EFFECTIVE APPROACHES TO MOTIVATE AND ENGAGE RELUCTANT BOYS IN LITERACY

Nicole Senn

This article explains why boys are often such reluctant readers and writers and provides classroom teachers with strategies to better engage them in literacy.

As a first-grade teacher, literacy is my favorite thing to teach. Helping my students grow from kindergarteners into fully fledged readers and writers in just one year is an extraordinary process. Even more gratifying than observing my students' rapid literacy development is cultivating within them a love of books and a desire to write.

I am thrilled beyond words when a first grader can tell me with absolute certainty that Mo Willems is his favorite author, that he has just finished writing a story he wants to share with the class, or that

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he needs a longer quiet reading time because he just "got to the good part" in his *Magic Tree House* book. Teaching kids to love reading and writing is what first grade is all about.

However, there are those few students who, no matter what I try or what strategies I implement, respond to literacy as if it were the most excruciating punishment that could possibly be inflicted upon them: the boys who completely lack interest when it comes to reading and writing. Writing expert Ralph Fletcher (2006) summed up many boys' experiences with literacy when he described the boys he observed in elementary school classrooms as "Turned off. Checked out. Disengaged. Disenfranchised" (p. 4).

What is it about boys that make them so difficult to engage in literacy, especially when compared with their female classmates? Popular children's author and former teacher Jon Scieszka suggested, "Researching the problems that boys have with reading, I have come to the conclusion that much of the cause of boys' reluctance to read can be reduced to a single, crucial element—motivation" (as cited in Boltz, 2007).

"The idea is…to broaden our thinking to include the specific needs of our boys and what they can achieve in literacy areas."

If motivation, as Scieszka proposed, is the key, what can teachers do to encourage boys to have a more vested interest in reading and writing? Luckily, research in this area provides background about the reason why boys lack motivation in reading and writing and recommends a number of approaches elementary school teachers can employ within their classrooms to engage reluctant boys in literacy.

Why Should We Pay Special Attention to Boys?

Smith and Wilhelm (2002) highlighted the fundamental reasons boys need some extra attention and care when it comes to literacy:

- Boys take longer to learn to read than girls.
- Boys generally provide lower estimations of their reading abilities than girls do.
- Boys read less than girls.
- Boys express less enthusiasm for reading than girls do.
- Boys increasingly consider themselves to be "nonreaders" as they get older; very few designate themselves as such early in their schooling, but nearly 50% make that designation by high school (p. 11).

Fletcher (2006) acknowledged that when compared with girls, boys may not be "failing miserably," but he asked the question, "Can we honestly say that [boys] are thriving?" (p. 15). This is an important thought to consider, especially when it is reported that between 70% and 80% of students who demonstrate a lack of motivation in school are boys (Gurian & Henley, 2001). The idea is not to ignore or pay less attention to the girls in our classrooms, but to broaden our thinking to include the specific needs of our boys and what they can achieve in literacy areas.

Data suggest that boys around the globe are struggling with literacy, especially when compared with girls at their same grade level (Boltz, 2007; Farris, Werderich, Nelson & Fuhler, 2009; Kush & Watkins, 1996; Moss, 2000). Generally speaking, girls outperform boys on all types of standardized tests in reading (Boltz, 2007; Farris et al., 2009; Moss, 2000), and the "underachievement of boys in writing is a major issue" (Graham, 2001, p. 20).

Furthermore, "an alarming number of boys are becoming distant from reading, being diagnosed with learning and emotional problems, and are dropping out of school" (Zambo, 2007, p. 124). In fact, three times as many boys are placed into learning disability programs as girls, and 70–80% percent of students found to lack motivation in school are boys (Gurian & Henley, 2001; Kush & Watkins, 1996).

One of the factors thought to have a great degree of impact on a student's literacy achievement is the attitude the student has toward literacy (Kush &

Pause and Ponder

1. Do you agree or disagree with the statistics in this article that suggest boys require "special" literacy attention? How do the boys in your classrooms compare with the information and examples presented here?
2. What teaching practices or philosophies are currently in place in our classrooms that foster boys' literacy learning? What practices might we modify to better meet the needs of *all* our students?
3. What material do we currently have in our school and classroom libraries that motivate boys to read?

Watkins, 1996). Students who embrace a more positive attitude toward reading tend to be more successful readers in terms of ability (Wigfield & Asher, 1984, as cited in Kush & Watkins, 1996). It makes sense then that boys are generally less successful readers than their female counterparts when they lack the interest and motivation to develop their skills.

