

**Lesson Plan: Gender diversity for nursery and primary school children**

**Age:** Suggested age range 3-6.

**Lesson Details:** The 'Penguin land' stories, written and produced by the Gender Identity Research & Education Society (GIRES) comprise 3 short stories, taking only a few minutes to read to the class or to individual children.

To order hard copies of the Penguin Land stories, please contact: [bernardgi@aol.com](mailto:bernardgi@aol.com)

You can find more information about the books on the website page entitled 'Penguin Land Book'. The Power Point files are available as a download on the website page entitled 'Classroom Lesson Plans' in the Resource: Education section.

Each story starts in the same way, but ends differently:

- Sally's story is about a penguin child whose gender identity as a girl, was not immediately understood by her family, they thought she was a boy;
- Tom's story is the reverse, the family thought he was a girl;
- Blur's story is about an identity that is neither boy nor girl (non-binary, gender queer)

**Lesson Context:** Schools are generally subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty, and all are required to abide by the Equality Act 2010. Understanding gender diversity should start at primary school level, before children's views become influenced by the prejudices of the adults around them. In law, gender diversity is as important as race and ethnicity diversity. Religion, belief, or cultural norms may not be used to discriminate against those who are gender non-conforming. Fostering good relations between groups with protected characteristics is an important factor in promoting equality, and supporting the health and wellbeing of our children. The numbers of children, even at pre-school age, who are changing their gender expression is growing exponentially, so teachers need to introduce this topic early.

**Lesson Objectives:** The penguin stories are a gentle introduction to the fact that we cannot always tell who a person is 'on the inside', just by looking at their 'outside'. This could apply to children who have intersex conditions, or who are gender diverse/ gender variant or nonconforming. As a consequence of hearing these stories, it is hoped that:

- a) Any child who was experiencing gender dissonance, would be encouraged to tell a parent, a teacher, or a friend. Even very young children are sensitive to the fact that gender specific behaviours are expected of them, and they may start repressing them. This undermines their self-esteem and can lead to long-term psychological damage. These stories will help to give children the confidence to express who they are, and to feel safe about sharing with others.
- b) The message to other children is that whether a child is a boy or a girl, or non-binary, makes no difference to their friendship. Even if they change their gender expression, they are still the same person.
- c) The message to adults, is that children's gender identities must be respected, *especially* where these conflict with cultural norms.
- d) Finally, diversity is something to be celebrated, not 'tolerated'.

**Lesson Delivery:** These stories may be read out loud by the teacher, either to the whole class, using the power-point version, or to individual or small groups of children using the books themselves. It is preferable not to read all three books on the same occasion because that could confuse small children. The teacher may read one story without stopping, then return to the first page of that story, and go through the pages more slowly, prompting the children to comment, following the children's trains of thought.

If a child in the class is planning to transition, or has recently done so, it would be appropriate to read the penguin story that matches that child's situation. The other books could be read at a later date.

**Learning Activity:** Promoting age-appropriate discussion about boys and girls as friends.

Are you only friendly with boys or with girls? Why?

How do you know you're a boy or a girl? Or neither?

How do we know our friends are boys or girls? Can we tell because of the way we dress? The way we wear our hair? Supposing these don't match the person inside?

A separate image of a baby penguin is provided with the books, so that it can be copied and given to each child to colour in and dress as they wish. (Document: Penguin to dress.pdf)

**Name game:** Can we tell because of the name? What about names that could be either, like Alex.

What are the names of your family members (siblings, parents)? Are they names that tell us whether they are one or the other, or are they gender neutral names?

If children in the class have Asian, African-Caribbean or other names – talk about these with the children. In their different cultures, do names indicate whether a person is a boy or girl?

Can we always tell from the name, if they are not ones that we are used to?

Invite the children to say whether the following are boys or girls? Mysha (g), Izyan (b), Shakarri (g), Asher (b), Jayla (g), Dion (b), Qamar (b), or any others...

<http://www.top-100-baby-names-search.com/popular-asian-names.html>

See also GIREs e-learning for professionals (badged by NHS and Health Education England) at:  
[Bit.ly/GIRESelearn](http://bit.ly/GIRESelearn)