

## Elementary School Lesson (Grades K–2)

# Challenging Gender Role Stereotypes

## Rationale

This lesson helps young students explore the gender stereotypical beliefs that place limits on the types of activities and interests they pursue. Through a game about gender roles and musical instruments, small and large group brainstorming and discussion, and children’s literature that celebrates the transcending of gender barriers, students increase their awareness of gender stereotypes and learn about ways to overcome them.

[NOTE: The purpose of teaching students about gender stereotypes is not to pressure them to pursue activities simply because they are gender non-conforming, but rather to broaden students’ notions about the choices open to them. As you encourage students to think beyond gender biases, make sure to also acknowledge and celebrate personal preferences. The girl who wants to study ballet and the girl who wants to take drum lessons should be equally celebrated, without judgment.]

## Objectives

- Students will engage in a learning game that challenges gender role stereotypes.
- Students will name activities regarded as traditionally only for boys or girls, and identify ways to turn those beliefs around.
- Students will engage with literature that challenges narrow gender role expectations.

## Time

2 hours or 2–3 class periods

## Requirements

Handouts and Resources:

- [Making Music](#) (one copy per small group)
- [Making Music Student Photos](#) (one copy per small group)
- [Boys and Girls Making Music](#) (one copy)
- [Discussion Guide for Ballerino Nate](#) (one copy)
- [Discussion Guide for Drum, Chavi, Drum!;/Toca, Chavi, Toca!](#) (one copy)

Other Material:

- Board/Smart board or chart paper, construction paper or newsprint, markers, crayons, tape or glue
- One copy of the book [Ballerino Nate](#) and/or [Drum, Chavi, Drum!;/Toca, Chavi, Toca!](#)
- (Optional) Computer, LCD projector

## Key Words

Different  
Embarrassed  
Instrument  
Reconsider  
Rhythm  
Role model  
Sexism  
Stereotype

## Advanced Preparation

- Reproduce handouts as directed above.
- Photocopy the [Making Music](#) and [Making Music Student Photos](#) handouts, one copy for each small group of 3–5 students. Cut out the student photos and create a set for each small group (see Part 1 #1).
- (Optional) Prepare the [Making Music](#) and [Boys and Girls Making Music](#) handouts or save them on a laptop for projection and viewing them on a large screen.
- Obtain a copy of [Ballerino Nate](#) and/or [Drum, Chavi, Drum!;/Toca, Chavi, Toca!](#) (See Part III). Alternative books with discussions guides are [Grace for President](#), [Jacob’s New Dress](#) and [Rosie Revere Engineer](#).

## Techniques and Skills

brainstorming, cooperative group work, critical thinking, drawing skills, forming opinions, large and small group discussion, reading skills, writing skills

## Procedures

### Part I: Musical Instruments and Gender Stereotypes (30 minutes)

1. Begin the lesson by asking for a show of hands if students like playing musical instruments. Tell them that they will participate in a brief matching game called Making Music. Divide the class into small groups of 3–5 students and provide each group with a [Making Music](#) handout, a set of [Making Music Student Photos and tape or glue](#). Have groups lay out the photos on a table and tell them that each of these children has signed up to learn a new musical instrument. Instruct groups to do the following:
  - Discuss which person they think should learn each instrument, and glue or tape the photos accordingly in the first column when the group has come to an agreement. (Tell students that they can only assign one person to each instrument.)
  - Discuss which of the six instruments they would choose if they could learn a new instrument, and write their names accordingly in the second column. (Tell students that more than one person can choose the same instrument.)

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**ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURE:** If your students are not able to complete this task in small groups, work on it together as a whole class. Project the [Making Music](#) handout on a large screen, board/smart board and, using enlarged copies of the student photos, have students vote on which person they think should learn each instrument. Subsequent small group activities in this lesson can be similarly adapted if necessary.

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2. Reconvene the class and invite a representative from each group, one at a time, to share their group’s decisions. Post the completed handouts where everyone can see them and engage the class in a discussion using some of the following questions:
  - How did your group decide which students should learn each instrument?
  - Did everyone in your group agree? If not, what were some of the different ideas that came up?
  - How did you choose the instrument that you would learn? Do you play an instrument in real life? If so, how did you choose that instrument?
  - Did some people in your group think that certain instruments were for boys and others for girls? If so, which ones were considered “boy instruments” and which ones “girl instruments”?
  - What other reasons—besides being a boy or girl—might make each instrument a good choice for the different children in the photos?