A longitudinal study conducted by Kush and Watkins (1996) examining student attitudes toward reading found first-grade girls to demonstrate more affirmative attitudes toward leisure reading than boys of the same age. This attitudinal trend remained consistent for three consecutive years.

These results are consistent with the findings of a survey of boys aged 10–13: 17.1% were not at all interested in reading for pleasure, 42.9% were occasionally motivated to read recreationally, and only 40% engaged in reading as a leisure activity (Boltz, 2007). As summarized by Farris and colleagues. (2009), "Overall, boys devote less time to reading, tend to be less confident readers, have less motivation to engage in reading, do not especially value reading as a free time activity, and have less interest in reading than girls" (p. 180).

The recipe for literacy success includes both reading and writing. While it is clear that boys' lack of enthusiasm for reading should be of significant concern for educators, boys' feelings about writing should not be left unacknowledged either. In a survey mailed to 100 teachers around the United States, Ralph Fletcher (2006) wondered, "In general, my boys/girls tend to enjoy writing more." The results that Fletcher received were overwhelming: 21 responses indicated an equal enjoyment by girls and boys for writing, 49 replies specified that girls enjoy writing more, and only 1 individual reported that boys enjoy writing more than girls.

In his survey, Fletcher went on to ask teachers to complete the sentence, "What perplexes me about my boy writers is…" Responses from teachers expressed frustration with boys who have great ideas, but resist expressing their thoughts on paper, or boys who are worried that they would not be viewed as "cool" by peers if they put too much effort into writing.

If the perspective that boys take with regard to literacy is as downbeat as Fletcher's survey suggests, then it is one that educators must work hard to correct. As Zambo (2007) stated, "Literacy can offer boys more life options, but more important, it can also offer them positive images of who they are and who they can become" (p. 124).

"Students who embrace a more positive attitude toward reading tend to be more successful readers in terms of ability."

Why Do Boys Lack Motivation in the First Place?

According to research, there are many reasons why boys seem to be more difficult than girls to motivate with regard to literacy. It is key to remember that although the aim is to treat girls and boys equally within the classroom, boys and girls *are* different, and teachers need to consider the distinguishing needs of each gender when planning and teaching.

Brain and Biology

Beginning in the early years of school, teachers and parents notice clear distinctions in the ways that girls and boys approach learning. Gurian and Henley (2001) summarized some of these observations that are often specific to age and grade level:

- Preschool and kindergarten—Boys often express their emotions through action, whereas girls use words to communicate feelings. Boys demonstrate lesser degrees of empathy and shorter attention spans than girls of the same age.

- First through third grade—Girls often begin reading sooner and with greater skill than boys, who usually take longer to achieve reading mastery. Girls display greater skill in grammar and vocabulary, whereas boys have distinct advantages in math. Children with attention and hyperactivity disorders are typically diagnosed during these years in school: 95% of those students diagnosed with hyperactivity are boys, whereas only 5% are girls (Gurian & Henley, 2001).
- Fourth through sixth grade—Boys generally focus on all things related to action and exploration, whereas girls attend much more to relationships and communication. Boys display aptitude in map and direction skills, and instead, girls have an edge in tasks that require fine motor skills. Boys are more often referred for remedial reading than girls.

With good reason, teachers and parents often want to know what is responsible for these dissimilarities between genders.

Studies show that biology and neurological "wiring" create differences in the ways that girls and boys respond to reading and writing and, consequently, to school as a whole. Brain research has found that certain areas of the male brain do not develop at the same rate or even in the same sequence as the female brain. Furthermore, the female brain matures sooner than the male brain, and certain areas of the brain do not develop to the same degree in one gender as compared with the other.

These brain design differences are what create some of the external behaviors and attitudes that we see in boys and girls. For example, the corpus callosum (the part of the brain that connects the right and left hemispheres and facilitates communication between them) is 20% larger in females than it is in males. Because verbal communication abilities are controlled by areas in both hemispheres of the brain, this explains why females are generally more adept at expressing emotions than males (Fletcher, 2006; Gurian & Henley, 2001).

Similarly, areas of the temporal lobe in the right hemisphere responsible for controlling spatial ability, measurement, and map reading develop more quickly and to a greater extent in males than in females. This explains why boys typically display greater aptitude in these skill areas (Gurian & Henley, 2001; Sax, 2007).

Specific regions of the brain have a significant impact on students' ability to succeed in literacy. Take, for example, the brain's frontal lobe and cerebellum, which are directly responsible for language skills. Recent brain studies have discovered the development of language areas of 5-year-old boys' brains to be on par with the language areas of 3.5-year-old girls (Sax, 2007).

