Form for gender examination of the characters in a picture book

Which types of children's books are best suited for use with this examination form?

- An ordinary picture book
- Aimed at children between one and six years of age
- A leaflet/brochure with illustrations/pictures and text
- A picture book app for tablets

The analysis strategies are not suitable for poems, nonsense verse and factual books.

Read the book, look at the pictures and answer the questions. If necessary, leaf through the book to answer a specific question. Use the answers as the basis for assessing whether the picture book expands or confirms traditional gender norms.

Questions about the book's main character

a) Active-passive: choose one of the options

The text and images of the book presents the main character as …

☐ 1 strong, brave, a hero
☐ 2 cheeky, mischievous, independent or adventurous
☐ 3 careful, anxious or withdrawn
☐ 4 passive or a victim of others or circumstance

The main character gets things happen and affects the environment significantly
Other players makes things happen or substances sets frame. He/she affects other indirectly to act
The second main character does little or can do little to change the situation

b) Emotions-absence of emotions: choose one of the options

The thoughts, emotions and vulnerabilities of the main character are in the text and the images of the book …

☐ 1 portrayed in great detail or is central for the plot
☐ 2 displayed or included as an important part
☐ 3 less important compared to the other aspects of the book
☐ 4 not described or not central
Do children’s books expand or confirm traditional gender norms?
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c) Relevance of appearance: choose one of the options

The text and the images of the book presents the main character as ...

1. pretty, and the portrayal a beautiful appearance is load-bearing, or central to the narrative
2. beautiful, pretty, handsome or cute
3. pretty or not, appearance is irrelevant to the story
4. ugly, monstrous or less attractive – through the whole story

d) Identity: choose one of the options

The text and the images of the book presents the main character as ...

1. A boy or a man
2. Girl or woman
3. A person who can’t be clearly categorized as either girl, woman, boy or man
4. A male animal or creature
5. A female animal or creature
6. An animal or being which can’t be clearly categorized as either girl, woman, boy or man

Questions about the book’s second main character
The book has only one main character: go to the question i) about the parent figures in the book.

e) Active-passive: choose one of the options

The text and images of the book presents the second main character as …

1. strong, brave, a hero
2. cheeky, mischievous, independent or adventurous
3. careful, anxious or withdrawn
4. passive or a victim of others or circumstance

Other players make things happen or substances sets the frame. He/she affects other indirectly to act

The second main character does little or can do little to change the situation

f) Emotions-absence of emotions: choose one of the options

The thoughts, emotions and vulnerabilities of the second main character are in the text and the images of the book …

1. portrayed in great detail or is central for the plot
2. displayed or included as an important part
3. less important compared to the other aspects of the book
4. not described or not central
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g) Relevance of appearance: choose one of the options

The text and images of the book presents the second main character as …

☐ 1 pretty, and the portrayal a beautiful appearance is load-bearing, or central to the narrative
☐ 2 beautiful, pretty, handsome or cute
☐ 3 pretty or not, appearance is irrelevant to the story
☐ 4 ugly, monstrous or less attractive – through the whole story

h) Identity: choose one of the options

The text and the images of the book presents the second main character as …

☐ 1 A boy or a man
☐ 2 Girl or woman
☐ 3 A person who can’t be clearly categorized as either girl, woman, boy or man
☐ 4 A male animal or being
☐ 5 A female animal or being
☐ 6 An animal or being which does not clearly can be categorized as a girl, woman, boy or man

Questions about the book's first parent character (father, mother etc.)
The book does not have a mother, father or parent figure, go to “Keys in assessing the picture book.”

i) Intimate-distant: choose one of the options

The text and the images in the book presents the parent character as …

☐ 1 the child's closest carer
☐ 2 present and caring
☐ 3 one that attempts, but has problems with being a good parent
☐ 4 distant, little supportive or one that make problems

j) Identity: choose one of the options

The text and the images of the book presents the parents character as …

☐ 1 Woman
☐ 2 Man
☐ 3 A person who can’t be clearly categorized as either girl, woman, boy or man
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Questions about the book's second parent character (father, mother, etc.)
The book has just one parent figure, go to “Keys in assessing the picture book.”

k) Intimate-distant: choose one of the options
The text and images of the book presents the second parent character as ...

☐ 1 the child's closest career  ☐ 2 present and caring  ☐ 3 one that attempts, but has problems with being a good parent  ☐ 4 distant, little supportive or one that make problems

l) Identity: choose one of the options
The text and the images of the book presents the second parent character as ...

☐ 1 A woman  ☐ 2 A man  ☐ 3 A person who can’t be clearly categorized as either girl, woman, boy or man

Keys in assessing the picture book
Go through the answers and assess the picture book. Do they give you a basis to assess whether the book expands or confirms traditional gender norms?

a and e) There are fewer female than male main characters described as strong, brave or as heroes.

b and f) Fewer boys than girls have been portrayed with their thoughts, feelings and vulnerabilities on display.

c and g) In many picture books and booklets the beauty or appearance of the female main character is fundamental. Alternatively a girl audience is targeted by making the book in itself is cute or beautiful.

d and h) There are significantly fewer picture books with a female than a male main characters. There are several examples of human main characters in picture books who neither fit in the “girl” or “boy” box. Animals or creatures are often portrayed with the characteristics of a boy or a man, or the gender is open to interpretation. Albeit very few animal main characters are portrayed as girls or women.

i and k) Traditionally fewer fathers have been portrayed as close and caring.

j and l) Until recently same sex parents have been non-existent.