

Gender and Early Years: Language



What do words convey?

This exercise is adapted from Amnesty International's Women's Rights school pack. Jot down your answers here or on a piece of paper.

1. Make a list of pet names and adjectives commonly used for boys and girls (make two lists, one for each). If there is crossover, write the word in both lists.

2. List as many words as you can think of in which the word 'man' is used. Find an equivalent word or phrase which includes women, eg manning/staffing



What do words convey?

3. Think of some words in the categories below which are used to describe men and women. Put a plus or minus sign next to them to indicate whether they are positive or negative (or patronising).

Men as Food (e.g. beefy):

Women as Food (e.g. sugar):

Men talking (e.g. debate):

Women talking (e.g. gossip):

Men as animals (e.g. stud):

Women as animals (e.g. cow):

Men who are sexually active:
(e.g. player):

Women who are sexually active
(e.g. slut):



What do words convey?

4. Write down images and words commonly associated with the following words:

Masculine:

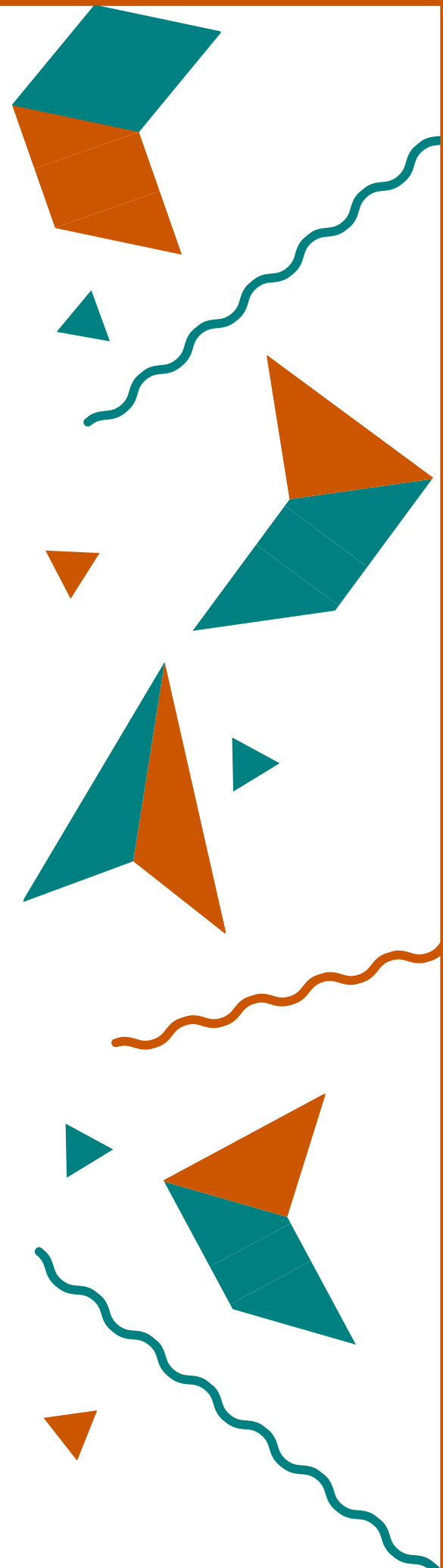
Feminine:

Bachelor:

Feminist:

Spinster:

Mistress:



What do words convey?

Once you have completed all the activities, take a moment to look at your lists and reflect on what you have come up with. What messages do you think children might internalise from the language commonly used around them?

While we may not be able to change what everyone says, we can make decisions about the language that we use. We can also start a dialogue with our kids as they get older about the gendered language patterns we've noticed here and confront the messages head on.



