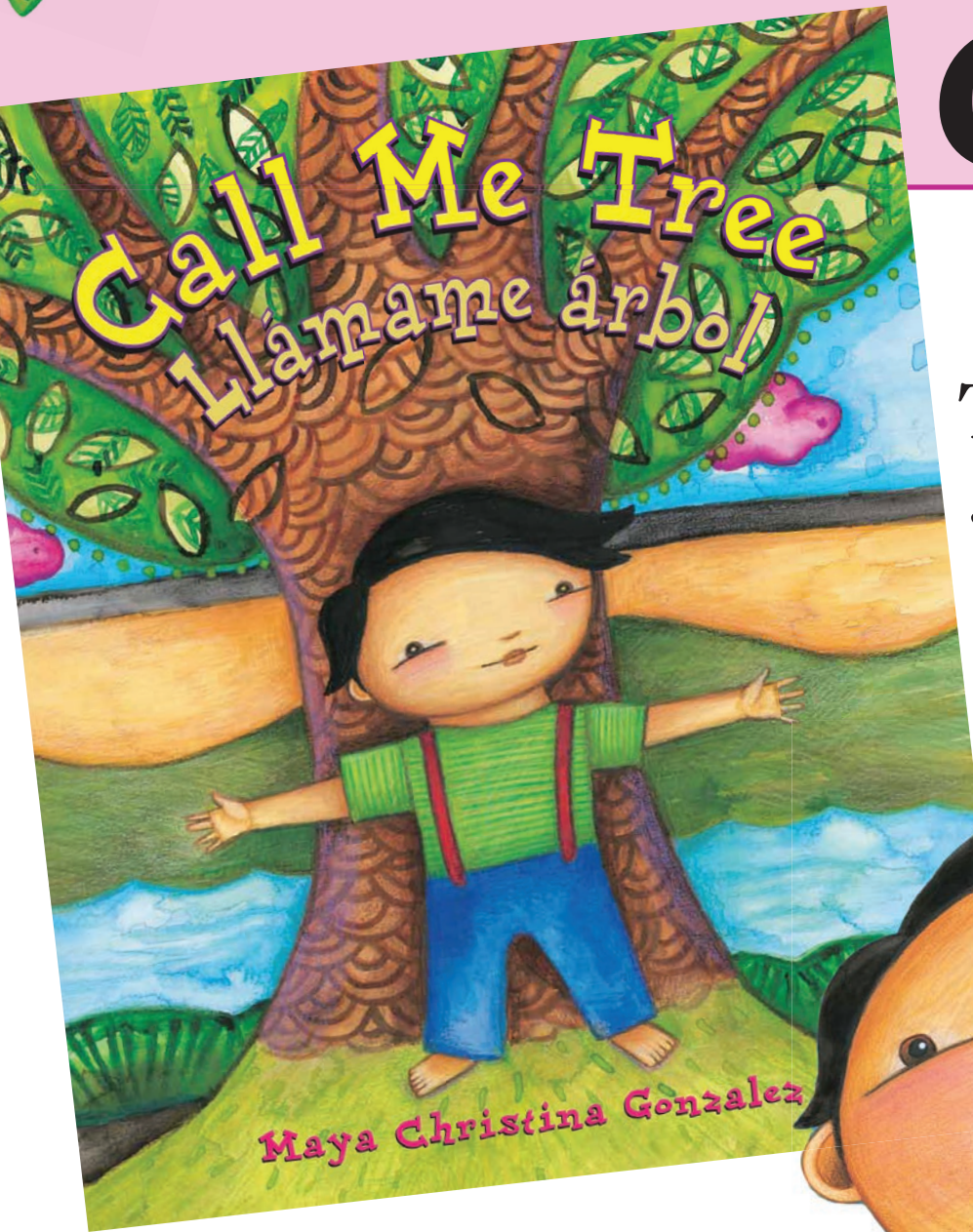


Reader's Guide



Exploring
Trees, Yoga,
and
Gender



Call Me Tree
written and illustrated by Maya Gonzalez
published by Children's Book Press
an imprint of Lee&Low Books, 2014
ISBN 978-0-89239-294-0

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Reading Guide created by Maya Gonzalez (www.mayagonzalez.com)

More resources for the book at www.genderwheel.com

Call Me Tree is available internationally and can be purchased through Lee & Low (www.leeandlow.com), through most online retailers or ask your local bookstore to order.



