

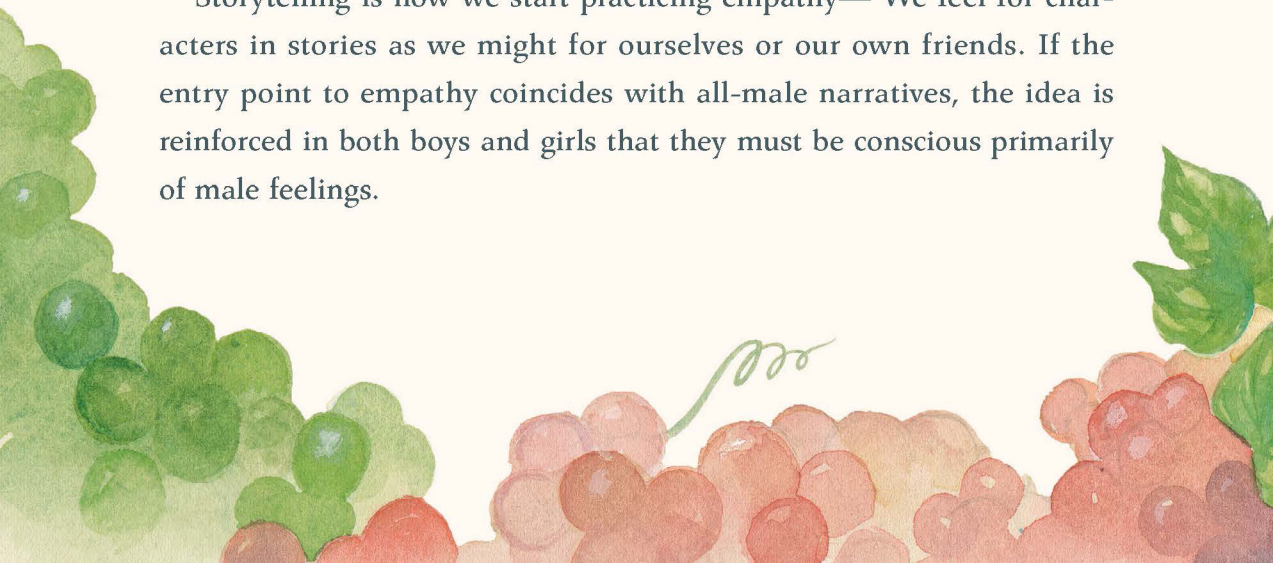
When my daughter was born, I was introduced to a whole new genre of literature: the feminist baby book. Every gift we received seemed to be a book about fierce girls, women who changed history, and yes, literal feminist babies.

I, myself, was undergoing a transformation—understanding (too late in my life) how deeply entrenched I was in the patriarchy, but I still had to admit—I didn't want to read feminist baby books to my girl. It felt sad to explain to a small child that girls and women have so many obstacles or why they are treated differently, before they've even started experiencing the world.

And no one gave me those books for my son to read five years earlier. It felt wrong that boys get to read normal, fun stories about caterpillars and rainy days and numbers that talk, and girls get loaded up with the socially conscious seriousness already. Also, boys need the education as much as, if not more than, girls do.

So, I've been reading the "regular" books to my daughter that I had read previously to my son, but I've been newly struck by the fact that nearly all the characters in these books are male—including the animals. I started noticing that when I pointed out animals in real life, I tended to use the pronoun he. "See the duck? What does he say?" "Oh look at the doggie! What's his name?"

Storytelling is how we start practicing empathy— We feel for characters in stories as we might for ourselves or our own friends. If the entry point to empathy coincides with all-male narratives, the idea is reinforced in both boys and girls that they must be conscious primarily of male feelings.



Currently, with the prevalence of male characters in kids' books, boys aren't given enough practice or incentive getting into a female mind. Girls and women are given too much practice and incentive getting into a male mind. (And when the protagonist of a book is female, it tends to be "a book for girls" and boys don't read it.)

In response, I started changing the pronouns in my daughters' classic books. I decided, for my own first children's book, to use classic fables because I didn't want to feel like we had to throw out the history of child-raising—instead I wanted to make the stories reflective of the actual world, where about half of the animal kingdom is female, and half is male, and some are neither or both.

These classic tales have great messages (hard work pays off, perseverance and grit win over hubris and haste, abundance can be dangerous) and are great ways to give a view of our animal kingdom that isn't skewed. The stories give kids the morals we've always liked to pass down from generation to generation, but are "gender-safe," so we're not telling any of our children that boys' inner lives are more valuable to imagine than those of girls.

Most importantly, I want them to be fun! I hope you and your children purely enjoy these stories. No one should feel that it's a revolution simply to depict the world of animals as it exists in nature. I hope they just feel like great stories we want to read again and again, the way I do with my children's favorites.

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