Teacher's Guide.** Caregivers can learn more through resources about how they can advocate for transgender children and their families in their respective communities.
- **Have students and caregivers brainstorm how they can demonstrate respect and acceptance of all people.** What are some ways that you can show respect to people?
- **Ask students to interview family members about what they love about themselves.** Have students share what they learned about *I Can Be...Me!* and how they can appreciate themselves. What do family members love about their own selves? How can they share their confidence with others? How does this make them feel good?
- **Reach out to families or their networks to find adults to invite to your classroom who challenge gender stereotypes with their career or life choices (female firefighter, male nurse, stay-at-home dad, etc.).** Ask students to prepare questions for the visitors about their experiences, including challenges, obstacles, gender expectations, and personal achievements. What advice do they have for others struggling to challenge gender norms and stereotypes?

- **Using ADL's list** (<https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/documents/assets/pdf/educationoutreach/How-Can-I-Prevent-Gender-Bias.pdf>) **or ideas from this teacher-researcher's study** (<http://www.naeyc.org/publications/vop/gender-identityand-expression>), **have families identify one activity and explore non-stereotypical gender roles.** Try it and discuss your observations.
- **Watch author Lesléa Newman's appearance on Austin Public Library's "The Van Show"** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GuyqFFC8tk8&t=36s>). Lesléa's book, *Sparkle Boy* (leeandlow.com/books/sparkle-boy) is featured. Then, ask students to interview a caregiver about how gender expectations and roles have evolved and transformed over time. What are the person's experiences with these changes? How are the changes positive? What does the person hope for in the future? Have students share their responses.



Ordering Information

General Order Information:

leeandlow.com/contact/ordering

Secure Online Ordering:

leeandlow.com/books/i-can-be-me

By Phone: 212-779-4400 ext. 25

By Fax: 212-683-1894

By Mail:

Lee & Low Books, 95 Madison Avenue,
New York, NY 10016

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lesléa Newman is the author of seventy books for readers of all ages. She has received numerous awards for her work, including two Stonewall Book Award Honors and a creative writing fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. Newman is also a popular presenter at conferences, libraries, and schools. She lives in Holyoke, Massachusetts, with her spouse, Mary Grace Vazquez. Learn about Newman's children's books at lesleakids.com.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Maya Christina Gonzalez is an award-winning children's book artist, author, activist and progressive educator. Maya's work addresses systemic inequity in relation to race/ethnicity, sexism and cissexism using children's books as radical agents of change and healing, both personally and culturally. Maya co-founded Reflection Press, a POC, queer and trans owned independent publishing house that uses holistic, nature-based, and anti-oppression frameworks in their books and materials for kids and grown-ups. Maya is also the creator of the Gender Wheel, a tool to express the dynamic, infinite and inclusive reality of gender, and provides trainings to educators, parents and caregivers. Visit Maya's website at mayagonzalez.com.

ABOUT LEE & LOW BOOKS

LEE & LOW BOOKS is the largest children's book publisher specializing in diversity and multiculturalism. Our motto, "about everyone, for everyone," is as urgent today as it was when we started in 1991. It is the company's goal to meet the need for stories that children of color can identify with and that all children can enjoy. The right book can foster empathy, dispel stereotypes, prompt discussion about race and ethnicity, and inspire children to imagine not only a world that includes them, but also a world where they are the heroes of their own stories. Discover more at leeandlow.com.