Introduction

By being intentionally gender free, *Call Me Tree* provides for some a much needed break from the constant boy-girl assumptions and requirements. It can also provide a moment to pause and consider those assumptions, requirements and their impact.

Highlights:

- intentionally created without pronouns and main character is referred to as a kid not a boy or a girl.
- all kids are in nature and in poses inspired by the Yogic Tree pose

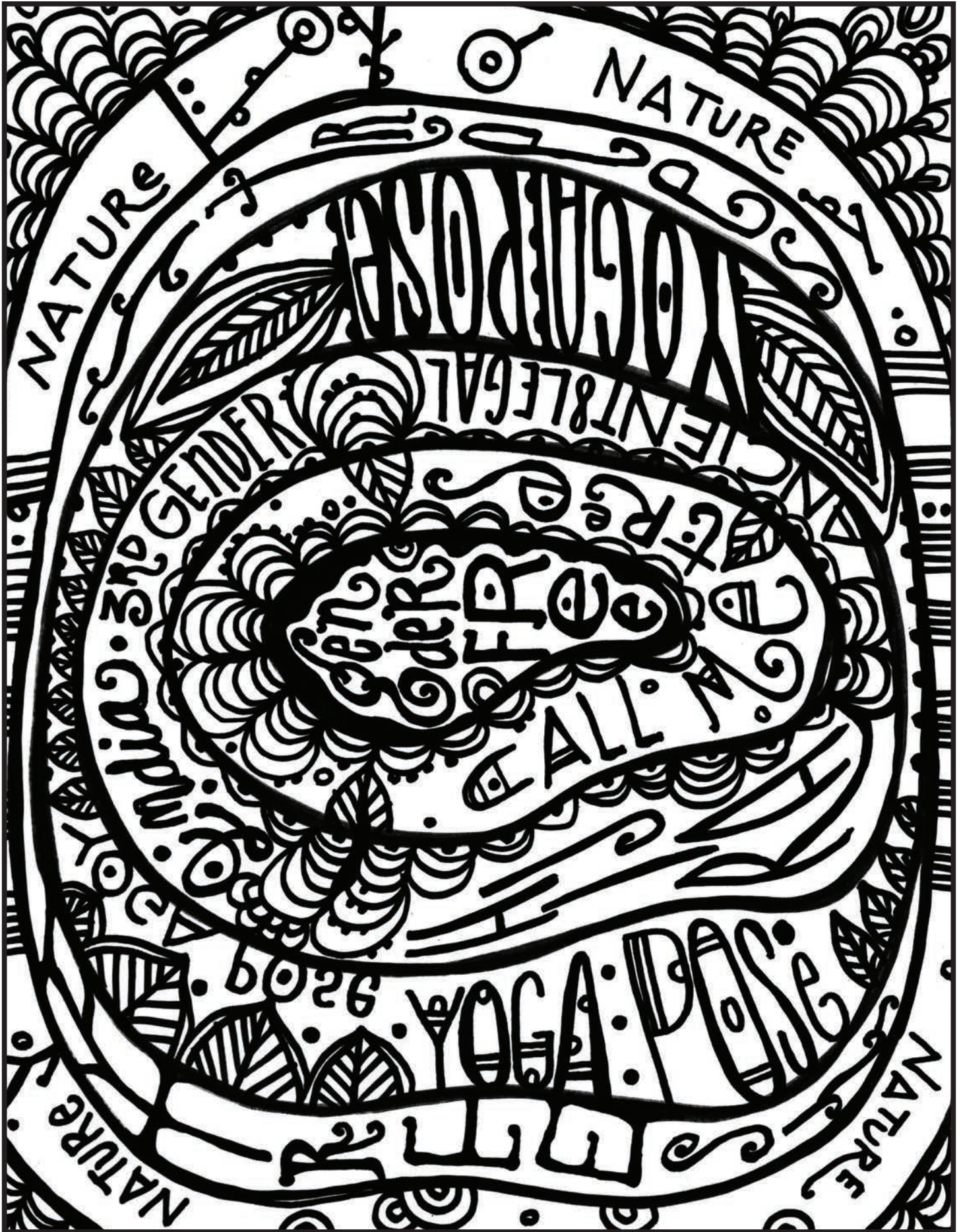
Despite the fact that there are no specific pronouns, reviewers have assumed the main character is a cisgender boy. The main character is actually based on someone assigned girl. The specificity doesn't matter as much as the opportunity to notice the assumption.

