



## ***I Am Jazz*: READING A CHILDREN’S BOOK TO HELP UNDERSTAND TRANSGENDER TOPICS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

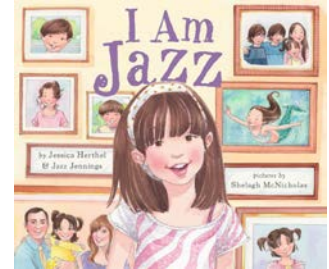
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**SUGGESTED GRADE LEVEL:** K – 5

**LENGTH OF TIME:** 40 minutes

### **GOAL**

- To expand students’ perception and understanding of gender.
- To understand what it means to be transgender using developmentally appropriate language for younger students.
- To increase student understanding of ally behavior.



### **OBJECTIVES**

- Students will read and discuss a story based on the true story of a transgender girl.
- Students will learn new vocabulary words related to gender.
- Students will learn about difference and being an ally.

### **ACADEMIC STANDARDS**

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.1: Ask and answer questions about key details in a text.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.1: Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 5 (grades 3 and 4) topics and texts, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.

### **EDUCATORS’ NOTES**

#### **About the Book**

*I Am Jazz* is a first-person account about a transgender girl written by transgender teen, Jazz Jennings, and co-author, Jessica Herthel. Jennings was one of the first transgender children to talk publicly about her identity. At the age of 6, she spoke with Barbara Walters on *20/20*. Herthel is not transgender, nor does she have any transgender children. She co-wrote the book based on her desire to explain to her daughters what being transgender can mean, hoping to create a book that other parents and caring adults would be able to use to start conversations with their kids.

#### **Before Reading *I Am Jazz* to Your Students**

- Read the book yourself and think about what questions you and your students may have, *and* practice how you want to respond. Being prepared will help you to be comfortable with a topic that you may be unfamiliar discussing.

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- o Review the Gender Definitions section below to prepare how to answer questions and lead a class discussion on gender topics.
  - o It is important to note that the book simplifies the idea of transgender to “a girl brain but a boy body;” however, being transgender is about more than just the brain. One’s gender is about who you know you are deep inside.
  - o For ideas on ways to respond to questions or put-downs about gender, take a look at Welcoming Schools’ handout: [Be Prepared for Questions and Put-Downs on Gender](#).
  - o If a student asks you a question and you’re unsure of the answer, it’s OK to say that you don’t know! You could say you’ll figure it out and get back to them.
- Ensure that every child in your classroom is allowed to express themselves however they want, regardless of their gender identity or expression—or any aspect of their identity that may be considered by other students to be “different.”
  - Understand that gender is a spectrum, not a binary, and that we all express ourselves in many different ways along that spectrum. Each child is an individual with their own unique expression of who they are in the world.
  - Messages to students can be as simple as: “There is no such thing as a boys’ color or a girls’ toy”; “colors are colors”; “toys are toys”; “clothes are clothes”; “hair is hair!”
  - Students are already learning and talking about gender and difference. They receive formal and informal messages about gender from a multitude of sources—their families, peers, communities and the media. Many of the messages empower them, and many of the messages limit them. As such, it is critical to discuss gender in the classroom.
  - By guiding discussions about gender with students, educators, families and other caring adults, you can help to prevent bias-based bullying, harassment and gender stereotyping.
  - Finally, it is often important to review classroom rules about respect and being an ally when having discussions about gender, given that gender is a common way that children participate in identity-based bullying. Gender-based bullying has a high frequency of occurrence in elementary schools and needs to be interrupted and addressed by educators.
  - If, for example, you have students in your school or classroom who are transgender or non-binary, then be mindful not to put those students in the position of teaching other children about their identity. That is the job of the educator, not the student. Also, remember student privacy. It can jeopardize a student’s safety and well-being if they are outed to their peers or non-affirming adults.

#### **MATERIALS:**

- A copy of the book *I Am Jazz* by Jazz Jennings and Jessica Herthel
- Optional: [Video](#) of Jazz Jennings reading *I Am Jazz*. Includes Spanish subtitles.

