

Boys and Reading

What You Should Know

“Boys like to read what’s toolish, not schoolish,” according to Jeff Wilhelm, associate professor of English Education at Boise State University, and one of the country’s leading authorities on boys and literacy. What Wilhelm means, he said in an interview with Scholastic, is that boys will usually respond well to things related to their daily life, interests, and imagination, but not with what they are reading in school.

<http://www2.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=1543>

In fact, U.S. Department of Education reading tests for the last 30 years show boys scoring worse than girls in every age group, every year. Some statistics:

- **Eighth grade boys are 50 percent more likely to be held back than girls.**
- **Two-thirds of Special Education students in high school are boys.**

Why Are Boys Underperforming?

Jon Scieszka, author of children’s books such as *The Stinky Cheese Man* and the *Time Warp Trio* series, believes that boys are slower to develop than girls biologically and therefore often have early struggles with reading and writing skills. On his website (www.guysread.com), he also says that the male way of

learning, which tends to be action oriented and competitive, works against boys in many classrooms.

“Boys like to read for a purpose, to find out how to do things, like how to build a dirt bike or skateboard. That’s just not

encouraged enough,” Scieszka says. “Nonfiction reading is reading. Magazines, newspapers, websites, biographies, science books, comic books, graphic novels are all reading material,” he adds.



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- **Boys generally take longer than girls to develop comparable literacy skills. What is considered a grade level appropriate reading skill for a girl cannot always be considered the same for a boy. Boys generally need more instructional time than girls do. In the larger, time limited classes of middle and high school teachers are unable to give boys as much one-on-one time. Therefore, they do not make as much progress in reading as girls do.**
- **Middle school aged boys indicate that they believe reading is much harder than it was in elementary school.**
- **Boys claim reading becomes less enjoyable as they become older.**
- **Many adolescent boys fail to see real life applications in what they read. Literature read in Language Arts classes tells “stories” rather than providing useful information. Some boys stop reading because they think there is no practical value in reading.**
- **As they reach adolescence more and more boys stop considering themselves readers. Research on the reading attitudes of middle school boys shows that many consider themselves “non-readers.”**
- **Reading is sometimes stereotyped as a “feminine” activity. When boys reach adolescence their gender identification becomes more important. If they believe reading is not a masculine activity, they will abandon it in order to demonstrate their masculinity.**

What steps can be taken to solve this problem? William G. Brozo, author of the IRA publication *To Be a Boy, To Be a Reader*, recommends three key steps: continue to find ways to coordinate the skills boys have with the skills needed to handle academic tasks; match reading materials in school with boys' interests; and help boys find men to serve as reading mentors, especially in low-income neighborhoods. Then, we can not only help boys succeed academically but prepare them for success beyond the classroom.

http://www.reading.org/publications/reading_today/samples/RTY-0608-boys.html

Boys And Reading

What Every Parent Should Know

by Jon Scieszka

(NAPS)—If you are a parent raising a son, you already know that boys will be boys. But did you realize he will most likely need more special attention than his sister when it comes to reading?

Studies show that boys have lagged behind girls on reading tests in every age group for the last 30 years. In the 8th grade, boys are 50 percent more likely to be held back than girls. Two-thirds of special education students in high school are boys, and overall college enrollment is higher for girls than boys.

WAYS TO ENCOURAGE YOUR BOY TO READ

Certainly, no one book can be right for every kid. But as a society, we need to make more of an effort to connect them with many different kinds of reading—both at home and at school. You can find a good list of books for boys in your library or at www.guysread.com, www.familyeducation.com and www.californiareading.com.

Also, if you can expand the notion of what reading is, you will



have a better chance of inspiring your boy to want to become an avid, accomplished reader. This means broadening your definition of reading to include boy-friendly nonfiction, humor, sports, comics, graphic novels, action-adventure, magazines, Web sites and newspapers. Boys need to know that these materials count as reading.

This approach opens the door and the mind. Once a boy starts reading, he will be more receptive to many other types of reading over his lifetime.

WHY IS THIS HAPPENING?

One of the central problems is that boys tune out when the subject matter doesn't resonate with them. One reason boys have trouble reading is that they don't get to read for a purpose that makes a lot of sense to them. So they turn off to all reading. Boys often have trouble reading for other reasons:

- Biologically, boys are slower to develop than girls and often struggle with reading and writing skills early on.

- The action-oriented, competitive learning style of many boys works against them when learning to read and write.
- As a society, we teach boys to suppress feelings. Boys often don't feel comfortable exploring the emotions and feelings found in fiction.
- Boys don't have enough positive male role models for literacy. Because the majority of adults involved in kids' reading are women, boys might not see reading as a masculine activity.

Jon Scieszka is an award-winning children's writer and an author for Pearson's "California Reading Street" school reading curriculum. In addition to his Trucktown series aimed mainly at boys (but for girls, too), he has written such best-selling children's titles as "The Stinky Cheese Man," which won a Caldecott Medal, and "The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs." He was recently named National Ambassador for Young People's Literature by the Library of Congress.

Did You Know?

Many parents don't realize boys may require more special attention than their sisters when it comes to reading. For a list of books for boys, visit www.guysread.com, www.familyeducation.com and www.californiareading.com.

Give your boy a reason to want to become a reader. /// What Every Parent Should Know