For Hana and Iman, my inspiration and my world. I love you.
And for Maryam, Aamina and Anayis
To all the girls around the world: you are beautiful. Believe it because it really is true.

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HELLO! THIS IS ME...



Cute, right? Well, that's what my mum and dad thought. And the picture on the next page is me now. I look quite different, and I suppose that's because I've grown up. I'm still growing in lots of ways, my body is always changing, and my mind is always growing. My mum and dad still think I'm cute, even though I'm much older now. They also still want to squeeze my cheeks, but I don't let them do that anymore. Because it REALLY HURTS.

I'm quite small, brown-skinned and I wear a headscarf, underneath which is long, dark hair. My skin has different shades on different parts of my body. I have skinny legs, knobbly knees and a round, squishy belly. My face has some darker freckles, and there are dark moles and beauty spots scattered across my body. I'm happy with all of that because that's me.

Some days I feel on top of the world about how I look, and some days I want to hide in a cupboard and not let anyone see me. (Top tip: don't hide in a cupboard. But if you do, take snacks, a torch and a good book to read. Like this one.) Sometimes feelings pop into my head by themselves, sometimes they appear because of what other people say, and sometimes I've had those ideas and feelings because of things I've seen or read.

All of this has made me realise one thing: it's normal to think about how we look. It affects how we feel about ourselves and the world around us. If you're reading this book, then I know that you are probably already thinking about what it means to be beautiful, just like I do.

I work in advertising with big companies, including beauty and fashion brands, thinking about the words and pictures used to make adverts. I also write for newspapers and go on TV and radio to discuss ideas about beauty and what makes us who we are. Which means I spend a lot of time thinking about the subject of being beautiful. There are lots of insider secrets that nobody ever tells you. And I think it's about time the truth about being beautiful was shared. Which is why I'm going to sneak you behind the scenes to find out for yourself! I want to share it with you. And hopefully you can share it with others.

So, of all the books you could have picked to talk about what being beautiful means, you chose a good one, because this one will hopefully change your life. At the very least it has some gorgeous pictures, some amazing stories of brilliant women and some very peculiar beauty techniques from history. What could be better?

It took me a long time to work out that there are lots of different ways to be beautiful, and that's what I want to share with you. There isn't a maths or science book that gives you a formula on how to be beautiful. There isn't a recipe book to cook up a perfectly beautiful woman. What it means to be beautiful changes all the time. It's different in different places. Here's the amazing thing that no one ever tells you: there is no single opinion that is right or wrong. There's only one opinion that counts, and that's YOURS!



Lots of love,

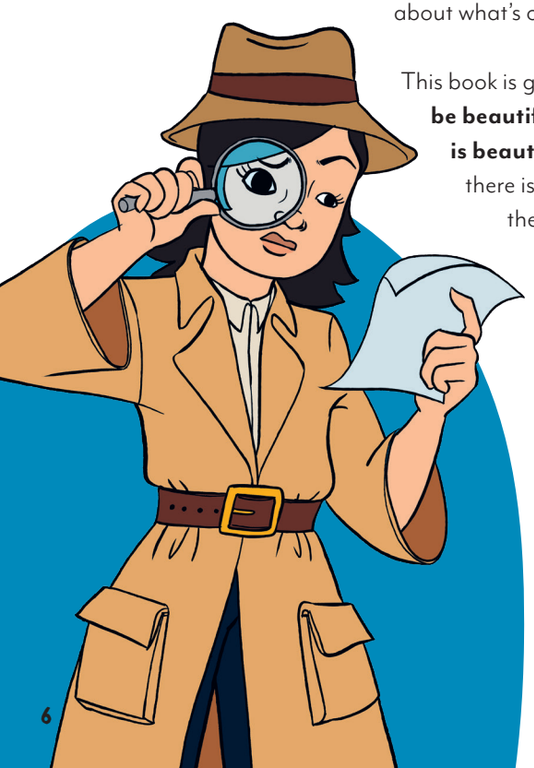
Shelina

(Mum of two girls)

ABOUT THIS BOOK

First, I'm going to tell you what this book is **not**. It's not about what clothes to wear, or how to put on make-up, or how to strike the perfect pose for a photograph. It's not about how to make yourself what *other* people tell you is "beautiful". It's also not going to tell you that beauty is something we shouldn't think about because it's actually quite normal to think about it. And it's something that **all of us think about**.

