

A Barbie book gets a new story

By Atlanta Journal-Constitution, adapted by Newsela staff

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A selection of Barbie dolls fill a shelf at a store in Caracas, Venezuela, Nov. 10, 2014.

ATLANTA—The Barbie doll has had many jobs. She has been an astronaut, a pilot and even a race-car driver.

In a new book, she is a computer engineer—someone who builds apps, websites and video games.

The book is called “Barbie: I Can Be a Computer Engineer.” In it, Barbie is helping to create a video game.

Can Barbie Make A Computer Game?

But, as bloggers on the Internet pointed out, Barbie is not actually making the game. Her friends are—boys.

“I’m only creating the design idea,” Barbie says in the book. “I’ll need Steven and Brian’s help to turn it into a real game.”

Also in the book, Barbie’s computer gets a virus, and she needs the boys to help her fix it.

The bloggers said Barbie wasn't setting a good example for young girls. The book was sending a message, they said, that boys are better with computers than girls.

Let's Tell That Story Differently

Casey Feisler is a research student in Atlanta, Georgia. She studies technology. She saw the online discussion of "I Can Be a Computer Engineer." She agreed that the book was sending a bad message to young people. She decided to do something about it.

Feisler changed the book. With the help of her roommate, she wrote a new story. She designed new pages using Photoshop. She posted her work online.

In Fiesler's story, Barbie is tougher and more confident.

In the new book, Barbie says, "Really good games are made by a team of people. I'm doing some of the coding now, but Steven and Brian are helping, too."

Coding means writing computer code. Computer engineers, or software engineers, write code to build websites, apps and games.

People loved Fiesler's new book, which she called a remix. She got 50,000 visits to her website in just a few days. Before that, she only had 800.

Barbie's Maker Says "Sorry"

Mattel is the company that makes Barbie dolls and other Barbie products. It apologized for the book and stopped selling it.

"Girls should understand that anything is possible and (that) they live in a world without limits," the toy company wrote in its apology.

Susan Marenco wrote the original book. She blamed Mattel for the book's message.

Marenco said the problem is that the company still thinks Barbie always has to be nice, that Barbie cannot show anger or frustration.

Fiesler, who rewrote the book, is a research student at Georgia Tech University in Atlanta. She studies technology. She also has a law degree, and is a writer.

"If Mattel would like to pay me to write a new version, I would be happy to," she said.