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**NOTE:** The discussion above is structured based on the likelihood that your students will have made “gendered” choices in matching the instruments to people (research shows that children as young as five display preferences for musical instruments closely related to their gender-stereotyped beliefs). However, if gender is not a motivating factor for your particular students, adjust the discussion questions accordingly. Similarly, if other factors emerge as determinants of student decisions (e.g., race, ethnicity, age, size), explore these themes before concluding the discussion.

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### Part II: Debunking Gender Role Stereotypes (60 minutes)

1. Ask students if they believe that boys and girls might each be “right” for or better at certain types of instruments. Project or pass around the photo collage, [Boys and Girls Making Music](#), and reinforce that anyone can play any instrument. Ask students how the trumpet player might feel if someone told her she should switch to an instrument that’s more “lady-like,” or what the flute player might do if other kids kept teasing, “You’re a girl, only girls play the flute.”
2. Ask students how people get their ideas about what girls and boys are “supposed to” do or like. For each response, help students to distinguish myth from reality. For example, if students suggest that boys run faster so they are better suited for soccer, or that girls are neater so they are better suited for housework, challenge these ideas by providing examples of

girls and boys who contradict these notions. Emphasize that narrow ideas about boys and girls roles can be hurtful to others and limit opportunities for everyone.

3. Ask students for examples of interests or activities, besides playing musical instruments, that some people say are “only for boys/men” or “just for girls/women.” Elicit general categories (e.g., toys) rather than specific items (e.g., Barbies). List their responses on the board or a sheet of chart paper.

Examples:

- toys/games we play
  - colors we like
  - clothes we wear
  - TV shows/movies we watch
  - who we play with
  - sports we play
  - chores we do
  - hobbies/things we collect
  - pets/animals we like
  - songs/singers we like
  - jobs that grown-ups have
  - video games we like
4. Have students get back into their small groups and provide each with a large sheet of construction or chart paper and some drawing implements (crayons, markers, etc.). Assign each group one of the topics generated above and ask students to talk about the ways in which girls and boys are set apart (e.g., if the topic is sports, students may discuss how only the boys play soccer during recess and how they don’t let the girls join in). After a few minutes of discussion, instruct students to draw a picture depicting what it would look like if girls and boys were not set apart, and to write a caption at the bottom (e.g., “Boys and girls playing soccer together happily in the schoolyard”).
  5. Reconvene the class. Have each group briefly share its work and hang their illustrations where everyone can see them. Emphasize the idea that attaching a gender to activities or interests is hurtful and limiting.

### Part III: Using Literature to Transcend Gender Stereotypes (time will vary)

Reinforce the ideas explored in this lesson by reading one or both of the following stories aloud during subsequent classes and completing one or more of the extension activities included in the discussion guide for each book.

- ➔ [\*Ballerino Nate\*](#) by Kimberly Brubaker Bradley  
*Penguin Young Readers Group, 2006, 32 pages, grades Pre-K–3*

**Summary:** Nate, a kindergartener, wants to become a ballet dancer, but is discouraged by his second-grade, sports-loving brother, who pronounces, “You can’t... You’re a boy.” Despite his parents’ reassurance, Nate is apprehensive when he begins a ballet class and learns that he is the only boy enrolled. After Nate’s mother takes him to a ballet performance, where he sees that half the dancers are men, Nate feels good about his new pursuit at last. ([Discussion Guide](#))

- ➔ [\*Drum, Chavi, Drum!;/Toca, Chavi, Toca!\*](#) by Mayra Dole  
*Children’s Book Press, 2003, 32 pages, grades K–3*

**Summary:** Chavi is determined to play the drums on the school float during Miami’s Calle Ocho parade, but everyone—from her music teacher to her own loving mother—is convinced that because she is a girl, she cannot possibly be good enough. Chavi knows differently, and she practices on anything she can get her hands on: pans, paint cans, car hoods. She just knows she’s good, and before the book is over, so does everyone else. ([Discussion Guide](#))

# Making Music

| Instrument  | Which person do you think should learn this instrument? | If you could learn a new instrument, which one would you choose? |
|---|---|--|
| Guitar<br>     |   |  |
| Flute<br>       |   |  |
| Drums<br>     |   |  |
| Clarinet<br> |   |  |
| Violin<br>   |   |  |
| Trumpet<br>  |   |  |

