

# READ★PRAY★WONDER★PLAY

## A GUIDE TO SHARING STORIES WITH CHILDREN

### The Dress in the Window

By Robert Tregoning & Pippa Curnick

Before reading this story with your child, explore the [downloadable resource list for adults](#) that provides articles from experts about gender identity and expression in children. After you've finished the story, depending on your conversation with your child, dive deeper into these resources to start an authentic conversation together.

Before beginning the story, consider your own feelings about gendered play for children. Can a boy play dress up in a sequined dress and dance? Can a girl use a stick to be a warrior and battle an imaginary dragon? Are there rules for who can play with Batman or Barbie?

Younger children will likely delight in the joy found in dressing up, while older children, who may already sense some societal pressures for gendered play, may wonder why a boy would play with a dress. Be open to your child's feelings and questions, offering your own love and support as they express themselves and explore their big wide world, whoever they are, however they choose.



### ★ ★ WONDER TOGETHER ★ ★

- What did you like about this story?
- What surprised you in this story?
- Where could you see yourself in the story?
- When have you noticed your heart “disco dancing inside” about something?
- In what ways did the mother express her love and support for her son?
- *With Older Children:* Do you feel there are rules for how boys should play and how girls should play? How do you feel about that?

### ★ ★ EXPLORE THE STORY ★ ★

- Visit a thrift shop and see what catches your child's eye. Set a spending limit or invite your child to do odd jobs to earn their own money to buy something.
- Play a game imagining the past lives of an item, such as an article of clothing, a vehicle, or a vintage object.
- Explore your children's interests and support them by asking questions, learning more about their interests, and engaging in an activity together.
- Have a dance party. Play lively music and enjoy the feeling of your bodies moving, laughing, swirling, and twirling!
- *With Younger Children:* Find the boy's dog in each picture and describe what the dog is doing.

### PRAY

God of dazzling colors, thank you for the things that catch our eye and bring us joy. May we continue to follow our heart for those things that delight us knowing that you love us just the way we are. Amen.



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## ★ ★ DIG DEEPER ★ ★

Through play, children develop problem-solving skills, practice physical abilities, test out new vocabulary, expand interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, and explore their imagination, testing both the boundaries of reality and the limitless possibilities of fantasy. Providing a non-judgmental environment for your child's play and imagination is critical. When you engage with your child as they play, ask open-ended questions, such as "What happens next?" or make wondering statements, such as "I wonder how it feels to wear a satiny dress" or "I wonder what you will do if the dragon breathes fire," permitting your child to fill in the blanks. These kinds of questions and statements show your child that you are interested in their imaginative scenarios and not trying to create your own, or society's, narrative for them.

Gender stereotyping—what we have typically assumed girls do, such as playing with dolls or domestic activities, and boys do, such as playing with weapons and with a high degree of physicality—can inhibit your child's worldview of what they are interested in and capable of doing. This applies to reinforcing stereotypes about disability, race, ethnicity, and culture as well. Being aware of your own unconscious biases is key. This may take stepping out of your own comfort zone and exploring toys, games, stories, and activities that allow your child to imagine a world of possibilities. Some suggestions include:

- Encourage activities that stimulate creativity and problem-solving.
- Find books/media that tell inclusive and diverse stories.
- Provide toys and games traditionally associated with the opposite gender and encourage play. This can help children become agile and adaptive learners and acquire skills in creativity, communication, and problem solving.
- Avoid toys, games, and books that deliberately encourage stereotypes of any kind.
- Encourage different types of play, active and quiet, interpersonal and intrapersonal, hands-on and virtual, and so forth.

## MORE TO READ & DO

CLICK THE LINKS BELOW TO LEARN MORE

### ADDITIONAL DOWNLOADABLE RESOURCES FOR *THE DRESS IN THE WINDOW*

- Download the [Resource List for Adults](#)
- Four coloring sheets are available! [Dress #1](#), [Dress #2](#), [Suit #1](#), [Suit #2](#)

### ADDITIONAL BOOKS TO ENCOURAGE SELF-EXPRESSION

- [I'm Fabulous Crab](#), by Nicki Greenberg
- [No One Else like You](#), by Siska Goeminne and Merel Eyckerman
- [Bruno's Hat](#), by Canizales

Guide written by Meg Elliot Rift and created in partnership with PC(USA)'s initiative "[Around the Table](#)" ([pcusa.org/aroundthetable](http://pcusa.org/aroundthetable)).



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