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## ACTIVITY

**Note:** The book purposefully introduces you to Jazz—what she likes to do, her favorite colors and her friends—before mentioning that she is transgender. Avoid introducing it as a book about a transgender girl. Instead, you could simply say that this is a story based on the real-life experience of a girl named Jazz.

### Prompts for discussion:

- Jazz says that her favorite colors are silver and green. What are your favorite colors? What about the colors pink or blue? Can boys like pink? Can girls like blue?
- Jazz says she felt sad when she had to wear traditional boys' clothes? Why do you think she felt sad?
- What helped Jazz feel happier? What kinds of things help you feel better about yourself?
- In the book, Jazz says that she is transgender. Who can describe what transgender means? **Note:** Allow students to ask questions. Help to clarify the meaning of transgender, if students are still not sure about it.
- Being transgender is just one part of who Jazz is. What are other parts of Jazz that make her who she is?
- How does Jazz feel when other kids at school make fun of her because she's transgender?
  - How does it make you feel when someone makes fun of you?
  - What can you do if you see someone making fun of another student?  
**Note:** Students have many options. Mention some of these ideas if they are not brought up by your students: Speak up in the moment; tell an adult such as a parent or teacher; talk to either the student who is being made fun of or the student who is being mean later, in private; cause a distraction so the mean teasing stops; or help the student who is getting teased to get away from the situation.

## EXTENSIONS

- Continue the discussion about gender roles and gender stereotypes with some of the additional books listed below.
- Watch the music video, [I Am Me](#) by Willow Smith.
- Write "I Am Me" poems. (See the Welcoming Schools' lesson: [Be Who You Are: I Am Me Poems.](#))
- Continue the discussion of what students can do if they see someone making fun of by another student with the Welcoming Schools' lesson: [Making Decisions: Ally or Bystander.](#)

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## ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

- Exit cards asking about one new thing the students learned and anything that they still have questions about.
- Ongoing teacher observation of gender-based teasing, and if it is recognized more often or becomes less frequent.
- Ongoing teacher observation of whether or not students feel comfortable making choices outside the gender binary.

## DEFINITIONS

**GENDER IDENTITY:** How you feel—female, male, a blend of both or neither. This can be different from the anatomy that you were born with (boy/girl or sex assigned at birth).

**TRANSGENDER OR TRANS:** When your gender identity (how you feel) is different than what doctors/midwives assigned to you when you were born (boy/girl or sex assigned at birth).

**GENDER EXPRESSION:** One of the many forms of expression where we share who we are with items such as our clothes and hair.

**GENDER EXPANSIVE:** This means that here at our school children get to “like what they like.” Toys are toys, hair is hair, clothes are clothes. Children can express themselves fully—to be who they are without being teased or bullied.

**GENDER BINARY:** The idea that there are certain ways to be a boy or a girl. For example, “boys like trucks and girls like dolls.” It is good for all of us to break out of the gender binary and be who we are.

**GENDER SPECTRUM:** The idea that there are many genders and gender identities beyond the categories of boy and girl. There are many, many ways to be a person in terms of how you feel and your gender expression.

**STEREOTYPE:** When you generalize and oversimplify what an entire group of people is like. Stereotypes are often negative. They don’t take into account all of the ways each person is unique. Even a positive stereotype can be hurtful. Stereotypes keep people from being seen as who they are as an individual.

**GENDER STEREOTYPE:** Stereotypes based on social and cultural beliefs or expectations about appropriate behavior for men/boys or women/girls. This can limit children’s aspirations, achievements and well-being.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FROM WELCOMING SCHOOLS

[Lesson Plans to Help Students Understand Gender](#)

[Children’s Books to Understand Gender and Support Transgender and Non-Binary Students](#)

[Resources for Gender Inclusive Schools](#)

[Gender And Children: A Place To Begin](#)

[Transgender Children: Books to Help Adults Understand](#)