

We've explored...

## our hair

Reading a book inspired one setting in London to explore differences in types of hair and styles, with staff, children and parents all getting involved. By **Annette Rawstrone**



**T**he book *My Hair* by Hannah Lee is described as a 'classic' by staff at Grove Nursery School in Peckham, south east London. Sharing the book often leads to the children and staff discussing different hair styles – from 'dazzling dreadlocks' to Bantu knots, corn rows and 'smooth waves' – talking about their favourites and experimenting with different styles and accessories.

After reading it recently, one child commented, 'My dad's hair is puff like me.' While another said, 'My dad's got little, little hair. He shave it.' Another child pointed to a picture of the auntie's shaved head and observed, 'That's like my mummy's hair.'

### ASKING QUESTIONS

Class teacher Claire Navaia says, 'We have such a diverse community and staff and hair-styling is always a favourite activity. We believe that role play is important for children and hair role play is often available. It helps us to reflect the diversity that we have in our home lives and

adds to discussions around our similarities and differences. We want children to see themselves throughout all we do at Grove and feel reflected in a positive way. We want them to feel that the nursery is their space.'

For example, one child commented how she has a bonnet that she wears at home. Another said, 'Jay has got a bonnet' and questioned whether Claire wore one at night. 'We want children to be curious about each other, to ask questions and to realise that not all people do the same things,' says Claire. 'They are acknowledging that life is different for people.'

'We see learning as a joint process and we want to collaborate as a team. As a staff team we all learn from each other, and we want to model that with the children too.'

Early years educator Sabrina Campbell says, 'Images and resources that reflected me weren't around when I was growing up. It's good to see that there is a lot more available for children now and we want to show that we are interested in and value people's different cultures and backgrounds. We are

### Parents, staff and children all took part in hairstyling

**We helped the children to thread beads and we showed them different ways to accessorise their hair**

proactive to seek conversations with children around diversity.'

She wants families to know that it is acceptable to ask questions. 'One child said to me, "Your lips are big." I mentioned this to her parent and she apologised, but she didn't need to because the child only said that because she was interested,' she says. 'We're all learning and a good way to do that is to be interested and to ask questions.'

### DIFFERENT HAIR STYLES

In the book, it is soon to be the main character's birthday. She wants new clothes to wear but, most of all, she wonders how to style her hair. Perhaps it will be a high-top fade or a twist out? Inspired by the book, children wanted to plait and brush a model's hair. Some staff showed the children how they style their hair and let the children practise twisting and plaiting on the mannequin.

'I got plaits,' observed one child, and another commented how they wanted their hair beading. Early years educator Claudeth Hemmings says, 'We helped the children to thread beads and we showed them different ways to accessorise their hair. We also talked about how we can put

moisture or grease in our hair to make it curly or straighter.’

After considering a multitude of hair styles, the girl in the book decides to wear her ‘Afro crown’, which is so big and free that it defies gravity! Thierry Xavier, who works in the Reception Unit, let his Afro hair down so that the children could see it. He also allowed them to touch, twist, comb and brush it.

‘We want children to feel good about themselves, such as to proudly say “I can run”,’ says Claire. ‘One girl commented on how she likes the shorter baby hairs at the edges of her hair.’ Her observation led to staff talking about how some people intricately style these hairs – sometimes known as ‘laying’ – as a form of self-expression, such as intricate swirls. This could be linked to the mention of corn rows in the book and how they can be styled in different shapes.

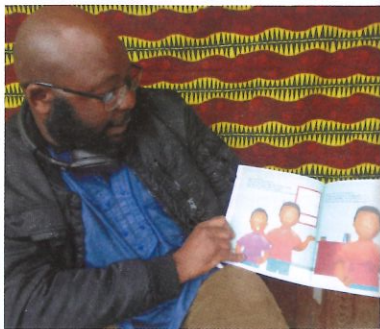
## AT THE HAIR SALON

On other days, children enjoyed role-playing hair salons. Resources included a mirror, wigs of long, straight and curly hair, mannequins, hair dryers, tongs and hair straighteners, along with brushes, combs, accessories and empty hair product bottles and pots.

They phoned up to make appointments with conversations including, ‘Yes, you can come tomorrow’, and ‘I got to wash my hair first.’

Staff observed how children were as gentle as possible when styling each other’s hair and showed empathy. One child was overheard asking, ‘Is it hurting, baby?’

Claudeth says, ‘Children were keen to share their own knowledge and experience of what happens at home and to relive it at nursery. It was great listening to the language that they used during role play. You could shut your eyes and imagine their parents saying the same things to them at home.’



## HAIR AT HOME

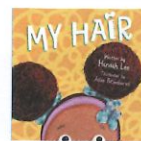
Although hair is a recurring topic in the nursery school, it had been a long time since families had been invited in to participate, because of the pandemic. During discussions, one girl was very proud of the fact that her dad often styles her hair in the morning, and he was invited in to speak to the children. ‘It was good for the children to see that men also style children’s hair,’ says Sabrina. ‘The girl is very proud of her dad and he is a positive role model.’

Another father came in to read *Riley Can Be Anything* by Davina Hamilton. He brought in fabric from Nigeria and talked about how there are often hidden meanings and stories behind the different prints. The colours and patterns used in the designs can symbolise a tribe, marriage or social status of the wearer.

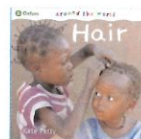
Inviting parents into the nursery and discussing subjects such as hair can also be an educational experience for some, especially those with mixed-heritage children, says Sabrina. ‘We will sometimes style the children’s hair or speak to them about what products to put in and how to keep it moisturised and managed, and parents are very happy that we are supporting them.’

Claire adds, ‘It’s an ongoing piece of work with no end as we continue to embrace these discussions in everyday practice. We want to continue to welcome families in to continue to share with us and work with the whole family, not just the child. The past couple of years have been very difficult to work that way. But we want to show that we are welcoming and open to all – we refer to ourselves as a “small school with a big heart”.’ ■

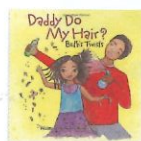
A father reads to the children (left). The books are supported with accessories for hair (right)



**My Hair** by Hannah Lee and Allen Fatimaharan  
This book captures the excitement of getting ready for a celebration.



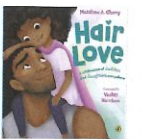
**Hair** by Kate Petty  
This book, published in association with Oxfam, has photos of different hairstyles from all around the world.



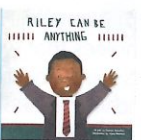
**Daddy Do My Hair? series:**  
**Beth’s Twists / Hope’s Braids** by Tola Okogwu and Rahima Begum and **Kechi’s Hair Goes Every Which Way** by Tola Okogwu and Naomi Wright  
Rhyming picture books which address bullying and identity.



**The Mega Magic Hair Swap!** by Rochelle Humes and Rachel Suzanne  
Mai and Rose are best friends. Each year for the other’s hair.



**Hair Love** by Matthew Cherry and Vashti Harrison  
Zuri knows her hair is beautiful, but it has a mind of its own!



**Riley Can Be Anything** by Davina Hamilton and Elena Reinoso  
This rhyming story follows Riley as he discovers some of the wonderful things he can do when he grows up.



**My Skin, Your Skin** by Laura Henry-Allain and Onyinye Iwu  
A powerful book to help children and adults have meaningful discussions about race. It aims to empower children to have self-love, self-esteem and self-worth, irrespective of their skin colour.