Gender research of the brain also implies the need for movement in males. Male brains produce less serotonin than female brains, contributing to boys' increased fidgetiness as compared with girls. Males also typically have a higher metabolism and energy level, making movement a necessity. Movement has been shown to stimulate boys' brains and helps them to better manage their impulsivity; more frequent opportunities for movement increases communication between the right and left hemispheres and therefore enhances boys' ability to learn (Gurian & Henley, 2001).

Brain research also indicates that the female brain is never at rest, giving girls a distinct learning advantage, and explains why boys tend to become bored more easily than girls. Teachers know

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that when students become bored, they can often become disruptive or exhibit behavior problems. These students are often boys. Providing boys with "more and varying stimulants" (Gurian & Henley, 2001, p. 46) helps boys maintain attentiveness and thus increases their opportunities for learning success.

Moreover, girls are able to absorb more sensory information than boys and can hear softer sounds better than boys. As a result of their hearing differences, boys may often be perceived as not paying attention, when in fact they simply cannot hear (Gurian & Henley, 2001; James, 2007). Some teachers observe that the boys in a classroom are louder than the girls. This may be because their perception of their own voice volume is not the same as their teacher's.

Research in recent years has questioned whether or not boys' brain development and general biology make age 5 an appropriate age for boys to begin kindergarten. Starting school a year later might prevent some boys from becoming turned off to school at such an early age. The combination of the slower developing male brain and an elementary school curriculum that is far more accelerated than it was 30 years ago is making learning more difficult for boys.

Quite simply, boys are required to do more than what their brains are developmentally ready to do (Sax, 2001, 2007; Zambo & Brozo, 2009). As Sax (2007) asserted, "Timing is everything in education… It is not enough to teach well. You have to teach well to kids who are ready to learn, kids who are 'developmentally ripe'" (p. 18).

Lacking Confidence

Much of boys' lack of motivation to read and write can be attributed to the limited confidence they frequently have in their abilities. Kowaleski-Jones and Duncan (1999) stated:

> One of the potential dangers of middle childhood is that children's sense of personal adequacy is developing and therefore vulnerable. To the extent that they feel their achievement skills are inadequate, boys might be discouraged from further developing these skills. (p. 931)

Boys' diminished confidence in their abilities leads them to read less and consequently to spend less time developing their skills, perpetuating the ability-confidence-motivation cycle (Moss, 2000).

In a study aimed to gauge the way 5-year-old boys view reading, results implied that negative attitudes toward reading originated from the boys' desire to "get it right" and that concepts of their ability were directly related to the difficulty of the task. The study found that to avoid failure and frustration and still complete the assigned tasks, boys preferred to read short and easy books. Also noted by this study was the fact that boys' negative attitudes toward reading were often because boys view reading as a "compulsory activity controlled by adult-given instructions," (Lever-Chain, 2008, p. 89) and boys believe "school just forces you to do things" (Lever-Chain, 2008, p. 109).

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Writing, like reading, is another area in which boys are likely to encounter frustration and diminished confidence. Fletcher (2006) described a writer as "somebody who is willing to tolerate failure on a massive level" (p. 37), and boys are not always able to accept criticism without it affecting their confidence. When boys' attempts at writing are not met with complete success or are ridiculed, it is no wonder that they become reluctant to persevere. For this reason, it is essential that teachers provide scaffolded activities for writing and do not expect mastery after first attempts (Fletcher, 2006; James, 2007; Medwell & Wray, 2007; Zambo & Brozo, 2009).

Literacy Is for Girls

Studies show that even preschool-aged children have concepts of gender stereotypes and that reading is an activity thought to be primarily associated with females (Zambo, 2007). This idea is supported by research from Katz and Sokal that found that 24% of second-grade students perceived reading as strictly feminine (as cited in Farris et al., 2009). This is a notion that teachers must work hard to correct.

Although teachers likely do not view themselves as favoring or teaching exclusively to one gender or the other, it is possible that one's gender does influence instruction. Fletcher (2006) explained:

"The books that appeal to boys are rarely Caldecott or Newbery Award selections and can actually frequently be found on banned book lists."

> Gender is not like a mask you can take off and put aside for a few hours; it is an inherent part of who we are. We each have a 'gender filter' that can enhance but also distort our perceptions of the world. (p. 22)

This gender filter might be a factor when considering the content of reading and writing material that teachers present to students. Sullivan (2004) believed that the criteria by which teachers evaluate books are centered much more on the way girls think as opposed to boys (cited in Boltz, 2007).

