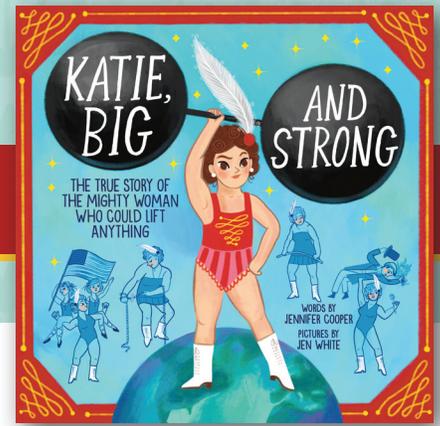


KATIE, BIG AND STRONG:

The True Story of the Mighty Woman Who Could Lift ANYTHING

Words by Jennifer Cooper, Illustrations by Jen White



OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

As a young girl in Vienna, Katie Brumbach discovered her exceptional strength, easily lifting objects that others could not. From a family of circus performers, Katie embraced her unique talent, challenging societal expectations that girls should be “slender” and “tiny.” As she grew older, Katie’s strength became legendary, allowing her to perform incredible feats like lifting full-grown horses and carrying cannons on her back.

When a male bodybuilder was declared the “World’s Strongest Man,” Katie boldly took on the stage name “Sandwina,” to showcase her own strength. After moving to America with her husband Max, Katie became a star attraction in the Barnum & Bailey Circus. Her combination of strength and beauty captivated audiences, and soon she was famous in New York City.

Katie’s influence extended beyond the circus ring. Recognizing the strength of her voice, she joined the fight for women’s suffrage to uplift the case for equality.

Katie Sandwina’s journey from circus performer to suffragette champion highlights the power of embracing your true self and becoming a symbol of female empowerment and inner strength.

A NOTE TO EDUCATORS

Katie, BIG and STRONG offers a powerful opportunity to explore themes of gender equality, body positivity, and the fight for women’s rights through the inspiring true story of Katie Brumbach (later known as Katie Sandwina). This guide aims to support you in teaching this picture book in a way that encourages students to think critically about societal norms, challenge stereotypes, and recognize the importance of resilience and self-acceptance.

Before teaching this book, we recommend familiarizing yourself with:

- The history of women’s suffrage in the United States
- The role of circus and vaudeville entertainment in the late 19th/early 20th century
- Changing gender roles and expectations in the early 20th century

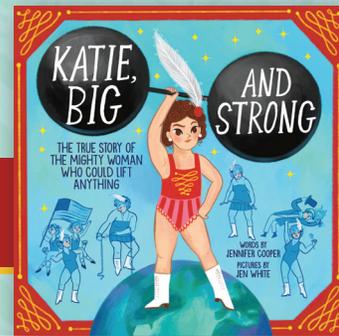
Affirm Students’ Identities

Before reading, have students create identity maps. Start by sharing your own identity map, including both personal identifiers (favorite music, food, etc.) and social identities (gender, ethnicity, etc.). Explain how our identities influence our understanding of texts and can help us perceive more in a story or recognize our limited understanding of others’ experiences.

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Establish Community Agreements

Work with students to create conditions for brave and safe discussions about gender, body image, and equality. Co-construct norms that will ensure respectful and productive conversations.

Create a “Parking Lot of Curiosities”

Set up a space (physical or digital) where students can post questions or topics they’re curious about as you read the text. This can guide further exploration and discussion.

Visual Read

Conduct a visual read of *Katie, BIG and STRONG*. Show the cover and illustrations, inviting students to share their observations and insights.

Ask:

- What do the illustrations tell us about Katie’s character and personality?
- How does the artist convey Katie’s strength and confidence?
- What do you notice about the reactions of other characters to Katie in the illustrations?
- How does the artist use color in the illustrations? What feelings or moods do these color choices create?
- Where is Katie positioned on each page? How does her placement affect how we perceive her in relation to other characters or her surroundings?
- How does the size of Katie compared to other elements in the illustrations change throughout the book? What might this represent?
- What details in the background of the illustrations help us understand the time period and setting of Katie’s story?

THEMES FOR DISCUSSION

Breaking Stereotypes

Katie consistently defied expectations of how women should look and behave.

For younger readers:	For older readers:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What were some things people thought girls and women couldn’t do in Katie’s time? How does the artist convey Katie’s strength and confidence?• How did Katie show that these ideas were wrong?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How did Katie’s actions challenge the social norms of her era?• Compare the stereotypes Katie faced to those that exist today. What has changed? What remains similar?

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Body Positivity and Self-Acceptance

Katie embraced her size and strength, finding power in qualities others criticized.

