



Monthly Featured Book

Presented by ADL's Education Department

About the Monthly Featured Book: This collection of featured books is from Books Matter™: The Best Kid Lit on Bias, Diversity and Social Justice. The books teach about bias and prejudice, promote respect for diversity, encourage social action and reinforce themes addressed in education programs of [A World of Difference® Institute](#), ADL's international anti-bias education and diversity training provider. For educators, adult family members and other caregivers of children, reading the books listed on this site with your children and incorporating them into instruction are excellent ways to talk about these important concepts at home and in the classroom.

Calvin

JR and Vanessa Ford (Authors), Kayla Harren (Illustrator)

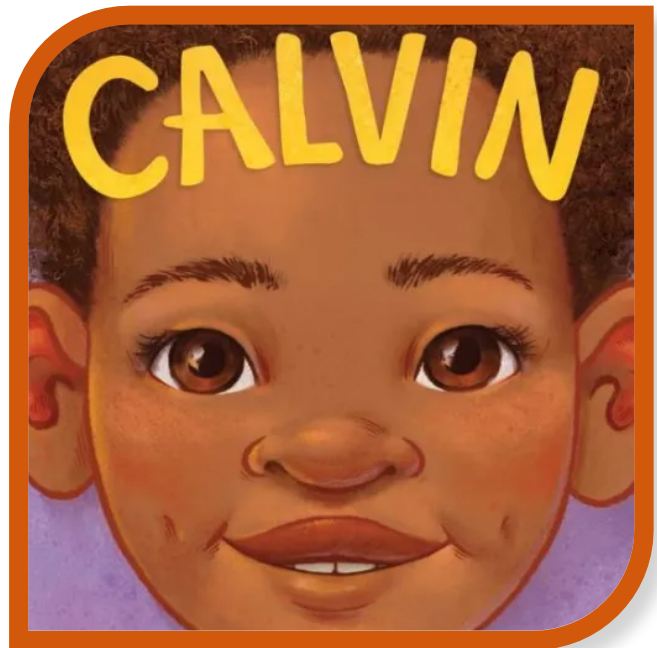
Calvin has always been a boy, even if the world sees him as a girl. He knows who he is in his heart and in his mind but he hasn't yet told his family. Finally, he can wait no longer: "I'm not a girl," he tells his family. "I'm a boy—a boy in my heart and in my brain." Quick to support him, his loving family takes Calvin shopping for the swim trunks he's always wanted, back-to-school clothes and a new haircut that helps him look and feel like the boy he's always known himself to be. As the first day of school approaches, he's nervous, and the "what-ifs" gather up inside him. But as his friends and teachers rally around him and he tells them his name, all his "what-ifs" begin to melt away.

ISBN: 978-0593108673

Publisher: G.P. Putnam's Sons Books for Young Readers

Year Published: 2021

Age Range: 4-8



Book Themes

Transgender People and Identity, Family, Gender Identity, Acceptance

Key Words

Discuss and define the words below with children prior to reading the book. Rather than focus on students' retention of all the words, make sure they understand the words enough to follow the story and remind students of the words' meanings as they come up in the book. You can also post the words and point out when they appear in the story. For definitions that are differentiated for young children, see ADL's [Education Glossary Terms](#).

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|--------------|-----------------|-------------|---------------|
| ■ brain | ■ gender | ■ principal | ■ scared |
| ■ breaths | ■ handsome | ■ proud | ■ transgender |
| ■ convention | ■ heart | ■ react | ■ what-ifs |
| ■ cubby | ■ outlet stores | ■ recess | |
| ■ dragged | ■ poster | ■ remember | |

Note to Teacher:

Before discussing this topic, it is important to consider that you may have students in your class whose family members or who themselves are transgender, non-binary or gender non-conforming. Be prepared and sensitive to those students' needs and be mindful not to call extra attention to those students while discussing the book. Consider talking with them (or their parents) in advance of a discussion on transgender identity so they don't feel uncomfortable or fearful. Students who may not have shared this previously may disclose it during the lesson, and that information should only come from the student themselves. See [Beyond the Binary: Discussing Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Identity in K-12 Schools](#) for additional guidance

Discussion Questions

Before reading the book aloud, ask some or all of these pre-reading questions:

- Describe the cover of the book. Who do you see?
- Who do you think Calvin is?
- What do you think the book will be about?

As you read the book aloud, ask a few discussion questions periodically throughout reading to check for comprehension and keep the students engaged. Below are some sample questions that correlate to specific page numbers:

- Why is Calvin scared to tell his parents that he is a boy? (Page 5)
- Who does Calvin see at the comic convention? (Page 13)
- What does the principal do that makes Calvin feel safe and happy? (Page 22)

After reading the book aloud, engage students in a discussion by asking some or all of the following discussion questions:

- What happens in the story?
- Why do you think Calvin decides to tell his parents he is a boy?
- When Calvin says, "I'm a boy in my heart and in my brain," what does Calvin mean?
- How do Calvin's parents react when he tells them he is a boy? Did you think they would react that way? Please explain.
- What word does Calvin's dad use to describe him? What does transgender mean?
- What experiences does Calvin have at the family's trip to Gigi and Papa's? What is important and meaningful to Calvin? What is fun for Calvin about the trip?
- How does Calvin feel when he gets his hair cut? How do you know?
- On the night before school starts, how is Calvin feeling? Why does he feel scared?
- What happens when Calvin gets to school? What makes him feel "safe and happy?"
- What makes you feel "safe and happy" at school? What does Calvin need to feel safe and happy at our school? What can our school do to make sure everyone feels safe and happy?

