

## TEACHER'S GUIDE



LEE & LOW BOOKS

# Sparkle Boy

written by Lesléa Newman

illustrated by Maria Mola

## About the Book

**Genre:** Realistic Fiction

**\*Reading Level:** Grade 3

**Interest Level:** Grades K–3

**Guided Reading Level:** M

**Accelerated Reader® Level/  
Points:** N/A

**Lexile™ Measure:** N/A

\*Reading level based on the Spache  
Readability Formula

**Themes:** Breaking Gender Barriers, Bullying, Childhood Experiences and Memories, Courage, Overcoming Obstacles, Empathy/Compassion, Kindness/Caring, Families/Sibling Relationships, Identity/Self Esteem/Confidence, LGBTQ, Pride, Tolerance/Acceptance, Cultural Diversity, Biracial/Multiracial Interest, Latino/Hispanic/Mexican Interest

## SYNOPSIS

Casey loves to play with his blocks, puzzles, and dump truck, and he also loves things that shimmer, glitter, and sparkle. Casey's older sister, Jessie, thinks this is weird. Shimmery, glittery, sparkly things are only for girls. Right?

When Casey and Jessie head to the library for story time, Casey proudly wears his shimmery skirt and sparkly bracelet. His nails glitter in the light. Jessie insists that Casey looks silly. It's one thing to dress like this around the house, but going outside as a "sparkle boy" is another thing entirely. What will happen when the other kids see him?

This sweet and refreshing story speaks to us all about acceptance, respect, and the simple freedom to be yourself. Shimmery, glittery, sparkly things are fun—for everyone!



## BACKGROUND

### *Children and Gender Identity*

The physical characteristics present at birth that determine whether a child is a boy or a girl denote the child's biological sex. *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 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>.

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>.

### 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-gender-typed-toys>

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

"Sex? Sexual Orientation? Gender Identity? Gender Expression?" by Joel Baum and Kim Westheimer: <http://www.tolerance.org/magazine/number-50-summer-2015/feature/sex-sexual-orientation-gender-identity-gender-expression>

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

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



## VOCABULARY

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

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.

### Content Specific

nail polish, bracelet, skirt

### Academic

adored, shimmery, glittery, sparkly, twirled, dizzy, plopped, frowned, fanning, snatched, swiveled, stomped, thrust, scrunching

## BEFORE READING

### Prereading Focus Questions

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strands 4–5 and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

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

1. What do you like to wear? Why? Why do children often like to choose their own clothes? What other kinds of choices do children like to make for themselves? How does it feel to make your own choices?
2. What does the word *individuality* mean? What does it mean to be an individual?
3. Why do you think some things children like or enjoy are considered specifically for girls or specifically for boys? Can all children like or enjoy the same things? Why or why not?
4. 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?
5. If you heard or saw someone teasing or bullying your sibling or your friend, what would you do? What would you say?

### Exploring the Book

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

Read and talk about the title of the book. Ask students what they think the title means. Then ask students whom and what they think this book will most likely be about. What do you think might happen? What information do you think you might learn? What makes you think that?

Take students on a book walk and draw attention to the following parts of the book: front and back covers (you may also wish to read the blurbs on the back cover to students), title page, author's and illustrator's dedications, and illustrations.

### Setting a Purpose for Reading

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

Have students read to find out:

- how Casey chooses to express himself
- how Casey's family members react to what he wears
- what happens when Casey wears sparkly things to story time at the library
- how Jessie learns to accept Casey's decisions

Encourage students to consider why the author, Lesléa Newman, would want to share this story with young people.



## 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 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 does Jessie show Casey at the beginning of the story? How does Casey respond?
2. What does Jessie say when Casey wants to wear a shimmering skirt? What does their mama say? What does she do?
3. What does Jessie show Casey when she gets home from the birthday party? How does Casey respond?
4. What does Jessie say when Casey wants to have his nails painted with glittery nail polish? What does their daddy say? What does he do?
5. What does Abuelita have that Jessie and Casey like?
6. How does Jessie react when Casey wants to wear a sparkly bracelet? What does Abuelita say? What does she do?
7. What does Casey want to wear to story time at the library? How does Jessie react? How does their mama react? What does she say and do?
8. How does Jessie feel about what Mama says and does?
9. What does the girl at the library say to Jessie? What does she think about Casey? What does Casey say to the girl?
10. What do the older boys say about Casey's outfit? How do their comments make Casey feel?