This book isn't going to try to pretend that how you feel about the way you look is not important. I know that it's annoying when someone tells you that what's on the outside doesn't matter because **how you feel about yourself is important**, and how you feel about how you look is part of that. People say being beautiful on the inside is what counts. This is definitely true, but it doesn't mean we don't care about what's on the outside.



This book is going to talk about **what it actually means to be beautiful as well as who gets to decide what is beautiful**. You might be surprised to know that there isn't one fixed idea of being beautiful. Since the beginning of human history, people have constantly **changed their minds** about what kinds of looks are beautiful.

Sometimes being beautiful meant being slim – or even stick thin – or it meant the opposite – "voluptuous" (which is a lovely word to describe being round in lots of places). Sometimes people thought high foreheads were attractive and in other times, big eyes were the thing.

People's ideas of what it means to be beautiful **vary by country and culture**, too. So, someone whose picture is on the cover of a beauty magazine in the UK might look totally different from someone on the cover of a beauty magazine in China! In some places, dark skin is considered the most beautiful. In other places, being told you have eyes like a cow used to be considered a compliment! The list could go on...

All of this goes to show that there is **no single description** of what it means to be beautiful. We can't build a robot that everyone, everywhere would agree was beautiful. (A robot wouldn't be beautiful anyway because it doesn't have a real personality.) You're probably going to be able to guess what's coming next. The reason for all this is because...

WE ALL FIND DIFFERENT THINGS BEAUTIFUL!

There isn't one fixed description of being beautiful, and what we think is beautiful can change over time and be different in different places. **So why do some people get called beautiful and not others?**

In this book, we will talk about how much of what we think of as being "beautiful" is **what other people think**. And since other people think different things... is anyone really more beautiful than anyone else at all?

Let's find out...

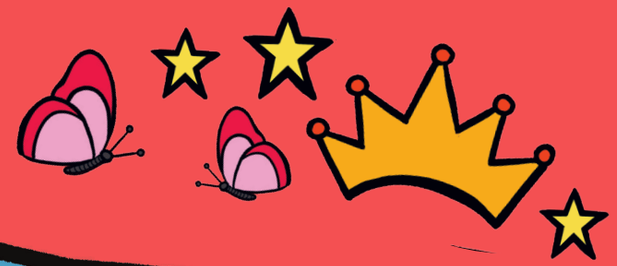
Get ready!

I can only let you into this book to discover all the secrets I've spent my life investigating if you promise to bring two things with you:

CURIOSITY: Learning about being beautiful actually starts from asking lots of questions. For example: do people have the same ideas everywhere? Who decides about being beautiful? "HOW" and "WHY" are brilliant words: keep them ready.

BELIEF: You have to **believe** you are beautiful. I totally understand that this is a BIG ASK. Don't tell anyone else, but I sometimes struggle with it, too. But trust me on this one. You'll be amazed that as the book carries on, if you start with belief, it will get stronger and stronger.

BELIEVE IN YOUR BODY



Our amazing bodies give us the chance to be part of the world and fulfil our hopes and dreams. On the inside our bodies are all very similar, but on the outside they all look different. From young to old, curvy to skinny to athletic, tall to small, there are so many kinds of bodies with different abilities. And as we grow up, our bodies keep changing, too. One thing is for sure, all of them are beautiful. Let's get exploring and find out what goes on inside our bodies, what ideas people have about them and how to make the most of the incredible bodies that we have.