# Making Music Student Photos



**Hassan**



**Jamal**



**Amy**



**Donna**



**Max**



**Maria**

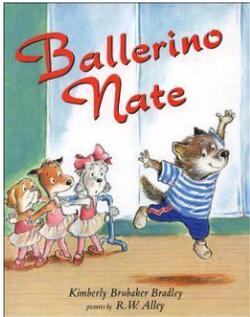
# Boys and Girls Making Music



Discussion Guide for *Ballerino Nate*

# Ballerino Nate

## Summary



Nate, a kindergartener, wants to become a ballet dancer, but is discouraged by his second-grade, sports-loving brother, who pronounces, “You can’t... You’re a boy.” Despite his parents’ reassurance, Nate is apprehensive when he begins a ballet class and learns that he is the only boy enrolled. After Nate’s mother takes him to a ballet performance, where he sees that half the dancers are men, Nate feels good about his new pursuit at last.

*Ballerino Nate* © 2006 by Kimberly Brubaker Bradley, Illustrated by R.W. Alley  
2006, 32 pages, Grades Pre K–3, Penguin Young Readers Group

## Discussion Questions

Read the book *Ballerino Nate* while sitting very close to the children. Place the book in a position easily seen. After reading the story, have a class discussion using the following questions:

- How does Nate feel when his brother keeps saying “Yuck!” about ballet?
- Has your brother or sister (or someone else) ever put down something that you care about? How did it make you feel?
- What does Nate love about ballet? Have you ever felt that way about a special activity or hobby? Describe your feelings.
- How does Nate’s mom react to Ben when he puts down Nate’s interest in ballet? What does she do to support Nate? How have your parents (or other close adults) encouraged you to participate in an activity you love?
- What does Nate do to stay positive and confident despite Ben’s teasing? What keeps you feeling positive when others tease you about an interest you have?
- What does Ben say that starts to make Nate unsure about ballet? How does their dad step in and help?
- What do you think it took for Nate to continue with his ballet class even though he was the only boy? Have you ever been the only boy or girl at an event? Did it matter to you or others? Should it matter?
- How does Nate feel when he goes to a professional ballet?
- What helps to give him confidence in his dancing?
- What is a *role model*? Do you have any role models? How have they helped you to feel good about an activity that you love?

## Vocabulary

Ballerina  
Ballerino  
Ballet  
Company  
Enormous  
Fluttery  
Miserable  
Permission  
Petunia  
Plié  
Professional  
Stretching  
Theater  
Tutu  
Uniform

## Extension Activities

- ➔ Read stories and teach students about male dancers (e.g., Alvin Ailey, Bill T. Jones) and men in other gender non-conforming roles (e.g., nurse, child caretaker, fashion designer). Invite parents and other adults in the school community to visit and talk with students about gender non-conforming jobs or activities with which they are involved.
- ➔ Have students write stories or draw pictures about a time when they were the only boy or girl participating in an activity or event. (This can be broadened to explore being the only one of some other category besides gender). Encourage students to express how they felt and what helped them to stay confident and secure in the situation.

- In the story, Ben tells Nate, “Boys can’t be ballerinas. They never, ever, ever can.” Post a sheet of chart paper and divide it into two columns. Label the first column, “They never, ever, ever can...” and have students list all the things people have told them boys or girls can “never, ever” do. Label the second column, “Yes they can!” and have students research exceptions to each item in the first column in the school library, computer lab or for homework. When their research is complete, post the results in the second column. For example, if one of the items in the first column is “women can never, ever be explorers,” students might paste a photo of Ann Bancroft in the second column with the caption, “polar explorer and first women in history to sail and ski across Antarctica.”
- Throughout the story, Nate is worried that only girls can be ballerinas. At the end of the story, he is pleased to learn that there is a word for male ballet dancers—ballerino. Explore with students how male and female roles are embedded in language and how this influences the choices they make. Have students brainstorm a list of jobs or roles that are “gendered” or primarily associated with one sex (e.g., fireman, policeman, nanny, nurse, etc.). Then have students change each item (e.g., policeman can be changed to police officer) or rewrite it altogether (e.g., nanny can be renamed as caretaker) to be gender-neutral and inclusive.
- In the story, Nate’s love for ballet is described as follows:

*Nate loved the ballet.*

*He loved the fluttery costumes that the dancers wore.*

*He loved the way the dancers jumped and leaped and spun.*

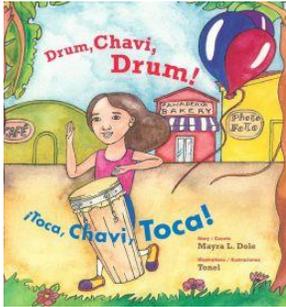
*He loved the way their movements looked like music.*

Have students write and illustrate poems using this structure to describe an activity they love. Have students share their poetry and encourage the class to celebrate their peers’ interests, regardless of gender role expectations.