Language and Body Image

How do you talk about your own body? What do you say about yourself when you look in the mirror? All too often we, as adults, make negative remarks about ourselves:

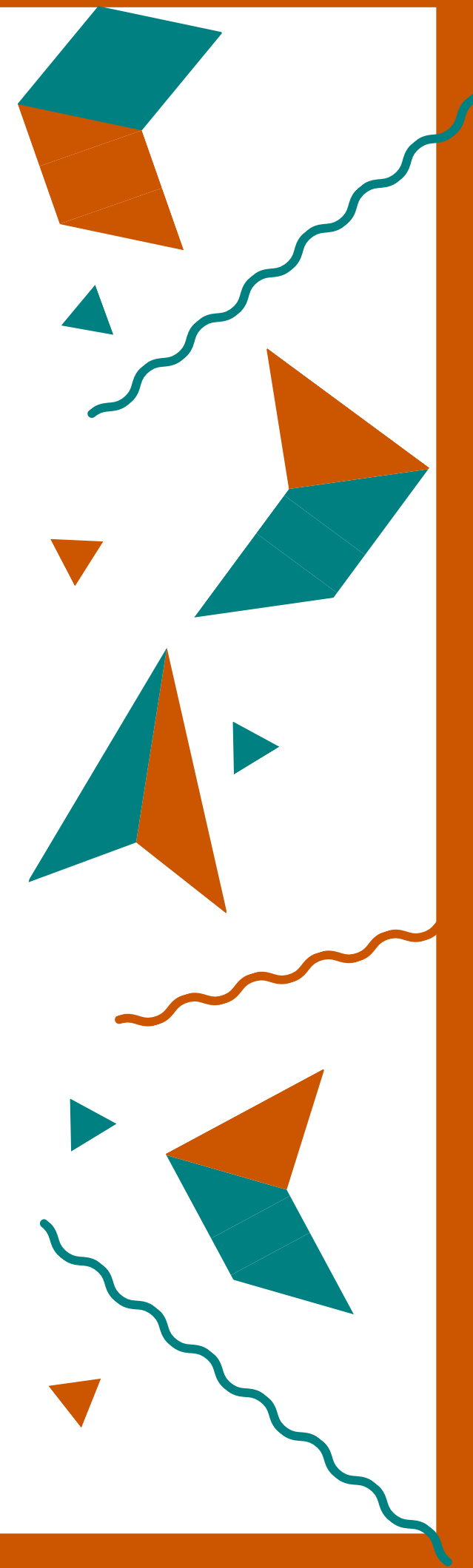
"Do I look fat in this?"

"I look haggard today!"

"Ugh I hate that photo, look at my double chin."

Our kids listen to everything we say. What will they learn from what they hear? As they grow up, what insecurities might they develop?