For younger readers:	For older readers:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How did Katie's feelings about her strength and height help her succeed?• What does Katie's story teach us about liking ourselves just the way we are?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How did Katie use her special qualities to become successful and prove her bullies wrong? What can we learn from Katie's story about feeling good about what makes us unique?• How do you think Katie's physical strength helped her stay confident even when facing challenges? How can having a healthy body help us feel good emotionally too?

The Power of Family and Community

Katie's family played a crucial role in supporting her unique talents.

For all readers:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How did Katie's family help her become successful?• Who are the people in your life that support and encourage you?

Women's Rights and Suffrage

Katie used her platform to advocate for women's right to vote.

For younger readers:	For older readers:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Why was voting important to Katie and other women?• How did Katie use her strength to help other women?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Research the women's suffrage movement. How did people like Katie contribute?• Discuss the connection between physical strength and political power in Katie's story.

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CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE DISCUSSION PROMPTS

Strength and Identity

Katie's strength was both a part of her identity and something that set her apart from others.

For younger readers:	For older readers:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some people thought Katie shouldn't be strong because she was a girl. Have you ever been told you couldn't do something because of who you are?• Katie used her strength to help others. How can you use what makes you special to help people?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Katie was very strong, which wasn't what people expected from women back then. Is there something about you that surprises people or goes against what they expect? How do you handle that?• Katie used her unusual strength to become famous and help others. Can you think of ways people might use what makes them different or special to do good things or make positive changes?• Katie faced both admiration and criticism for her strength. How do different communities or cultures react to people who stand out? How might these reactions affect how someone feels about themselves?

Family and Tradition

Katie's strength was part of her family's tradition.

For younger readers:	For older readers:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Katie's family was known for being strong. What is something special that your family is known for?• Katie learned to be strong from her parents. What's an important skill or lesson you've learned from your family?• Katie's family cheered her on when she performed. How does your family show they're proud of you?• Sometimes, Katie did things differently from others in her family. Can you think of a time when you did something in your own special way?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In Katie's family, physical strength was celebrated. How does your family or culture define and value strength? Is it physical, emotional, intellectual, or something else?• Katie's family supported her unconventional path. How does your family react when you pursue interests or goals that might be different from what they expected?• Sometimes family traditions can conflict with personal growth or societal changes. How do you balance respecting your family's heritage with forging your own path?

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Community and Advocacy

Katie used her strength to help fight for women's rights.

For younger readers:	For older readers:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Katie helped other women by showing how strong she was. What's something you're good at that could help others?• Katie spoke up for what she believed in. What's something important to you that you'd like to tell others about?• Katie worked with other women to make changes. Who would you team up with to make things better in your school or neighborhood?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Katie used her unique talent to draw attention to women's rights. What skills or interests do you have that could be used to raise awareness about an issue you care about?• Katie's advocacy connected her circus world with the political sphere. How can seemingly unrelated areas of life intersect to create change? Can you think of modern examples?• Katie's activism was very public. What are some ways people can advocate for change behind the scenes or in their everyday lives?

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OUT WITH THE OLD AND IN WITH THE NEW ACTIVITY

In pairs, have students find quotes from the book that show limiting beliefs about girls or women. Students will then find empowering counter quotes about women and explain how they counter the quotes about Sandwina and women.

Quotes	Counter Quote with Explanation
"A lady is always quite weak."	"Women, whether subtly or vociferously, have always been a tremendous power in the destiny of the world." by Eleanor Roosevelt. Eleanor Roosevelt's quote tells us power can be expressed in different ways and that women have always been powerful and important enough to change the world.

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CROSS-DISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS

Art

1. Empowerment Soundscape

- Have students compose a soundscape that represents Katie's journey and the concept of empowerment. Using everyday objects, body percussion, voices, or technology, students will create a layered audio piece that grows in complexity and volume, mirroring Katie's growing strength and influence.

Resource: musiclab.chromeexperiments.com/experiments

2. Stereotype-Breaking Shoes

- Students will design and create wearable shoe art that represents breaking stereotypes. Students will modify old shoes with materials that symbolize challenging societal norms, inspired by Katie's story. The shoes could be displayed in a "walk a mile" exhibition that encourages exhibition visitors to consider different perspectives.

- Resource: *A Class That Turned Around Kid's Assumptions of Gender Roles* @ <https://youtu.be/G3Aweo-74kY?si=9jwderiszkhSLuo5>

Social Studies

1. Women's Suffrage Movement

- Katie used her fame to support women's suffrage. Introduce the historical context of the 19th Amendment, allowing students to explore the long struggle for women's right to vote.

- Activity:** Students will create a timeline of the women's suffrage movement, highlighting key figures and events such as Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and the 19th Amendment.