Many of us assume a child with short hair, dressed in a t-shirt and pants is a cisgender boy. What does an assumption like that fully communicate? About gender requirements? fitting in? living up to expectations? being accepted? Who does it leave out and what is the impact of being excluded?

Call Me Tree also opens up the possibility that it's ok not to know the gender of a child. No matter what their gender may be, what is valuable is that they feel free, strong, a sense of belonging and appreciative of difference and sameness in themselves and others.

For Kids, *Call Me Tree* offers opportunities to:

- Become aware of gender assumptions and stereotypes and step away from “guessing” people's pronouns and gender based on stereotypes.
 - » Through my letter to readers (pg. 5) kids understand that guessing about someone's gender based on how they look can leave a lot of people out.
 - » When we introduce that the main character would have been assigned girl at birth, we can ask how does knowing this change their understanding of the other kids in the book?
 - » What if we imagined all the kids in the book went by she? What if they all went by he? or they? or tree!?
- Explore international, multicultural perspectives on gender beyond western ones.
 - » The book begins with nature, then connects the kids to their bodies through Yoga, specifically the Tree pose and variations thereof. This provides an opportunity to learn about Yoga and India. We can learn that India has a legal third gender. We can then reflect back on the book and explore the kids' genders.





How to Use this Book

Nested Holistic Non-Western Framework of Gender

Nature. Global cultures. Physical engagement. Pronoun expansion. Ideas of inclusion and difference. All of these elements combined create a scaffolding to hold a child in understanding nature, gender and themselves more wholly, while developing critical, contextual, inclusive, expansive thinking styles. Creating gender awareness outside of Western frames engages multiple levels of learning which strengthens our children and helps preempt gender based, and power-over dynamics prevalent in Western and patriarchal cultures.

While a single lesson is definitely possible, I suggest using the book to explore over the course of several days or weeks and tying in lessons of Nature, Global Cultures and ultimately Gender. The image to the left is a playful way to show this nested approach similar to the rings of a tree. You can even use it as a coloring page for kids as you move through the lessons. We start with Nature, move into Yoga and India then explore gender within this larger context.

• Begin with Nature

We begin from the outermost and largest framework and circle in, so to speak, slowly coming into smaller frameworks. Especially in settings in which gender is just beginning to be introduced as a subject, it is beneficial to begin with something as large and ultimately undeniable as nature. Looking at current nature research shows that gender is slowly becoming universally understood as well beyond the binary, or even ternary. This is true of all living things, including trees. Beginning your focus here with kids establishes a familiar base. Trees are everywhere showing multiple genders and interactions and can serve as a great teaching tool.

What this might look like: Focus on the trees in the book and in your current environment and nothing else to begin with. If gender is an important subject you want to support in your teaching environment, consider literally exhausting the “tree angle” in this book as a teaching opportunity. For example, how many different kinds of trees are there? what trees are in your local area? how are their leaves? their root systems? etc. Use the *Journey through the Book* (pgs. 7-14) [Nature](#) section for insights about the different spreads in *Call Me Tree*.

• Explore Yoga and India

Bringing in somatic awareness through yoga postures can happen either after or in conjunction with learning about trees. Whichever path you feel is best, make sure to connect what was learned about trees to the tree yoga pose and the child’s feeling of core self within the pose. It’s also important to see yoga within full context. It’s origin. It’s history. It’s intent.