11. How does Jessie respond when the boys tease Casey?
12. What do Casey and Jessie do at the end of the story?

### 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. How do you think Jessie feels when Mama disagrees with her about Casey wearing a shimmering skirt?
2. How do you think Jessie feels when Mama finds Casey his own skirt? How do you think Casey feels?
3. Why do you think Jessie suggests putting glittery nail polish on Casey's toes instead of on his fingernails? Why do you think Casey says no?
4. How do Jessie's reactions change each time Casey gets to wear something she thinks he shouldn't? Why doesn't she agree with the adults who allow Casey to wear these things? What might Jessie be thinking and feeling?
5. Why do you think Casey likes shimmering, glittery, sparkly things so much? Unlike Jessie, why isn't Casey worried about what others will think?
6. What might Mama, Daddy, and Abuelita be thinking to themselves when Casey asks for a skirt, nail polish, and a sparkly bracelet?
7. What effect do the girl's comments at the library have on the older boy who overhears Casey's response? Why do you think the boy calls over his friend?
8. How is Jessie's response to the boys at the library different from her previous reactions to Casey's love of shimmering, glittery, sparkly things?
9. What do you think caused Jessie to change her ideas? Why does she defend Casey? What would you say if you overheard someone being teased at the library (or at school)?
10. How do you think Casey feels when Jessie defends him at the library?





“VERDICT: A cheerful addition for libraries that need more titles like Cheryl Kilodavis’s *My Princess Boy* and Sarah Hoffman’s *Jacob’s New Dress*.”

–*School Library Journal*

“Jessie’s response to the library bullies might be the best of all. After being told that boys don’t wear skirts and bracelets because ‘That’s just the way it is,’ she responds, ‘Not anymore.’”

–*Publishers Weekly*

“*Sparkle Boy* captures the sparkle of siblinghood and the joy of glitter. Once again, Lesléa Newman reminds us that we all have the right to shine!”

–*Alex Gino, author of George*

- How does the story end? What has changed between Jessie and Casey?
- How do you think the story would be different if Jessie wanted to wear clothing and accessories that are commonly thought as being for boys? How do you think her family members would react? How might the other children at the library react? Why do you think so?

### Reader’s Response

(*Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1 and 2 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6*)  
(*Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strand 1 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4 and 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.

- 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?
- What might have happened if Casey’s adult family members were not accepting of his love of shimmery, glittery, sparkly things? What does his family’s support teach him? Write about an experience you have had in which someone

supported or did not support a choice you made. How did you feel? How did the person’s support, or lack of support, affect you?

- 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?
- Why is it sometimes difficult to express yourself and make choices without worrying about what others think? Does what other people say and/or do influence your decisions? 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?
- What would you think or say if you saw Casey wearing a shimmery skirt and other glittery and sparkly things? Do you think you would you react any differently if he was not wearing those things? What questions might you have for Casey? How would you react if you saw someone being unkind to Casey because of what he liked to wear? What would you say or do, and why?



## ELL/ESL 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 ELL students to partner-read the story with strong English readers/speakers. Students can alternate reading between 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:
  - Review the illustrations in order and have students summarize what is happening on each page, first orally, then in writing.
  - Have students work in pairs to retell either the plot of the story or key details. Then ask students to write a short summary, synopsis, or opinion about what they have read.
4. Have students give a short talk about what is individuality or a time when someone stood up for them.
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 English Language 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.
6. Support your students as needed by challenging stereotypical gender roles with examples (ex. "his doll," "her truck," "she is a firefighter," etc.).