Resources: U.S. Constitution (19th Amendment) @ youtube.com/watch?v=4zD4e1myEOU

Votes for Women @ artsandculture.google.com/story/ogWxZX3r7pZoJA

2. Early 20th-Century Gender Roles

- Katie, BIG and STRONG* highlights the expectations society had of women during the early 1900s.

- Activity:** "A Day in the Life" Comparison
 - Introduction: Review parts of *Katie, BIG and STRONG* that highlight gender expectations of the time. Discuss how Katie challenged these norms.
 - Research: In small groups, have students research typical daily activities for women and men in the early 1900s and today.
 - Create Schedules: Students create two "A Day in the Life" schedules side by side.
 - One for a woman in Katie's time
 - One for themselves or a woman they know today
 - Encourage students to include illustrations or images to represent activities.

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- Reflection: Student groups present their schedules, highlighting differences and similarities.
 - a. Discuss the following:
 - How have expectations for women changed?
 - What opportunities do women have today that they didn't have in Katie's time?
 - Are there any expectations that haven't changed?

3. Circus History

- a. Use the context of Katie's life in the circus to introduce students to the history of circuses in Europe and America, and how they played a role in shaping entertainment and culture.
 - **Activity:** Students will research famous circuses, comparing their cultural significance across different countries and time periods.
- Resource: *The Circus* @[youtube.com/watch?v=uHQ-rVZieWA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uHQ-rVZieWA)

Language Arts

1. "A Day in Katie's Life" Script Writing
 - a. Have students write a short script imagining a day in Katie's life, either as a circus performer or as a suffragette. Encourage students to use dialogue that reflects the time period and Katie's unique perspective. Students can perform their scripts live or record them as podcasts.
2. Multilingual "Strength" Word Cloud
 - a. Using an online word cloud generator, students will contribute words meaning "strength" in different languages, reflecting the diverse backgrounds of circus performers and immigrants of Katie's time.
 - b. Also, students will create a virtual bulletin board to post words, images, or short videos representing different types of strength inspired by Katie's story. This could include physical strength, emotional resilience, courage to stand up for beliefs, etc.
3. Suffragette Speech Writing
 - a. Students will write and deliver a speech as if they were Katie advocating for women's right to vote. They can use digital presentation tools to incorporate visual aids and historical photos into their speeches.

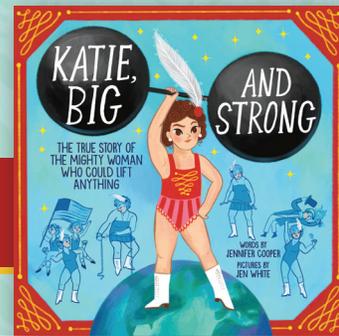
Science

1. Super Strength Secrets
 - a. How can we lift heavy things more easily?
 - Activity:** Using a ruler, students will try to lift a heavy book. They will explore how changing the ruler's position affects the effort needed, relating it to Katie's circus acts.
2. Don't Judge a Book by Its Cover
 - a. Students will investigate how body size and composition relate to different types of strength, challenging stereotypes about gender and physical capabilities.

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Activity: Strength Comes in All Sizes

- Forming Hypotheses: Lead a brief class discussion about different types of strength (e.g. grip strength, endurance, flexibility). Then, have students form specific, testable hypotheses for each strength test.
 - **For example:**
 - a) Grip Strength: “I think taller people will have stronger grip strength because they might have bigger hands.”
 - b) Endurance: “I predict that smaller people will be able to hold their arms out longer because it might be easier to hold up less weight.”
 - c) Flexibility: “I hypothesize that there won’t be a difference in flexibility based on size because flexibility might depend more on practice than on height or weight.”
- Strength Tests: Students will work in pairs to conduct three types of strength tests.
 - Grip Strength: Use grip strength testers to measure hand strength.
 - Endurance: Hold arms straight out to the side for as long as possible.
 - Flexibility: Measure how far they can reach past their toes while sitting.
- Data Collection: Record results, along with each participant’s height and arm span.
- Analysis: Create class graphs comparing results.
 - Discuss the following:
 - How did the results of your strength tests compare to your initial predictions?
 - Were there differences between types of strength?
 - How do these results relate to Katie’s story?

3. Tower Power Challenge

a. How can we build the strongest tower?

Activity: Using marshmallows and spaghetti, students compete to build the tallest tower that can support a small weight (like a toy figure). Students will test and revise their designs, exploring structural strength.

Resources:

Girlhood (it’s complicated) @ [youtube.com/watch?v=5qyCVrmdA18](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5qyCVrmdA18)

Women in the 19th Century @ [youtube.com/watch?v=fM1czS_VYDI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fM1czS_VYDI)

Katie Sandwina @ www.youtube.com/watch?v=NP7m5JQKkMc

The Ringling @ emuseum.ringling.org/search/Circus