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# The Boy in the Dress

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Editor's Choice:

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Media type:

Book

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To the growing list of 'celebrity' children's books must now be added this debut novel by David Walliams, best known as the more svelte of the pair responsible for BBC Television's **Little Britain**, or, as it becomes in the text's one humorous reference to it, 'Small England' where those two idiots dress up as 'laydees'?. And 'dressing up' is what the novel is all about, particularly where its 12-year-old hero, Dennis, is concerned. Starting with an obsession with fashion ? he is a regular reader of **Vogue** ? and with active encouragement from Lisa, one of his classmates, he eventually finds himself wearing an orange sequined dress. Predictably, this leads within the family, at school and on the playing fields to considerable consternation, but the story's greatest charm is that young Dennis is, ultimately, totally unaffected by these critical responses: the book is proudly on the side of difference and its celebration. There are some moments of authorial self-indulgence, the narrator's third person voice is frequently arch and patronising, the minor characters remain essentially two-dimensional and the school principal, Mr Hawtrey, is mere Dickensian caricature; the final revelation about the latter strains all credibility even if having its own ironic justice. But, on the whole, this is a very likeable book, a feeling well reinforced by Quentin Blake's sprightly illustrations. The twenty years which have passed since the first publication of Anne Fine's **Bill's New Frock** have seen some remarkable developments in children's fiction ? and this is one manifestation of them.

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