YOUR BODY AND YOU

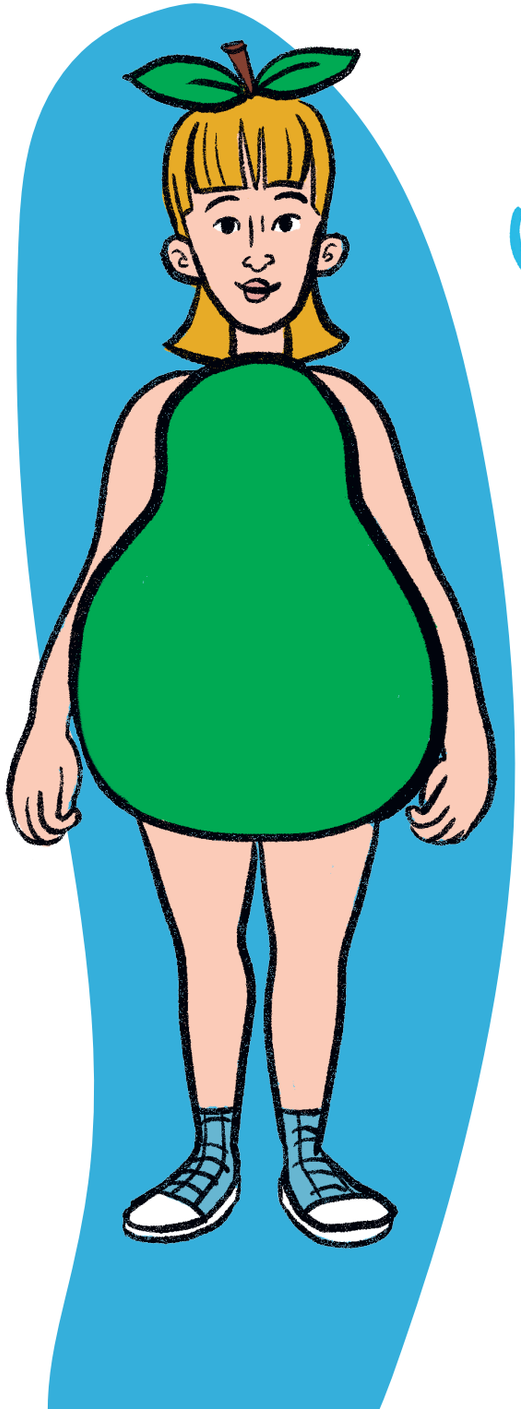
Do you have a body? Excellent! Then this book is just for you. Your body can do all sorts of amazing things like breathe, pump blood, digest food, grow hair and smile! It's lucky you have a body, not just because bodies are incredible, but because it means you exist: your own body gives you a place to be you.

You and your body

If you didn't have your body, could you still be you? If you were in a completely different body, would you be a different person? No! **Your body and you are two separate things.**

You are you. Your ideas, dreams, personality and individuality; your imagination, hopes, feelings and so much more... all of these make you the amazing person that you are. Your body is the physical place where all these things happen. It's **where** and **how** you exist in the world. It's how other people see you and interact with you. Most importantly, your body is a place to **express yourself** and **experience life**.

If you didn't have a body, I suppose you'd be a ghost and waft about. You couldn't give hugs, enjoy delicious ice cream, maybe one day go to the moon or achieve any of your dreams. And how boring it would be if your body just walked around with no YOU in it: no personality, no ideas, no thoughts, no imagination? Lucky for you, you have an amazing body, and that, added to your amazing YOU, is **a winning combination**.



Beautiful, bold, brave and brilliant bodies

There are many amazing things going on inside people's bodies. Blood transports oxygen and nutrients. The brain sends and receives signals for movement and feeling... I could keep going and fill a whole book.

Some bodies are tall, some are small, some round and some skinny. Some are young, some are old, some have bits missing, some have extra bits or bits that don't work quite like anyone else's.

There's no such thing as a "perfect" or "ideal" body. And the opposite is also true – that there is no such thing as a "wrong" or "ugly" body. Bodies are bodies. And in the grand scheme of things, the genetic variation between different bodies is only about 0.1%.



Jyoti Amge

Our bodies vary, and that's normal

Even though bodies are 99.9% all the same, the small things that make them different can sometimes feel big. Take height, for example. There are very tall women and women with dwarfism which makes them smaller than average. Zeng Jinlian was the tallest woman ever recorded at 246.3cm tall, and Jyoti Amge is the smallest at 62.8cm.

Another way people can differ is by being skinny or curvy, or somewhere in between. Bottoms, breasts and tummies can be different shapes and sizes. Facial features vary too, like eyes, noses and face shapes. And bodies change as they age.

Proportions can be different, so some people have longer legs compared to their abdomen, and others have shorter legs (like me!). You might have what you think are small feet or big feet. People from different cultures and heritages might have different body shapes and features.

Someone might have a prosthetic leg, be in a wheelchair or have a cleft lip. You can be flabby or taut, have cellulite or stretch marks, have bits inside you made of metal, or, well, anything! There are so many variations. But they are all bodies!



TILLY LOCKEY

At 15 months old, Tilly Lockey was diagnosed with meningococcal septicaemia (blood poisoning) and had to have both her hands amputated. Now a teenager, she wears bionic hands and campaigns to have the technology available to more children. She's a model, beauty and style influencer and a children's TV presenter.

"I like to think of my hands as a really awesome accessory," Tilly says. "I like to match it with my outfit or how I'm feeling. It's kind of like a handbag that you can just pick up and add to your outfit."

She doesn't think describing someone as disabled is useful. "If you break [the word] apart," she explains, "it's like [saying] you're unable to do things, which I think is completely wrong." "Whether they've got hands or no hands. Or whether they've lost a leg, or whether it's deafness or blindness. At the end of the day, everyone's just the same."

