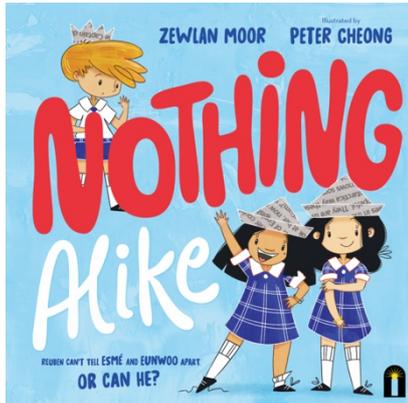


# Teacher's Notes



## *Nothing Alike*

Written by Zewlan Moor

Illustrated by Peter Cheong

Teacher's Notes by Bec Kavanagh

These notes may be reproduced for use within schools free of charge, but not offered in any part for commercial sale.

Copyright © Hardie Grant Children's Publishing 2023.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

### RECOMMENDED FOR

3+ aged readers (grades P-1)

### KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- Learning areas: English
- General capabilities:
  - AC9EFLA07
  - AC9EFLA08
  - AC9EFLE02
  - AC9E1LE02
  - AC9E1LA07

## THEMES

- Stereotypes
- Perception
- Race/Racism/Antiracism
- Microaggressions
- #SorryWrongAsian
- Cultural blindness
- Differences
- Friendship

## SYNOPSIS

Reuben thinks his classmates Esmé and Eunwoo look so similar that he can't tell them apart. But the more that Reuben thinks about it, the more he realises that Esmé and Eunwoo are very different people, and he can tell them apart.

Esmé smells like a peach squishy and has a rounder face. She loves hash browns dipped in apple sauce. While Eunwoo likes Reuben and has kind eyes. Her favourite colour is yellow. Reuben realises that if he takes the time to get to know people, he'll stop judging them by their similarities, and be able to see that they're nothing alike.

*Nothing Alike* is a funny, relatable book that gently pushes back against microaggressions and stereotypes, especially around Asian people, and encourages children (and their parents) to take responsibility in getting to know people.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR/ ILLUSTRATOR

---

**Zewlan Moor** is a Brisbane-based GP with an English Literature degree. She writes playful children's books, some of which are based on her Filipino-Australian heritage.

**Peter Cheong** spent several years in the Australian army before pursuing a career in illustration. He currently resides in Perth (Whadjuk Region), Western Australia with his amazing wife and baby (and cat), creating characters and telling their stories.

## A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

---

*Nothing Alike* is based on a true story, and a common experience among Asian people. I was continually mistaken for another Asian writer colleague, despite us looking nothing alike. In a curious twist of fate, my son came home from his new school and could not tell his two Asian classmates apart.

Much as we like to think that children do not 'see race', they do take on the views of the people around them and do classify and sometimes exclude people because of their race or other visible differences. The Children's Community School of Philadelphia shared in their 2018 graphic 'They're not too young to talk about race': 'Adults often worry that talking about race will encourage racial bias in children, but the opposite is true. Silence about race reinforces racism by letting children draw their own conclusions based on what they see.' And what they see is often, unfortunately, structural racism and inequality.

While this is much less obvious in our increasingly multicultural society (I have had feedback that this does not occur and is 'not a thing' in today's schools), it still occurs in less ethnically diverse areas of Australia. Even, to my chagrin, in my household where one parent is Asian. I did not have a discussion with my son about racism, stereotyping and prejudice at that time because I did not want to give him a lecture or workshop about these topics. I did not want to alienate him or make him feel ashamed. But I did gently question him about whether the two girls were *really* identical. This planted the idea in his mind that it would be possible to distinguish his classmates – if he took the time to get to know them and really see them as individuals.

The questions I asked him formed the basis of this story, but I removed the parent figure. I wanted to allow Reuben to see the absurdity of his stereotyping behaviour on his own. Though it might seem like a missed opportunity to not have Esmé and Eunwoo as the main characters of the story, it was a conscious decision on my part. I decided *not* to put the burden of teaching onto the Asian girls. Frankly, as we have seen in #BlackLivesMatter, people of colour are exhausted from having to educate their white acquaintances about racism. Surely people can step up, recognise their own harmful biases, and educate themselves? In this story, Reuben does exactly this: he comes to see *his* problem and solve it over time, instead of avoiding the girls or blaming them (even lightheartedly) for looking alike. And the girls end up cheekily defiant.