Tips on building body confidence: <https://www.amightygirl.com/blog?p=25273>



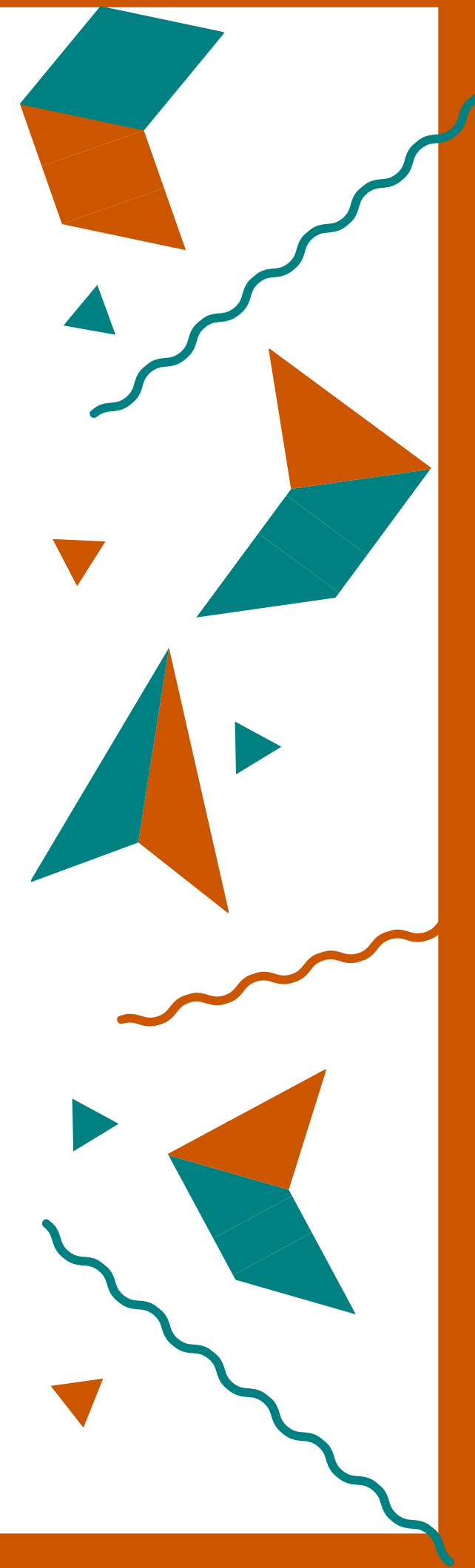
Language and Healthy Relationships

One area we felt we couldn't ignore while we are on the subject of how we talk to our kids is relationships. It might sound crazy when we're talking about under 5s, but there are two things we, as parents of little ones, have already heard:

"Oh look, she's got her first boyfriend!" This phrase, while usually said in jest and without ill intention, sends the message that boys and girls can only have romantic relationships. Not to mention an assumption of heterosexuality!

"He's just being mean because he likes you." This all too common sentiment sends problematic messages to both boys and girls about appropriate ways to show affection.

We're sending you to A Mighty Girl again for this one; their excellent blog post on this subject sums it up well: <https://www.amightygirl.com/blog?p=21631>

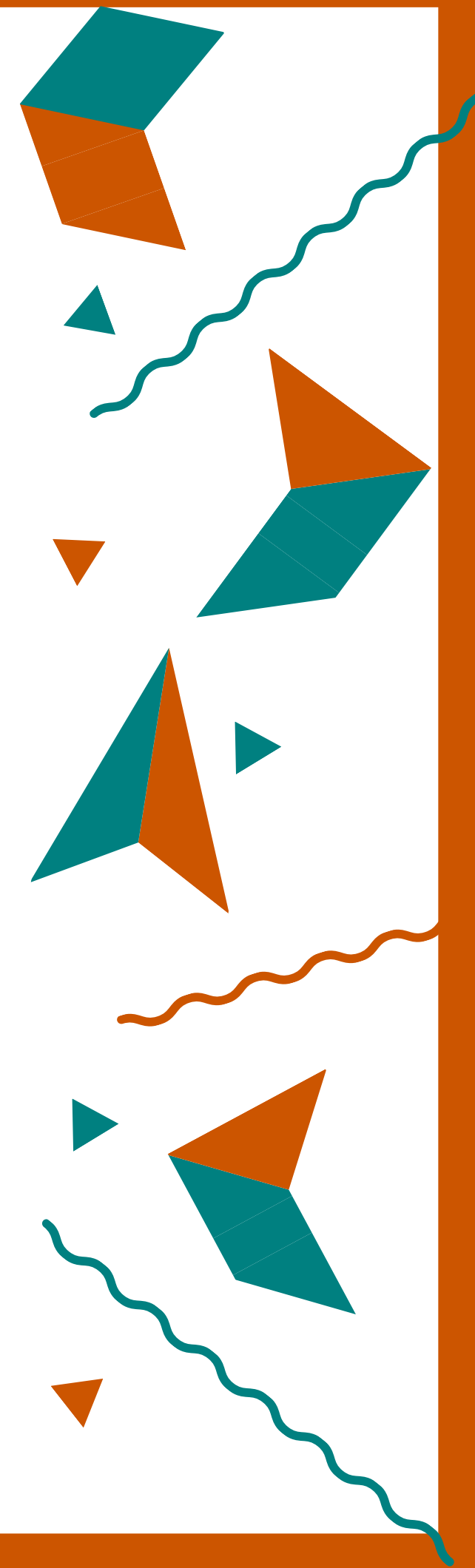


The Perfection Complex

"Many tweens and teens struggle with anxiety and perfectionism" according to research explored by blog 'A Mighty Girl'. We recommend reading these two blog posts in particular to find out what seemingly harmless phrases might be sending the wrong messages to our kids.