What this might look like: Take the opportunity to learn about ancient and contemporary culture in India while learning the poses. Include that India has a legal 3rd gender and that



Hijras are one of the many Kiraan of Indian culture. Make the connection that all of nature is multi-gendered and as a part of nature, so are people. There are legal 3rd genders in a number of countries, largely because pre-Western, nature-based, indigenous cultures understood what has since been suppressed about gender and retained their cultural relevance. Nepal was the first to recognize 3rd gender in 2007, now India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Germany, New Zealand and Australia have followed, several states in the US now also recognize a third gender. Use the *Journey through the Book* (pgs. 7-14) [Yoga pose](#) section for insights about the different spreads in *Call Me Tree*.

• Ultimately Bring in Discussions of Gender

Now look at the gender aspect within the book. After learning about trees and nature, engaging in yoga and learning about India, gender can be seen within its larger context. It is no longer a singular, “complicated & confusing” focus, but something to be understood in a layered framework that is both global and personal.

What this might look like: At this point it may be beneficial to read to kids the “Note to My Readers” on the following page and explore the genders of the kids in the book. Use the *Journey through the Book* (pgs. 7-14) [Gender](#) section for insights about the different spreads in *Call Me Tree* and ways to talk with kids about it. This is also a perfect time to bring in additional support books like *They She He Me: Free to Be!* and *They, She, He easy as ABC* that dive more deeply into pronouns and expression. I also have a video of me reading both *Call Me Tree* and *They She He Me: Free to Be!* and discussing gender and pronouns (see the Additional Resources section).



Call Me Tree Gender Free

a note to my readers...

You may or may not notice something different about my new book, *Call Me Tree*. Nowhere in the story are boy/girl or pronouns used. No 'he' or 'she' anywhere! I found it easy to write this way because that's how I think of kids, as kids, not boy kids or girl kids.

I even requested that no 'he' or 'she' be used anywhere else in the book, like on the end pages or the back cover when talking about the story. I also asked the publisher to only refer to the main character as a child or kid when they talked about my book out in the world. Because I wanted *Call Me Tree* to be gender free!

Why? I'm glad you asked

Two reasons come to the top of my mind.

First, I know a lot of people. Some don't feel that they fit into the boy or the girl box and of course, some do! By not using 'he' or 'she,' I could include everyone! This is very important to me. **I want everyone to know that we all belong!**

And second, I thought it would be a great opportunity to talk about the main character in *Call Me Tree*. Let's call them 'Tree.' *Tree* is like a lot of people I know, including my own kids! Strong, curious, free! Now, if you were going to guess if *Tree* is 'he' or 'she,' which do you think?

I'm going to guess you'd say 'he' first, maybe because *Tree's* already been called 'he' by folks who have given *Call Me Tree* some really awesome reviews. *Tree* could be he, but maybe not! A lot of times we make guesses based on what we think is true, but often that can leave people out. **Tree's reminding us there are lots of different ways to be!**

I just remembered another top reason.

People who don't fit into the boy or the girl box get teased more than anybody. This is extra not cool to me. I happen to know all kids rock, so I want to make sure the ones that get picked on the most know they rock! Right?!

So *Call Me Tree* is gender free! Because all trees belong!

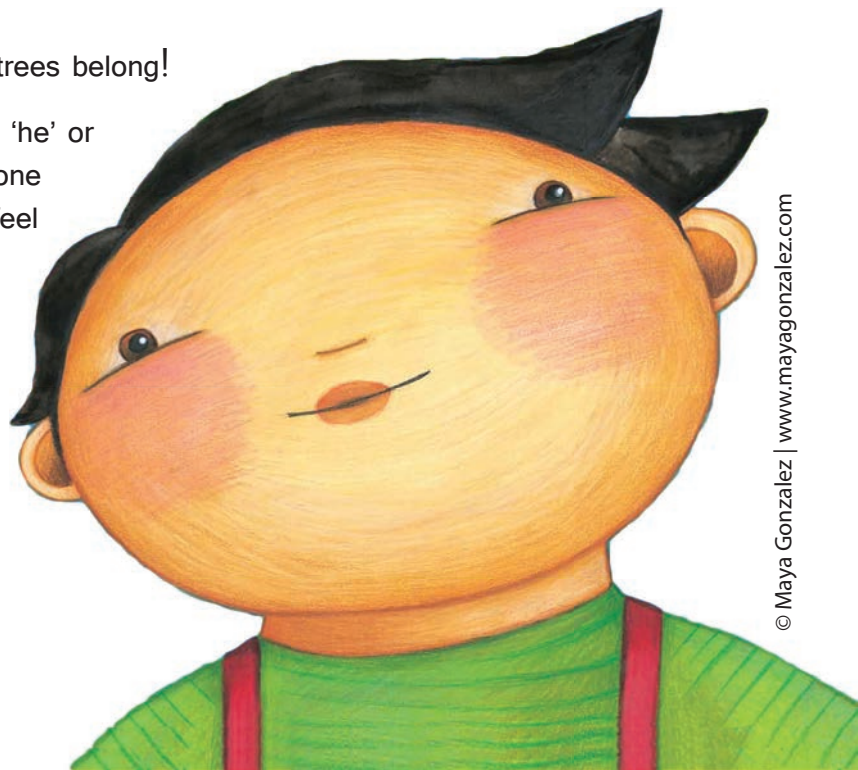
Try it on for a day. Play with not being called 'he' or 'she,' but only *Tree*, tall and strong! Just for one day, or even one afternoon. Would anything feel different? Would you be different?