Discussion Guide for *Drum, Chavi, Drum! / ¡Toca, Chavi, Toca!*

# Drum, Chavi, Drum! / ¡Toca, Chavi, Toca!

## Summary



Chavi is determined to play the drums on the school float during Miami's Calle Ocho parade, but everyone—from her music teacher to her own loving mother—is convinced that because she is a girl, she cannot possibly be good enough. Chavi knows differently, and she practices on anything she can get her hands on: pans, paint cans, car hoods. She just knows she's good, and before the book is over, so does everyone else. (This book is bilingual, English and Spanish)

*Drum, Chavi, Drum!* © 2003 by Mayra Dole, Illustrated by Tonel  
2003, 32 pages, Grades K–3, Children's Book Press

## Discussion Questions

Read the book *Drum, Chavi, Drum!* while sitting very close to the children. Place the book in a position easily seen. After reading the story, have a class discussion using the following questions:

- How does Chavi feel when her teacher tells her that she can't play the drums in the festival because she is a girl?
- Has anyone ever told you that could not do something because you were a boy or girl? How did you feel?
- After Mami throws Chavi's drum sticks in the trash and her grandfather complains about the noise, Chavi says, "No one listens; no one believes in me." What gives Chavi the motivation to continue with her drumming?
- Have you ever believed in yourself even when others did not? What helped you to stay positive?
- How do the men in the community react when they find out they have been fooled by Chavi?
- What ideas do they have about why girls should not play drums? What do you think about those ideas?
- How does Rosario stand up for Chavi? Has anyone ever stood up for you? How did it feel?
- When Chavi finally gets to play the drums at the festival, what feeling does she have inside?
- How do the crowd and the school principal react to a girl drummer? How does their reaction change the way Mami and Mr. Gonzalez feel about Chavi's drumming?
- Is it ever okay for kids to be discouraged from doing certain types of activities just because they are girls or boys? What can you do to make sure this never happens in your school or community?

## Extension Activities

- ➔ Have students write diary entries in Chavi's voice exploring what she might have been thinking and feeling after pivotal events in the story (being scolded by her teacher, rejected by her family, supported by her friend, etc.). Alternatively, have students write a diary entry

## Vocabulary

### English:

Banner  
Bongos  
Confetti  
Conga  
Cuba  
Embarrassed  
Festival  
Float  
Plead  
Reconsider  
Rhythm  
Sway  
Throng  
Unrecognizable

### Spanish:

Abuelito  
Barrio  
Botánica  
Cafecitos  
Calle Ocho\*  
Fábrica  
Gracias  
Mariposita  
Merenguitos  
Mijita  
Niña  
Oye  
Pastelitos  
¿Qué pasa?  
Sombrero  
Toca  
Tumbadoras

\*Calle Ocho (8th Street) refers to the central area of Miami's "Little Havana" and to the large street festival celebrating Latino culture that takes place there every March.

in Rosario’s voice exploring what she was thinking and feeling as she watched Chavi get rejected and decided to stand up for her friend.

- Have students write a story or draw a picture about a time when they were discouraged from an activity because of their gender, and another story or picture depicting what would have happened had they been encouraged. As a follow-up, have students role-play some of these situations and practice standing up for themselves and/or others.
- Have students write a story or create a collage entitled, “[Verb], [Name], [Verb]!”, that celebrates an activity about which they are passionate (e.g., “Swim, Donna, Swim!” or “Paint, Robbie, Paint!”).
- Hold a class Calle Ocho festival and have students make or bring in a variety of instruments to play. Encourage students to try out different instruments.
- Read stories and teach students about gender non-conforming musicians. Invite parents and other adults in the school community who have chosen instruments (or other pursuits) considered “wrong” for their gender to visit and share with students.