## 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, Strand 4, and Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 7 and 9)

(Writing Standards, Text Types and Purposes, Strand 3)

1. Provide students with a character analysis chart to describe and list character traits for Casey, Jessie, Mama, Daddy, and Abuelita. Model and support students in using characters' thoughts, words, and actions to draw conclusions about each character. What do you know about the characters from what they say, think, and/or do? What is the motivation behind each person's actions?
2. Ask students to write consecutive diary or journal entries from the perspective of Jessie before and after the event at the library. Here are some questions students may ponder as they create their entries. How does Jessie feel about Casey's decision to wear shimmery, glittery, sparkly things? Why? How does she feel about her parents' and Abuelita's reactions to Casey's desires? What does Jessie hope for or want for her brother? How does Jessie feel about Casey's decision to wear his shimmery, glittery, sparkly things after the event at the library? How did Jessie feel when the older boys teased Casey? How does her opinion about how Casey chooses to express himself change? Why?
3. Have students write a diary or journal entry from Casey's perspective about his love of shimmery, glittery, sparkly things. Here are some questions students may ponder as they create their entries. How does Casey feel when his parents allow him to wear a shimmery skirt and glittery nail polish?



How does he feel when Abuelita gives him a sparkly bracelet? How does Casey feel about Jessie's reactions to his joy in wearing these things? How does Casey wish Jessie would react? How does Casey feel about what the girl and older boys say at the library? How does he feel about what Jessie says and does?

4. Help students identify and use relevant vocabulary to talk about gender identity and stereotypes with the Think Outside the Box: Lower Elementary lesson plan from Teaching Tolerance (<http://www.tolerance.org/lesson/think-outside-box-lower-elementary>).
5. Have students explore gender identity with introductory activities from the Introducing Gender: Girls, Boys, and More! lesson plan from Gender Spectrum (<http://www.tolerance.org/sex-identity-expression>).
6. As a class, discuss the use of gender-specific pronouns (he, she, him, her) and gender-neutral language (they, them). Then ask students to change pronouns used in traditional songs, stories, and rhymes to include gender-neutral pronouns and interchange parental roles. Find examples in the ADL article "How Can I Prevent Gender Bias in Young Children?" (<https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/documents/assets/pdf/education-outreach/How-Can-I-Prevent-Gender-Bias.pdf>.) Challenge students to edit material you use for read aloud and shared reading to be more inclusive.
7. Author Lesléa Newman states that she wrote *Sparkle Boy* to challenge "the 'rules' that our society dictates that are harmful to us all, including notions about gender" (<http://www.lesleakids.com/sparkleboy.html>). Discuss this statement and the meaning of the word stereotype. Ask students to brainstorm other harmful stereotypes they have encountered. Working as a class or in small groups, have students generate a list of constructive responses to being told that you are less than or undeserving, or that your goals are unachievable due to a stereotype. Use the responses of the characters in *Sparkle Boy* as a springboard for discussion.

8. Read other stories in which characters challenge gender roles, stereotypes, or bias, such as in *Marisol McDonald Doesn't Match* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/marisol-mcdonald-doesn-t-match-marisol-mcdonald-no-combina>), *Catching the Moon* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/catching-the-moon>), *Hiromi's Hands* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/hiromi-s-hands>), and *Antonio's Card* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/antonio-s-card-la-tarjeta-de-antonio>). Compare the experiences of those targeted by the stereotype and also the actions of those who support them. How are the stories similar and different? What obstacles do the characters overcome? What themes or messages do they share? What lessons or morals do they teach?

### Art/Media

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strand 7)  
(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strand 1)

1. Have students explore art projects that include sparkles or glitter that are appealing to all students. Encourage students to discuss why sparkly things are fun and exciting for everyone. Examples include:
  - Glitter Calm Down Jars (<http://www.therealisticmama.com/11-awesome-calm-down-jars/>)
  - Glittery Goo (<http://laughingkidslearn.com/glittery-goo/>)
  - Glow in the Dark Firework Painting (<http://craftulate.com/glow-dark-fireworks-painting/>)
  - Glitter Rocks (<http://intheplayroom.co.uk/2013/02/19/painting-rocks/>)
2. Ask students to design and create self-portraits that show how they express their individuality through their appearance, clothing, interests, hobbies, and personality. Encourage students to look beyond physical appearance when creating their self-portraits. Have students use keywords, phrases, imagery, and/or symbols in their self-portraits that best describe or depict who they are. Interested students may wish to share their self-portraits with the class and reflect on what they learned about one another.
3. Have students work as a class or in small groups to look for examples of stereotypes and bias in



the media (posters, advertisements, magazines, print, etc.). Encourage students to discuss the types of stereotypes and biases they find and how stereotypes and biases influence people's ways of thinking. What is the intent of the imagery or words used? Who, or what audiences, are they intended for? Then ask students to design or create new media posters and advertisements that omit stereotypes and biases. How can we make these media examples more inclusive? What can we eliminate, change, and/ or add?