Let's call it Tree Day.

Let's all be free. Let's all be trees!
Whatdya think?

Call me Tree!

Love, *mayatree*





THE STRONGER WE GROW INTO OURSELVES,
THE MORE WE CAN APPRECIATE IT IN OTHERS.

THE STRONGER WE ARE TOGETHER!





Journey through the Book

The book is meant to serve as a container to learn and imagine. The more familiar you become with the art, the text and how to look at them, the more it can serve as a place holder for you and the child (or children) to meet, explore and learn. You don't have to be the perfect spokesmodel for gender expansiveness. You can use the book and the layered curriculum to guide you in and even help you learn and explore with the kids.

This is what I call a DEEP READ.

It is a slowing down process. It supports paying attention to the different elements to support a fuller understanding of and engagement with the content, and to model a more inclusive, holistic way of thinking.

I hope having this deeper understanding of the book coupled with the nested curriculum will support you in developing your own voice and authenticity in relation to gender. I believe the more relaxed, playful and curious you are, the more solid and confident you will be. It is in the nonverbal that we communicate our strongest. Because the gender binary is so embedded in our culture, it is valuable to open up new ways of thinking along with new ways of teaching and even new ways of being inside of ourselves. Use the book as a place to meet and play.

When reading the book, I encourage you to refer to the main character as a child or kid and not use a pronoun.

• SPREAD ONE: I begin within the deep dark earth

What to notice in the text: The only pronoun used is I. This is a beginning. It is about the inside and being connected to nature.

Art: Child in golden bubble under earth under night sky with pink thought bubble. Children may notice pink around star up in the corner too.

What to notice in the art: Earth and sky are alive with pattern and motion. Child is resting deep within this alive environment as a part of it. They are like a seed. Their dream, as shown by the pink bubble above their head (a shape reminiscent of a question mark), is also in a seed state. Notice the green and blue clothes the child is wearing. Green a color of growth and blue like the sky.

Nature: The child is like a tree seed nestled in the Earth with the beginning of a dream.

Yoga pose: Balasana or child's pose, an introductory pose of rest and connection to the Earth to support bringing the focus inward.

Gender: the child is wearing pants, a t-shirt, suspenders and has medium short hair. They are dreaming a pink bubble. Here is a child stereotypically "dressed like a boy" having



a pink dream, stereotypically a 'girl color,' while attending to their deepest self and their connection to nature.

MAKE THE CONNECTIONS: notice how the child is similar to the tree, practice the child yoga pose and recall the feeling-somatic awareness, use art in the book to engage imagination about feeling like a seed.

• SPREAD TWO: A seed, A tree, Free to be free

What to notice in the text: calling out the idea of seed (implied in the first spread) and that the seed is for a tree and it is free

Art: there is a golden tree growing up with an open arm and hand at the center of it. A completely pink sky with clouds and swirls and a green hill with golden pods flying everywhere.