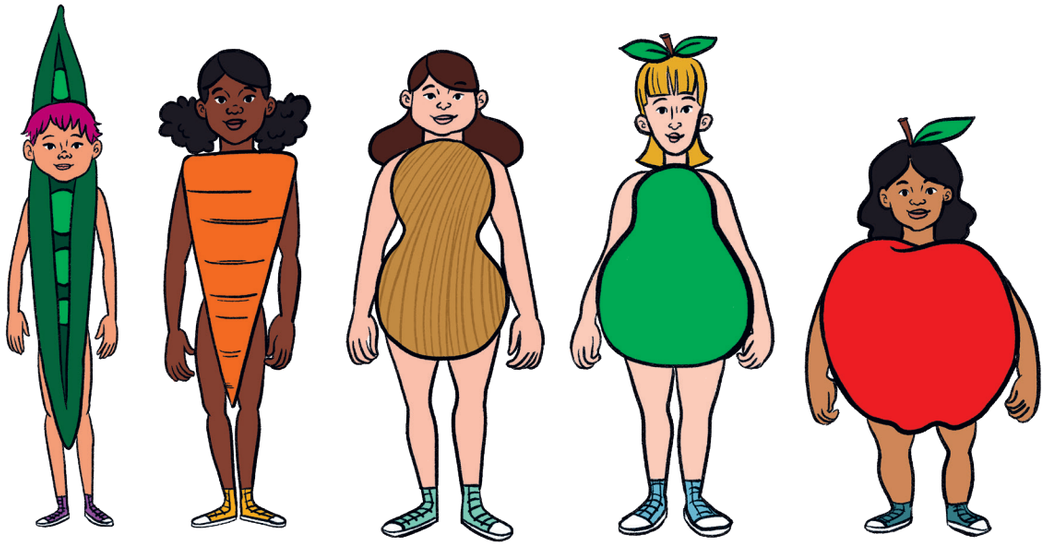
Bodies keep changing

Your body starts by being born, becomes a child, goes through puberty and eventually grows older. Bodies change in many ways. Sometimes bodies get rounder – including growing breasts for girls. Hair grows (sometimes in new and unexpected places!). Female bodies might get pregnant and grow babies. People can even get shorter as they get older!

Body shapes and sizes

Bodies come in different shapes and sizes. FACT. Human beings like to be able to group things together, so some people like to talk about "body shapes". You might see something like the images below in magazines, describing women's bodies as food. I think I'm a cross between a string bean and a peanut.





How does it make you feel that women's shapes are described with so much detail and are compared to things like fruit? Confused? Enlightened? Hungry? A good reason to identify your body shape is to get to know your own body and be proud of it. What's not a good reason is to feel you have to use clothes to hide your "flaws". There is no such thing as a "perfect" shape, and your shape – whatever it is – isn't flawed. Your body is your body.

Why do body sizes come in numbers?

If women buy clothes today they pick a size, usually a number like 8, 12, 16 or 20. But it wasn't always like this. After the Second World War, the US government conducted a study of 15,000 women. They randomly named sizes in even numbers. Each was based on the measurements of bust, waist, hip and height.

Sizes can be useful, but the measurement and shape of "standard" sizes are just what someone decided. It doesn't mean that the sizes and shapes of clothes are "right" or that your body is "wrong". It's just a way to sell clothes. The first women measured were all white, but women of other heritages have different shapes and sizes. A second group measured later were from the military, so they had a specific kind of body trained for physical combat, which not everyone has. In fact, the "standard sizes" aren't even standard themselves. A size 14 in one shop might be totally different from a size 14 in another. That's confusing!

Some of the size names are peculiar. Size zero is extremely thin. If that's your natural body and you're healthy, that's fine. But many women become ill to achieve a size zero. The opposite is also strange: "plus size". This suggests there's a "right" size and anything more is "plus". Now, you being a clever clogs, you know that there is no "right" size, so it doesn't even make sense to call something "plus"!

The bodies we see around us

Real bodies come in all sorts of shapes and sizes. But for some reason, the bodies usually used to represent all of us are much more limited.



Wouldn't it be wonderful if all the mannequins, pictures, images and models reflected **real women of all races, sizes, ages and abilities**? You can keep going with this list. Because the more kinds of bodies we see around us, the more beauty we can celebrate, and the happier we feel about ourselves. Can you spot how I've tried hard to include all sorts of women in this book?