<https://www.amightygirl.com/blog?p=20598>

<https://www.amightygirl.com/blog?p=21158>



Equity vs Equality

Equity and equality are two related concepts with important differences. It's the difference between treating all children the same (i.e. putting the same toys out and letting everyone choose what they want) and giving some children the encouragement they need to counteract the cultural stereotypes already at play in their decision making (i.e. actively encouraging the girls to play with trucks and the boys to play with dolls).

For a 3-minute read on the difference between equity and equality and why equity is important, check out this blog from Social Change UK: <https://social-change.co.uk/blog/2019-03-29-equality-and-equity>.



Equity vs Equality

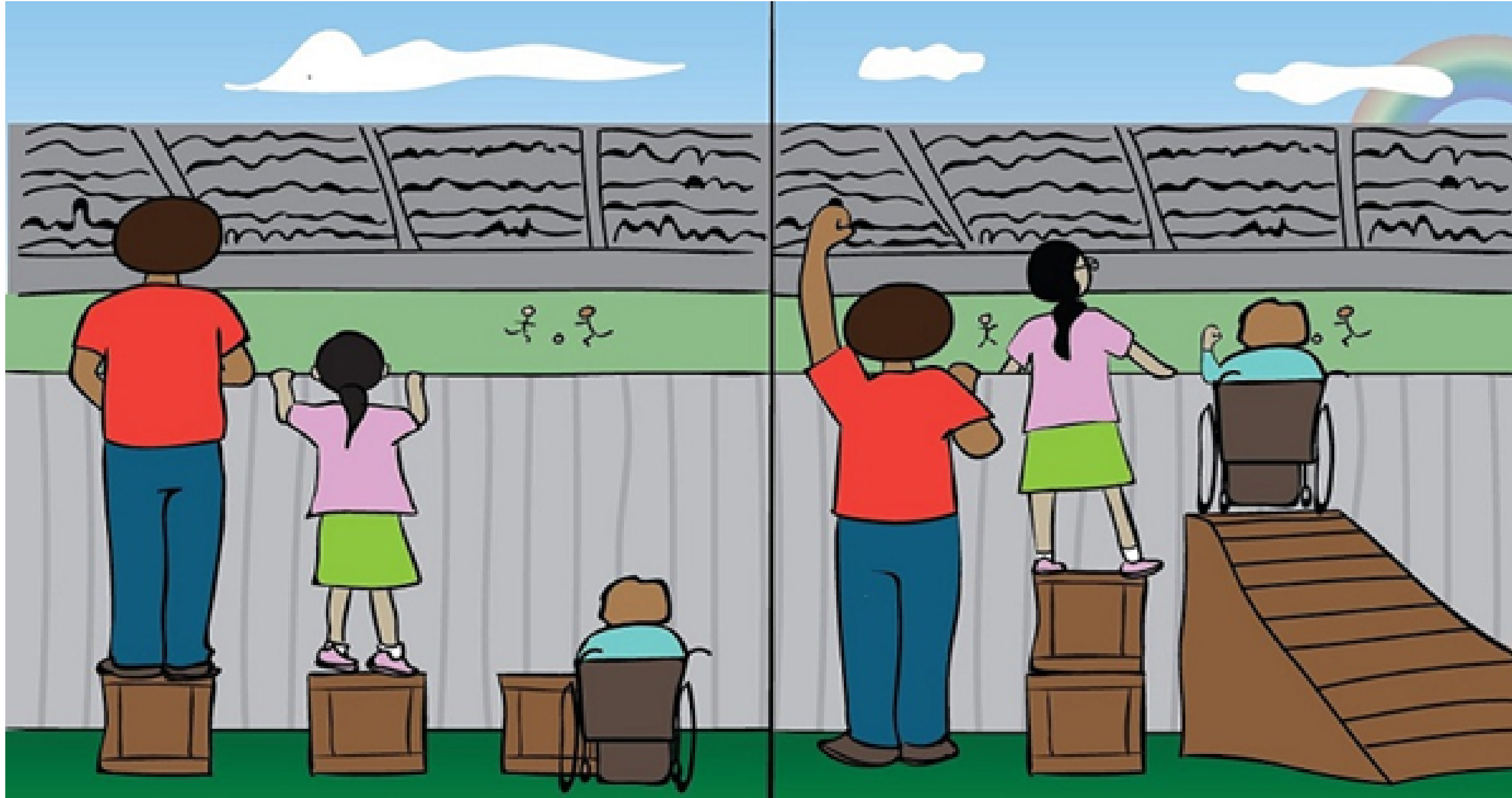


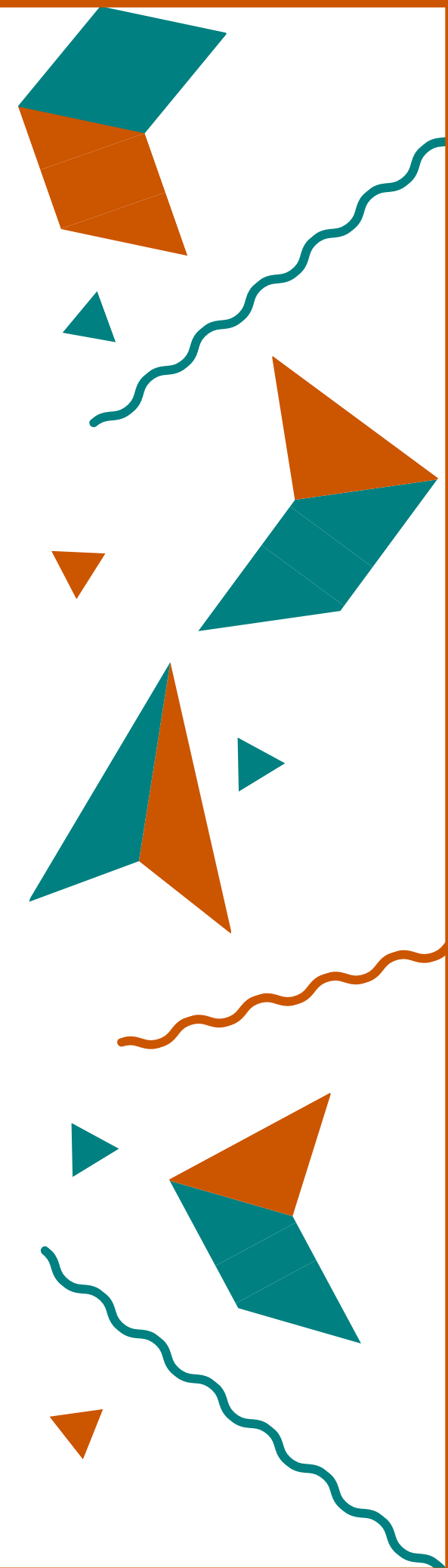
Image credit Maryam Abdul-Kareem



Challenge: Compliment Swap

Challenge for next week: try the 'compliments swap' challenge referred to in the Guardian article below. "This involves replacing praise focused on appearance with praise relating to character. For example, instead of commenting on a person's shoes or hair, the emphasis is moved to remarking on astute observations, acts of bravery or kindness. Even the most enlightened people are usually surprised when they begin noticing how often they unconsciously reinforce the notion that a woman's worth is nothing more than the sum of her parts. This is something that can be replicated on social media."

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/sep/22/girls-looks-teach-children-appearance-stereotypes>



Resources

A few links to websites, resources, videos and blogs that you might find interesting to view when you have the time.

- Amnesty International's Women's Rights resource: <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/resources/activity-pack-womens-rights-global-gender-inequality>
- 'A Mighty Girl' on inadvertently increasing girls' anxiety: <https://www.amightygirl.com/blog?p=20598>
- 'A Mighty Girl' on why bright girls struggle: <https://www.amightygirl.com/blog?p=21158>
- 'A Mighty Girl' on ways to help your daughter love her body: <https://www.amightygirl.com/blog?p=25273>
- 'A Mighty Girl' on the idea of "mean because he likes you": <https://www.amightygirl.com/blog?p=21631>
- Compliment Swap challenge: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/sep/22/girls-looks-teach-children-appearance-stereotypes>