What to notice in the art: there is an open space of a child's arm and hand, inviting the child to lay their hand there and be part of the art and tree in the book. The golden bubble the child was curled up within in the first spread has expanded into the shape of a tree with pods flying off! There is a perfect shape to grow into already known inside the tree. Pods very similar to the small shape the child was resting in. The dream bubble has now expanded into the entire sky with pink clouds, like a world of pink. The green of the child's shirt is echoed in the green hill behind the tree, as if their body is the Earth.

Nature: this is the dream of the seed. It already senses or dreams what it will grow into. There is lots of room and motion. The tree is based on the Elm trees I grew up around. They have seed pods. <https://en.wikipedia.org/?title=Elm>

Gender: The entire sky is pink, if seen as symbolic, it implies that the larger world may try to impose a world of 'pink expectations' on the child.

MAKE THE CONNECTIONS: notice connections between child and tree, trees and freedom to grow into their natural shape, child reaching/growing like the tree dream. There is an open space on the page for the child to reach up into and imagine themselves growing into the tree they are meant to be. This inner hand is cushioned by the shape of the golden tree and given enough space to grow into their perfect shape.

• SPREAD THREE: I dream I am reaching Dreaming and reaching Reaching and dreaming

What to notice in the text: still use of the pronoun I. Dreaming is confirmed and reaching.

Art: the child is now turned toward the reader and actively reaching up into the space inside the open hand shape inside the golden tree. The starry night sky is fading into pink and yellow. The pink dream and clouds are smaller and more contained.



What to notice in the art: this spread combines the first two spreads, and shows that something is changing. The deep blue night sky is turning pink and then bright yellow with the dawning of the day. The pink dream sky also seems to be more contained and now only the pink clouds are in the sky instead of an entirely pink sky.

Nature: the sky is changing from night into day

Yoga pose: opening up from the child's pose.

Gender: the child is now actively reaching up into the dream tree with the potential of growing into their perfect shape. They are free to be exactly who they are. The all pink dream sky is now contained with just a couple of pink clouds bridging the dream world and the now dawning sky. Symbolically not denying the current existence of 'pink girl expectations' but also not being limited by them.

MAKE THE CONNECTIONS: invoke the feeling of waking up, stretching, night turning into day

• SPREAD FOUR: I wake UP I see sky Sky as high As a bird Can fly

What to notice in the text: the story has moved from being focused inside, underground, dreamscape to up and out and in the full day sky. They have woken from a dream state and now their vision is directed by a flying bird toward the sky.

Art: a whole shift from underground and night time to the dawning of the day and the sky. The child is also in a more upright position. They are now kneeling with a big tree behind them. There is a yellow bird in the sky near the tree.

What to notice in the art: green the color of growth is now the dominant color. The tree, the Earth and the child. The bird is the same color as the golden cocoon like space and the dream tree from the previous spreads. The bird serves as a transition support as the child grows through their dream into the real world. Pods on the ground.

Nature: solid, rooted tree, pods on the ground, notice the bird. Birds are very connected to trees!

ASL sign: the left hand of the child is in the shape of the American Sign Language symbol

SECRET: I often hide secrets in my books! This one includes the initials of my two kids, Sky and Zai. There's a Z at the end of the pointer finger on the I LOVE YOU hand and an S near the base of the tree below the right hand, both in the green grass.

Gender: the child is awake, facing the sky and bird and has their arms spread open with one hand in an I LOVE YOU symbol. This is about coming out into the world as their full self, being open to possibility while being a part of everything they see.



MAKE THE CONNECTIONS: consider the bird is serving as a guide, a transition support from inside to outside. The bird is even the same color as the golden orb the child was in, the tree pods and the dream tree that held the child in the previous spread. Their arms are wide like branches or wings or both!

• SPREAD FIVE: I reach And I rise

What to notice in the text: before they were reaching and dreaming. Now when they reach, they actually rise. They have moved beyond the dreaming stage into action. They are growing into themselves in every way, identity, physically, socially.

Art: the child is in the mountain pose. Feet planted firmly alongside the roots of the tree they are standing in front of, torso in line with the trunk, arms out like the branches, but facing slightly down as if they were growing UP. Bird flying away as they look back at the child. Still see pods on the ground.

What to notice in the art: notice that the child looks completely integrated into the environment. Their colors reflect the sky blue in their pants, the green Earth and leaves in their t-shirt, the bark browns in their skin. They are growing like the tree and are lined up with the tree.