- What helps make Calvin's feel less afraid?
- How did you feel when the book ended? What do you think will happen next?
- Why do you think the author titled the book Calvin?
- What do you think the author wants us to learn by reading this book?
- Have you ever had to wait a long time for something? What was that like? How did you feel?
- What happens when people's numbers are called? Where do they go next?
- When Noemi says, "I wonder how Belinda can keep her smile. I feel mine fading every day," what does she mean? Have you ever felt that way?
- Why do you think Noemi gives her doll away to a younger child?
- What happens when Noemi and Mamá become the notebook keepers? How do they treat those who are waiting?
- How did you feel when the book ended?
- What do you think will happen next?
- What do you think is the message in the book? What do you think the author wants us to learn by reading this book?

Extension Activities

Below are activities for students that can extend learning from the book.

1. My Favorite or Most Memorable Scene

Ask students: *What was your favorite, or your most memorable or impactful, scene or part of the book?* With students, brainstorm a list of scenes from the book that students liked or found impactful, important or memorable (e.g., when Calvin tells his parents he's a boy, when Calvin and his family visit Gigi and Papa's over the summer, when Calvin wears a costume and meets his favorite superhero, when Calvin gets new clothes and does a fashion show for his family, when Calvin gets his haircut, Calvin's first day back at school after the summer). After compiling a list of scenes, have students select a favorite or memorable scene. Then have them turn and talk with someone sitting nearby and share what scene in the book was their favorite, most memorable or impactful and why. Based on their selected scene, have students draw the scene and write a few lines of dialogue and/or thoughts of the people featured in their drawing. If most of the scenes of the book are covered by their illustrations, create a new book with all of the students' drawings together or display them in order on the bulletin board.

2. Discuss Transgender People and Identity

Elicit from students that the book is about a boy named Calvin, who is transgender. Talk with students about what it means to be transgender by asking students: *What does it mean to be transgender?* Remind students about how transgender is described in the book (on page 8): "Being transgender means other people think you are one gender, but inside, you know you are a different one." Ask: *How does this relate to Calvin?* Discuss what it means to be transgender through the character of Calvin and remind students about when he says, "I'm a boy in my heart and my brain." You can say something like: "Being transgender means that when you were a baby, people may have thought you were a girl but later you told them you are actually a boy" (or the other way around). You can also say that this

feeling can happen at a young age or later on. Explain that they may know someone who is transgender—a friend, family member, friend of the family, famous person (athlete, politician, actor, gamer, etc.) or a character in a movie, TV show or book (like Calvin in the book). Talk together about what you can do as a class or school to support and act as an ally to students who are transgender. You can also read and discuss [other books about people who are transgender or gender non-conforming](#).

[Note: Depending on the age and maturity of your students and the extent to which you've discussed this topic or bias and discrimination in general, you can elicit and explain some of the challenges faced by people who are transgender, including bias, stereotyping, bullying, name-calling, exclusion, media bias, discrimination, etc. The book focuses on acceptance and support of Calvin and does not explore this aspect of the lives of transgender people. However, if appropriate, you may want to consider discussing it with students.]

3. Feeling Safe, Included and Accepted

When Calvin goes back to school at the beginning of the new school year, he says he feels “safe and happy.” Ask students: *What happens at school for Calvin that helps make him feel safe and happy?* Elicit from students the following reasons: the principal uses his right name, his friend Violet knows his name and knows and accepts that he is a boy, his cubby, mailbox, desk name tag and lunch chart all have Calvin's name on them. Remind students that Calvin felt scared and worried that students wouldn't accept that he is a boy or wouldn't use his name. But they do. Ask: *Why is it important that we accept and include people for who they are? Why is it important to help make all students feel safe, happy and included?* Ask students to think to themselves about a time they (or someone else) did not feel safe or happy, included or accepted in the classroom. You can ask some students to share if they feel comfortable or have them share with a partner. Then brainstorm a list of ideas about how we can make our classroom and school safe, inclusive and accepting for all. You could get more specific by making a map of the school and identifying places at school and how to help make someone feel safe and happy in those spaces. Then have students choose one of the ideas and create a poster (or short video, for older students) about the idea with an illustration that helps to describe it. Place the posters around the classroom or school. Consider adding some or all of the ideas to your classroom guidelines or norms.

ADL Resources

The following are curriculum and other educational resources on transgender people, identity and topics, acting as an ally, and acceptance.

Curriculum Resources

Diverse Books Matter, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/diverse-books-matter

Identity-Based Bullying, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/identity-based-bullying

Transgender Identity and Issues <https://www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/transgender-identity-and-issues> (Note that this is a high school lesson plan, but teachers can use for background information and context.)

Websites

6 Ways to Be an Ally

<https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/6-ways-to-be-an-ally-en-espanol>

Beyond the Binary: Discussing Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Identity in K-12 Schools <https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/beyond-the-binary-discussing-transgender-and-gender-non>

Let's Get it Right: Using Correct Pronouns and Names www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/lets-get-it-right-using-correct-pronouns-and-names

Safe and Inclusive Schools for All www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/safe-and-inclusive-schools-for-all

Children's Books

Below are links to lists of recommended anti-bias and multicultural books for the indicated category.

Books about People Who are LGBTQ+ <https://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?f%5B0%5D=topic%3A1584>