Perfectly WEIRD, Perfectly YOU

Written by

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Extracts and notes for KS2 and librarians

Suitable for age 9+

Explore themes of:

✔ Identity

✔ Neurodiversity

✔ Self-respect

✔ Peer pressure

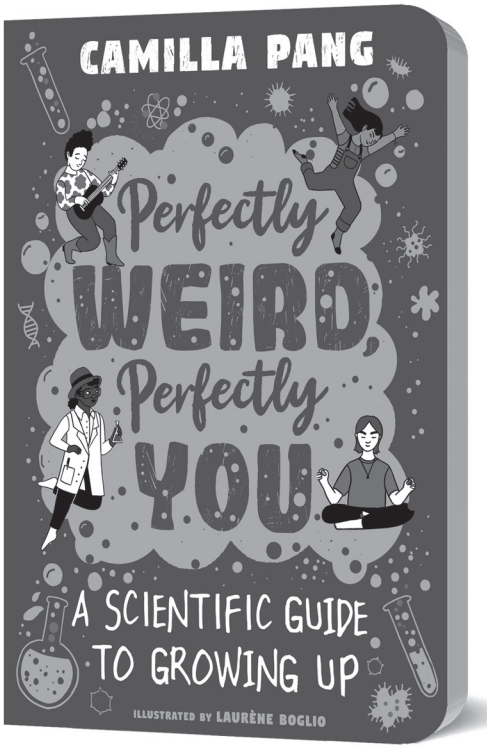
Subject checklist:

✔ Literacy

✔ Science

✔ PSHE

ABOUT THE BOOK



FIND YOUR FEET. DISCOVER YOUR QUIRKS. GROW UP PERFECTLY WEIRD, PERFECTLY YOU.

Did you know that ...

- Finding your confidence is a lot like programming a computer?
- Understanding photosynthesis can teach you about following your passions?
- Peer pressure and Isaac Newton have more in common than you might think?

Well, welcome to Dr Camilla Pang's scientific survival guide to growing up!

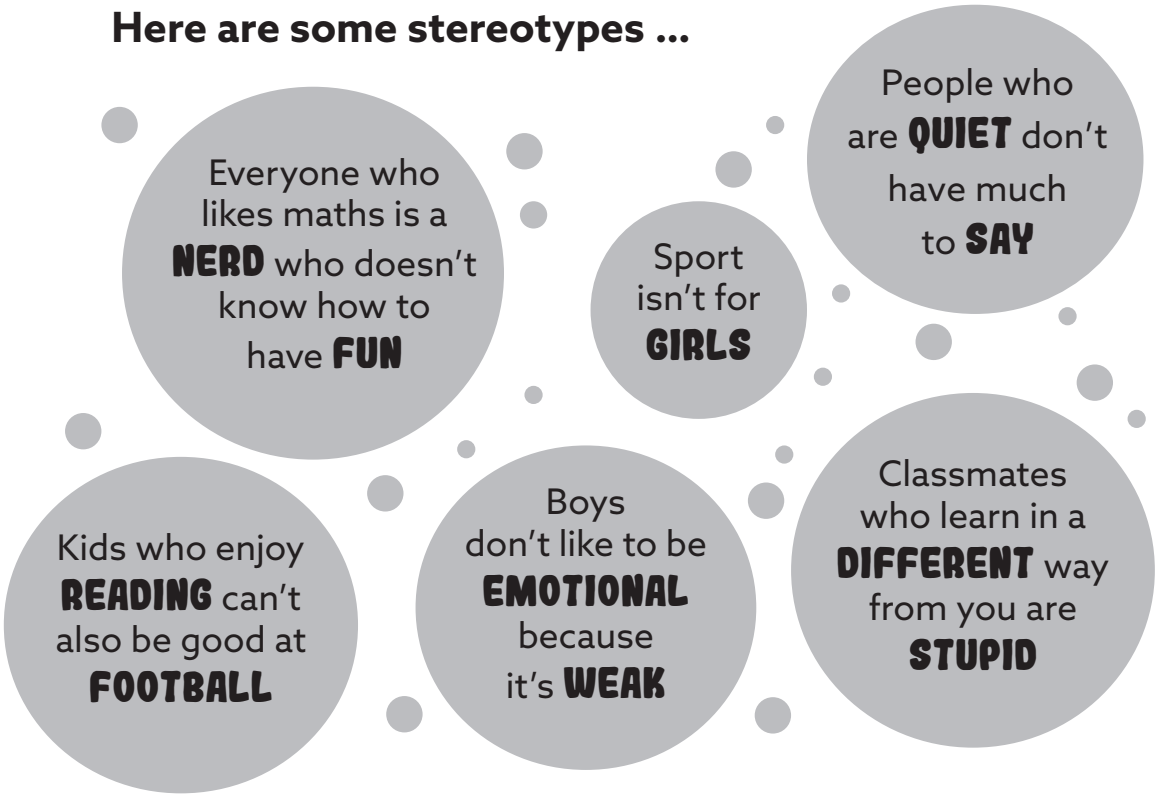
As a child Camilla loved patterns and putting things in order. She was obsessed with Stephen Hawking. And the only language she really understood was science. Diagnosed with autism aged eight, Camilla saw the world very differently.

