



## Bonding Boys to Books

### Did you know?

- Boys are biologically, developmentally, and psychologically different from girls:
  - ✓ Boys tend to have an advantage in their left hemisphere by being able to recall facts and rules and categorize
  - ✓ Right-brain strengths encompass visual-spatial and visual-motor skills, which enable boys to excel in topics like geography, science, and math (Connell & Gunzelman, 2004)
- Scientists caution that brain research doesn't tell the whole story – temperament, family background and environment play roles, too (Tyre, 2006)
- By the 4<sup>th</sup> grade, the average boy is developmentally two years behind the average girl in reading and writing
- Boys want to see characters like themselves when they read books (McFann, 2004)
- According to Michael Smith and Jeffrey Wilhelm (*Reading Don't Fix No Chevys*) boys read fewer books, and value reading less. But, it's not that boys aren't reading, it's just that the things they are reading aren't valued by schools (Graham & Hardy, 2006)
- For teachers to effectively teach literacy, they should work with, not against, the cultural tools that students bring to school
- Contrary to popular wisdom, children who are heavy users of electronic media tend to read *more* than light users do, although the portion of the day spent on reading is small, and book reading declines after age 10 (Newkirk, 2006)

### So What Should We Do?

#### *Ways to attract boys to reading:*

- **Male role models** - Provide male role models – a boy will follow the lead of his male role model – if that man values reading, the boy will, too. Invite fathers and male figures (authors, community figures) into the classroom as special guests, to help balance female influence. High school boys make great tutors for elementary age boys, as well (McFann, 2004).
- **Visual Graphics** - Tap into visual spatial strengths (ex. allow boys to map a filmstrip prediction for a book's ending)

Information compiled by Links to Literacy, 2008, [www.linkstoliteracy.com](http://www.linkstoliteracy.com)

- **Physical movement** - Allow time for movement – brief breaks built into the day to stand up, stretch, walk around, build physical movement into lessons wherever possible
- **Make it Hands-On** – Whenever possible, provide opportunities for boys to use hands-on activities when completing literacy activities
- **Incorporate technology** – Allow boys to use the computer for various reasons: the Internet to research topics, word documents to type writing pieces, PowerPoint to create slide shows, or literacy software to practice skills
- **Competition** - Allow opportunities for competition – occasional studying contests, spelling bees, geography bees, math competitions, and brainteasers
- **Match books to boys' interests** - Choose books that appeal to boys - comic books, video game manuals, sports magazines. Book talks in classrooms should include a variety of nonfiction to entice and engage boys.
- **Create a supportive class environment** – create an atmosphere of respect where boys feel comfortable letting their feelings show and feel safe to make mistakes. Provide an opportunity for each student to learn at his own pace and in his own style.
- **Clear Guidance** – Create tightly structured, well focused lessons that have an obvious purpose and are tied to the achievement of clear goals. Clearly define assessment tasks and provide specific and immediate feedback.

*Choice of Materials is Critical:*

- Materials should feature people of different ethnicities, races, and backgrounds who live in a variety of homes and communities
- Look for materials that have well-written male role models in them
- Boys are inclined to read informational texts, magazines, newspapers, graphic novels, and comic books
- Boys tend to resist stories about girls
- Boys like to read about hobbies, sports, and things they might be interested in
- Boys like to collect things and tend to collect series of books (ex. The Magic Tree House Series by Mary Pope Osborne and The Time Warp Trio Series by Jon Scieszka)
- Boys read less fiction than girls and tend to enjoy escapism and humor, some are passionate about science fiction or fantasy

*Boy-Friendly Literacy Activities (Ontario Ministry of Education):*

- Allow boys to read and create Pop-up books
- Provide boys the opportunity to create drama to understand components of a book (Reader's Theatre)
- Permit boys to create a fantasy sports league (boys read about their favorite sports figures and make a case for why those athletes should be on a fictional "dream team")
- Allow boys plenty of opportunities to use graphic organizers to help with comprehension

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- Create a storyboard before writing as a pre-writing strategy to get ideas on paper in a non-linear fashion
- Use music and lyrics to help students with vocabulary lessons, etc.
- Boys tend to thrive in an environment that uses literature circles
- Provide lessons and activities that relate to real-world themes
- Provide plenty of opportunities for boys to use technology in the literacy classroom

## Resources

Here are a few resources that may help you when differentiating for boys:

[www.guysread.com](http://www.guysread.com) – Jon Scieszka’s website dedicated to helping teachers and parents find books that boys will like reading

Helping Boys Succeed in School by Rich Weinfeld and Terry W. Neu, Ph.D.

Reading Don’t Fix No Chevys by Michael Smith and Jeffrey Wilhelm

The Minds of Boys by Michael Gurian and Kathy Stevens

To Be a Boy, To Be a Reader by William G. Brozo

## References

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