Nature: recall how trees grow. Starting inside the earth, break up and out into sunshine.

Yoga pose: tadasana, mountain pose. The essence of the mountain pose is about standing tall and strong. One of the most basic poses that leads to many others and serves as a resting pose in between different poses.

MAKE THE CONNECTIONS: notice similarities between the tree and child, birds and higher perspective.

• SPREAD SIX: And what do I see With my eyes As I rise?

What to notice in the text: once they are growing into themselves they can look around, even have a clearer/higher perspective as they rise.

Art: really all about the face. Face as a sense of self and identity is front and center (connected to my Claiming Face curriculum - www.reflectionpress.com/claimingface). And from this position of feeling solid about themselves they can look around and see the world around them.

What to notice in the art: continued connection between child and trees. The shapes of their hair echoes those of the leaves and they're both wearing green.

Nature: SKY!!! Everyone is connected through the sky at all times. People, the trees, everyone at the same time, all together, all the time.



Gender: this is a great spread to look at the child closely. What do we know about this child at this point? How do they feel? Just like trees, everyone is meant to grow into exactly who they are. And just like trees there are as many different ways to be as there are people! This would be a good time to refer again to the *Note to My Readers* (pg. 5).

MAKE THE CONNECTIONS: call out that when the child feels strong and solid after growing up powerful like a tree themselves, being exactly who they are, then notice what's next?

• **SPREAD SEVEN: Trees! More and more trees Trees and trees Just like me!**

What to notice in the text: brings us back to trees, which has not specifically been mentioned since the tree dream with the text: A seed A tree Free to be free. After spending time embodying tree-ness, now the child sees all these kids and trees around them, and they are all alike, in that they are strong and growing and being exactly who they are meant to be.

Art: we no longer see the original child. For a moment we can see what they see. It's a different perspective. It's more like the bird! Less focused on self, now looking outward toward others. The child sees all different trees and kids in variations of the tree pose.

What to notice in the art: there are different levels of difference and sameness going on. Everyone is in a tree pose, but they are all variations. Everyone is standing with a tree but they are all different kinds of trees. Everyone looks different, but they are all kids.

Nature: there are approximately 100,000 kinds of trees. And more than 400 billion trees on Earth. Every one of them is different. Can 2 trees grow to be exactly the same?

Yoga pose: Vrksasana, the Tree pose. The essence of Tree Pose is to find balance within oneself and in relation to others. However, balance is not found in this pose in a rigid manner. In Tree Pose, your body may sway, like a tree does in the wind, but your foot stays rooted into the ground.

Gender: look at the new characters. Based on what we see, can we tell what their genders are? Can we tell what their pronouns are? If we remember that the main character was assigned girl at birth, does that change how we see them? Does it change how we see the other kids'? Look at the art and imagine all of the kids were assigned boys. Look again and imagine that all of the kids were assigned girls. Now look for a third time and imagine you don't know how any of them were assigned. Does it matter whether we know?

MAKE THE CONNECTIONS: there are more trees in the world than there are people and ALL of the trees are different than each other-just like people.



- **SPREAD EIGHT: A tree I am A tree I stand On a sidewalk On a mountain By a river or a road**

What to notice in the text: the main character is back and expanding their vision to see lots of different experiences. They begin with themselves A tree I am A tree I stand and let it expand from there.

Art: lots of different experiences are portrayed as the main child looks out across the land.

What to notice in the art: What began with them seeing the trees that were close to them in the last spread has expanded to them seeing many more trees with different experiences. They are all the same in that they are all kids with trees in an outdoor setting. But they are also all different, different looking kids, trees and environments.

Nature: a diverse array of environments and trees related to those environments.

Yoga pose: Continuing to notice the tree pose, mountain pose. Ardha Chandrasana, moon pose. The essence of the moon pose is to lean into our body and our emotions.

Gender: look at more new characters. Based on what we see, can we tell what their genders are? What their pronouns are?

MAKE THE CONNECTIONS: maintaining connections between kids and trees. There are trees everywhere. Obviously that's why in India there is a Tree pose. Imagine which of these kids could be from India. Imagine the trees there.