But with science as her sidekick, she was able to translate ideas she couldn't understand (like peer pressure, emotions and finding your voice) by using things she could (like gravity, photosynthesis and algorithms).

Today, Camilla is a scientist and an award-winning author, and she is here to share her scientific survival guide – helping children to grow up with the courage to be themselves, no matter how different they feel or how tricky they might find it to connect. Because the hard part of growing up isn't dealing with other people (their opinions, their popularity or their exam results). No, the hard part is you: learning who you are and what makes you tick. And the really hard part is accepting that it's completely normal to be perfectly weird. In fact, it's essential to growing up happy.

EXTRACT 1 – PERFECTLY DIFFERENT

Here are some stereotypes ...



Discussion questions:

Stereotypes can make us treat people as we expect them to be and not as they are.

- Can you think of any more stereotypes?
- Can you think of an example that goes against some of these stereotypes?
- Why are stereotypes not helpful?

Activity

No one should ever be judged based on how they look, the things that make them different or the interests they have.

But that isn't the same thing as saying that there aren't different types of people. Some of us like to be in a crowded room full of people chatting, while others prefer small groups and quieter settings. Some people love to be outdoors, tramping about in the rain and the mud, while others like to be curled up inside where it's warm and dry. Some people thrive on trying new things and meeting new people, while others like the comforts of home and what they are most familiar with. And still more people enjoy a mixture of both!

What makes you different?

List all the things about you that make you different from your family, friends and classmates below.

Being different can be a superpower. Author Camilla says:

"My ASD makes me brave in ways that lots of people aren't. When I see something strange or wrong, I will point it out before I've thought about whether this might be rude or 'impolite'. That can lead to some difficult situations, but it also means I'm more likely to say the thing that needs saying, when other people are too embarrassed to mention it."

Pick three things that make you different and explain how and why they could be your 'superpowers' below.

EXTRACT 2 – PERFECTLY ALIVE

What's the coolest thing you have ever done in a classroom? Mine was in an English lesson during Year 9 when I presented my own **LANGUAGE**: a special code that only I knew how to speak and translate. It was made up of weird words, taps on the body and beeping noises like a computer might make. It was called Epas (after two conditions I knew well and which made me different: epilepsy and autism spectrum disorder).

Write a paragraph describing the coolest thing you've ever done. It doesn't have to have been in school; it can be anything that you're proud of. You can draw it if you like as well!

EXTRACT 3 – PERFECTLY AT HOME

The first time I stepped foot in a science lab, I knew I had found my **NATURAL HABITAT**: the place I was born to be and where I felt most comfortable. In the lab, everything seems to fit: like a key in a lock, or your feet in your favourite pair of slippers. I always feel like I have come home.

We all have a 'home' like this: a habitat which is our perfect environment for life.

In fact, we have several.

The first and most important is the one we all share: planet Earth. As far as we know (unless you have any new information about alien landings, or have seen one from your bedroom window), this planet is the only place in the universe capable of supporting animal life.

Earth may be tiny as far as the universe is concerned, but it's also pretty neatly designed. It's close enough to the sun that we don't freeze to death, but not so close that temperatures get out of hand. Its atmosphere gives us oxygen to breathe and protects us from lots of the nasty stuff (poisonous gases and deadly radiation) floating around the solar system. It also provides some useful extras, like water to drink. A pretty good package all round!

So the planet is our shared home and the natural habitat for all human life. That's the first layer.

Discussion questions:

- What do you think the other layers of habitats might be?
- What different habitats are there in the world?
- What makes somewhere a good habitat?

Activity

Draw a map of all the most important places in your universe.

Why do you like them?

When do you most like to go to them?

Who would you choose to be in them with you?

Draw how they make you feel, too.