4. Have a class discussion about bullying and develop a definition for and examples of what bullying is and what bullying is not. What does bullying look like? What are different forms of bullying? Why do people bully others? Then ask students to create a list of proactive strategies to prevent bullying in their school, and ideas for what to do when they experience or witness bullying. Explore the resources at <https://www.stopbullying.gov/> for more information and ideas.

### School–Home Connection

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

1. 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?
2. Watch author Lesléa Newman's appearance on Austin Public Library's "The Van Show" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GuyqFFC8tk8>). Then ask students to interview a parent, grandparent, guardian, or another adult 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

and make predictions for what changes they would like to see in the future.

### Discussion Prompts for Teachers, Parents, and Guardians

1. How would you respond if your child or student wanted to wear or do something that does not conform to gender-specific behavior? What questions or concerns might you have? How would you show your support? How would you respond to other children's negative comments? Negative comments from another adult?
2. Review the ADL article "How Can I Prevent Gender Bias in Young Children?" (<https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/documents/assets/pdf/education-outreach/How-Can-I-Prevent-Gender-Bias.pdf>). Are there attitudes and behaviors with which you inadvertently struggle? What is one area where you would like to improve? Make notes on your behavior (or observe that of a partner) and discuss your efforts.
3. Using the ADL's list (<https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/documents/assets/pdf/education-outreach/How-Can-I-Prevent-Gender-Bias.pdf>) or ideas from this teacher-researcher's study (<http://www.naeyc.org/publications/vop/gender-identity-and-expression>), identify one activity or experience you could offer children that would encourage exploration of non-stereotypical gender roles. Try it and discuss your observations.
4. Discuss a "position statement" for your family or school on promoting healthy gender identity development in children. Discuss or role play how you would respond if your reading of *Sparkle Boy* in your home or classroom was challenged in the way the book *Jacob's New Dress* was challenged in a North Carolina school. ([https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/24/us/north-carolina-school-jacobs-new-dress-book.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/24/us/north-carolina-school-jacobs-new-dress-book.html?_r=0))





## 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 wrote this story to celebrate all the “sparkle boys” who brighten the world. She lives in Holyoke, Massachusetts, with her spouse, Mary Grace Vazquez. You can visit her online at [lesleakids.com](http://lesleakids.com).

## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

**Maria Mola** has illustrated picture books for publishers in both Europe and the United States, and her images are notable for their expressiveness and sense of whimsy. Mola was drawn to the story in *Sparkle Boy* because she believes it addresses a socially important topic. A native of Barcelona, Spain, Mola now lives in Evanston, Illinois, with her husband and their two sons. You can visit her online at [mariamola.com](http://mariamola.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](http://leeandlow.com).

## ORDERING INFORMATION

### On the Web:

[www.leeandlow.com/contact/ordering](http://www.leeandlow.com/contact/ordering) (general order information)

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/sparkle-boy> (secure online ordering)

**By Phone:** 212-779-4400 ext. 25

**By Fax:** 212-683-1894

**By Mail:** Lee & Low Books, 95 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016

## Book Information for Sparkle Boy



\$17.95, HARDCOVER

978-1-62014-285-1

32 pages, 8-3/4 X 10-1/4

\*Reading Level: Grade 3

Interest Level: Grades K–3

Guided Reading Level: M

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points: N/A

Lexile™ Measure: N/A

**THEMES:** Breaking Gender Barriers, Bullying, Childhood Experiences and Memories, Courage, Overcoming Obstacles, Empathy/Compassion, Kindness/Caring, Families/Sibling Relationships, Identity/Self Esteem/Confidence, LGBTQ, Pride, Tolerance/Acceptance, Cultural Diversity, Biracial/Multiracial Interest, Latino/Hispanic/Mexican Interest

### RESOURCES ON THE WEB:

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/sparkle-boy>

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