- **SPREAD NINE: Some trees reach Some trees teach Some trees stand so still**

What to notice in the text: the main character is gone again and we see from their perspective. They continue to expand their perspective as they now acknowledge that what someone does is also unique to each person.

Art: there are three trees. Two close up and one in the distance, each with children.

What to notice in the art: there is a playful flamboyant tree and child, a walnut tree that has a lot to teach with three kids paying attention to different experiences in the tree and a child in the distance, quiet and alone. There is not a right or wrong way to be a tree or to be a child. Sometimes we are quiet. The environment has opened up again to show not just different places and how the environment supports your growth like in the last spread, but also shows what you do is also different and makes you who you are.

Nature: the central Walnut tree shows nuts, leaves and a nest as well as roots and a powerful trunk.

Gender: continue looking at each kid's uniqueness. Flamboyance! Look at the child on the far left side. Trees, just like kids can be flamboyant. In fact, there is a tree that is called



a Flamboyant tree, Delonix Regia (although the one in the art is not one of those). It is perfectly natural to be flamboyant if you are that kind of tree!

MAKE THE CONNECTIONS: continue making the same connections as the previous spread.

- **SPREAD TEN: Some sing songs Some sing along All trees have roots All trees belong**

What to notice in the text: SOME, not focused on I anymore, expanding further out in perspective until the focus lands on ALL! Sing songs alludes to storytelling. Roots connect to everyone belonging and being a part of nature and humanity.

Art: the three kids on the left side are in the moon pose as Quaking Aspen. Their connected root system is visible through the Earth. The main character is visible again.

What to notice in the art: roots touching, connected, with hearts. Able to see into the Earth again like in the first spreads when the main character was dreaming as a seed.

Nature: Quaking Aspen grow as one whole organism rising from one root system.

Yoga pose: Noticing the moon pose again

Gender: maintain curiosity. Everyone belongs because everyone is connected.

MAKE THE CONNECTIONS: roots and trees, roots and people. Purpose of roots. Even if someone doesn't know their family origins doesn't mean they don't have roots, just not visible, like trees.

- **SPREAD ELEVEN: Call me tree Because I am tall I am strong And like a tree I am free**

What to notice in the text: began with self, opened up to seeing others nearby, then extended that out to see other environments, expanded again to see other experiences then finally to include ALL. Now, back to the beginning and their own journey as a tree. They reached up and out until they are the tree they dreamed of. Claiming of self and experience.

Art: return to just the main character and their tree. Their body echoes the position of the tree and the process of growing they have been undergoing.

What to notice in the art: full shift in orientation. The image is vertical, the tree fills the whole space, having grown UP!

Nature: trees grow into their perfect shape and size. Some naturally grow very tall while others stay short and wide. Some blossom, some have pods, some have fruit...

Yoga pose: mountain pose/tree pose combo, see above.



Gender: CALL ME TREE, a neutral term. TREE can be played with as a gender neutral pronoun! (A good opportunity to bring in other books related to pronouns like *They She He Me: Free to Be!* and *ABC easy as They, She, He*)

MAKE THE CONNECTIONS: what has Tree experienced? What have they seen? What has being a tree taught them?



Additional Books & Resources

For Kids

- *They She He Me: Free to Be!* by Maya & Matthew
- *They, She, He easy as ABC* by Maya & Matthew
- *The Boy and the Bindi* by Vivek Shraya, illustrated by Rajni Perera
- *They Call Me Mix* by Lourdes Rivas, illustrated by Breena Nunez
- *The Gender Wheel: a story about bodies and gender for every body*: geared toward ages 7-10, explores colonization in relation to gender
- VIDEO: Book Reading of *Call Me Tree* and *They She He Me: Free to Be!* (including a sneak peek of *They, She, He easy as ABC*) - www.genderwheel.com/pronouns

For Grown-Ups

- Establishing a Holistic Gender Perspective - 5 Part Series
 - » Part 2: Multicultural Awareness provides resources and videos for educators to gain more understanding of gender in other cultures. Also included are coloring pages and book recommendations to share with kids.
 - » www.genderwheel.com/5-part-gender-series