While the ending suggests getting confused for someone else can happen to white kids as well, this behaviour does not usually extend beyond the classroom. But for Asian people, this can be an everyday reality. If you search #SorryWrongAsian on Twitter, you will see how commonly this occurs. It happens in the classroom and keeps happening to Asian people in higher education and in the workplace. Although it may seem like an innocent and harmless mistake, it can have serious economic and social consequences when people are continually confused for another Asian person in the workplace: they may often receive important emails that aren't for them, or miss the ones that are for them, and they may be passed over for



promotion because they are continually confused with a lesser-performing colleague. The mistake isn't harmless; it's not something to laugh over and dismiss.

While light in tone, this book is deeply serious about friendship and being an antiracist. It's also a philosophical book about perception and how we view the people around us.

## **THEMES**

---

### Stereotypes

A stereotype is when we make assumptions about a person based on their skin colour, or religion, gender or other arbitrary factors of their identity. Discuss the stereotypes that students know and have experienced themselves. How does it feel to be stereotyped?

In the book, Reuben can't tell the difference between his two Asian classmates – Esmé and Eunwoo – because he can only see the ways they are the same. In reality, they're very different from each other. Ask students to reflect on why it's so important to see people as individuals, and really get to know them.

### #SorryWrongAsian

This book was written partly in response to the Twitter hashtag #SorryWrongAsian, in which more than 350 Asian American people shared their experiences of being mistaken for other Asian Americans in their workplaces. Although this is often written off as an innocent mistake by their colleagues, it can mean that Asian professionals have to work much harder to make themselves stand out enough to be considered for promotions, or to be acknowledged for their contributions and successes. Ask students to imagine how they would feel if they painted an incredible picture, only to have another classmate receive credit for it.

## **WRITING STYLE**

---

Despite the book's complex themes, the writing is simple, with only a small amount of text on each page. As the author says in her author note, she wanted to write a story where the person making the mistake did the work of educating themselves, rather than the person of colour needing to make all the effort. Zewlan Moor's use of first person means that the reader learns alongside Reuben, gradually observing the differences that are introduced on each page until, by the end, it seems impossible to think that the two girls could have been mistaken for each other.

## **COMPREHENSION**

---

- Who is this story about?
- Who is telling the story?
- The narrator of the book says that Esmé and Eunwoo 'look just the same'. He says, 'They have the same hair' and 'They even dress the same.' Is this true? Make a list of some of the differences between the two girls.



- How would you feel if someone couldn't tell the difference between you and someone else in your class?
- How does Reuben teach himself to tell the two girls apart?
- Are the things that make us different from other people always visible on the outside? What are some of the invisible differences that Reuben observes?
- Why is it important to get to know people beyond the superficial things we notice about them?
- How does the story flip the joke back onto the narrator?

## WRITING EXERCISE

---

What are three things that make you unique? How might people discover these things? Write a short scene, imagining that someone is meeting you for the first time – how do they discover one of these interesting facts about you?

## ILLUSTRATION STYLE

---

Because the book deals with visual stereotypes, the illustrations are very important, because they *show* the reader how different all of the characters are, even on the surface!

Look at the image on the first page – what are some of the differences you can see between all of the children? Look at their expressions, the way they're sitting, their hair, hats and glasses. How would you draw yourself into this group?

The illustrations also help the reader to understand the joke at the very end of the book – look at the picture and discuss whether you think the two boys look the same!

## CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

---

- Draw a class picture of your class, and try to capture some of the differences between everyone.
- Make a list of some of the similarities and differences between you and your best friend. How can people tell you apart if they don't know you very well?
- Stereotypes can mean that we make assumptions about people rather than get to know them. Draw a picture of a stereotype you've experienced. What do people assume about you because of this stereotype?
- Reuben realises that by getting to know Esmé and Eunwoo, it is easier to see them as individuals. Choose someone in your class that you don't know very well and interview them for ten minutes.



Be curious – ask questions to learn more about their lives and interests, and when your ten minutes is up, write a list of discoveries you've made about your partner.

## RELATED READING

---

*Wide Big World* by Maxine Beneba Clarke

*The Proudest Blue* by Ibtihaj Muhammad

*The Kindest Red* by Ibtihaj Muhammad

*My Two Blankets* by Freya Blackwood

*The Boy Who Tried to Shrink His Name* by Sandhya Parappukaran

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

---

Teaching Tolerance ([tolerance.org](https://www.tolerance.org))

Embrace Race ([embracerace.org](https://www.embracerace.org))

Antiracism Kit ([antiracismkit.com.au](https://www.antiracismkit.com.au))

Project Implicit Association Test, created by Harvard researchers

([implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html](https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html))