Consider the fact that when deciding on read-aloud selections, fiction is typically the genre of choice for most teachers and parents. Most books in this category tend to focus on thoughts and feelings, explore relationships between characters, and encourage reflection—all concepts that develop reading comprehension. Boys often perceive books of this nature as "girl books" because boys tend to be disinterested in analyzing characters or relationships in the same way girls often are (Boltz, 2007).

Similarly, the emphasis on expressive, narrative writing over informational or expository writing in many classrooms can make it difficult for boys to excel (Fletcher, 2006; Read, 2005). Many boys become turned off to writing because they view it as a subject more appropriate for girls.

Not Interested

Farris and colleagues (2009) observed, "As boys progress through school, it becomes more difficult to motivate them to read. Although teachers seek to find that just-right book for every reader, the one that will get a boy engaged in literacy is oftentimes elusive" (p. 181). Many teachers can identify with this statement. One reason why many boys can be so difficult to motivate to read is because the material provided to them by schools, teachers, and parents does not appeal to their interests. If the goal is to engage boys in literacy, adults must be aware of how they respond to subjects that boys find appealing and then allow boys to read and write about these themes.

Topics that boys often gravitate toward, such as sports, comics, action, horror, or humor, are often not genres endorsed by teachers or librarians (Boltz, 2007; Brozo, 2002; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). In fact, as Boltz (2007) noted in her article, "What We Want: Boys and Girls Talk About Reading," with few exceptions, the books that appeal to boys are rarely Caldecott or Newbery Award selections and can actually frequently be found on banned book lists or as books not selected for school libraries.

When boys notice that what they like and want to read about are not genres sincerely embraced by adults, they may deduce that reading and writing are not worth their time. "Without books that appeal to boys, boys come to believe that topics of interest to them cannot be found in books" (Zambo & Brozo, 2009, p. 39).

How Teachers Can Get Boys Motivated

Fisher (2001) purported that "boys' general experience of school is often not suited to their learning styles or preferences" (p. 33). If educators are to correct this claim, then steps need to be taken to more effectively engage boys in literacy. "Helping boys find entry points into literacy must be a priority and it must happen early, when boys first become acquainted with literacy" (Zambo, 2007, p. 125). Recognizing this overwhelming responsibility, researchers and education experts offer practical advice to help classroom teachers successfully accomplish this goal.

Show Boys That Men Read, Too!

Because reading and writing are often perceived as activities for girls, men who read and write can be valuable role models for both boys and girls. In a poll of boys in the fifth through eighth grades, 29.7% reported that no men in their families were regular readers (Boltz, 2007). Brozo (2002) rightly questioned how society expects boys to become readers when they rarely see adult men reading. Gurian and Henley (2001) stipulated that men should be present in a boy's "educational life, especially from fifth grade onward" (p. 197).

To achieve this, teachers can invite parent volunteers to assist in the classroom, making sure that mothers and fathers are equally welcome. Helper moms and dads (grandparents, siblings, etc.) can read with students individually or provide one-on-one writing assistance while a teacher works with other students.

Inviting men who like to read and write to speak to students can also be a useful strategy to model reading as a male activity. An author visit, a guest reader, or simply highlighting the work of male authors and illustrators in the classroom can make an impression on boys and girls alike. Finally, fathers should be encouraged to spend as

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much time reading with their children as mothers do to show their sons and daughters that literacy is important to everyone (King & Gurian, 2006).

Appeal to the Interests of Boys

If the goal is to engage boys in literacy, then teachers and parents should provide boys with topics and genres that are of specific interest to them. It is essential to remember that boys and girls *are* different in terms of their literary interests. Research that investigates the specific reading and writing tastes of boys reveals that they enjoy texts that can be collected (books in a series, baseball cards, etc.), have visual interest (graphic novels, websites), are succinct (newspaper or magazine articles), relate to their own lives, and are funny or rebellious (comics) (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002).

"What boys like to read springs naturally from their experiences and how their brains are wired" (Boltz, 2007, Review of the Literature section, para. 13). Gurian and Henley (2001) explained this idea further and stated that, because of the lesser cross-brain activity in boys compared with girls, boys need to jump-start their brains with an increased dose of sensory or physical stimulation. This is the reason that action, adventure, and sports top the list of boys' preferred reading and writing topics. The fact that boys display a greater interest in comic books, graphic novels, and nonfiction than girls also makes sense when one understands the design of the boy brain.

The use of nonfiction as read-aloud, guided reading, or independent reading material, or as a writing topic, can be particularly useful when engaging boys in literacy. Boys are often much more interested in informational topics than those that are fictional or narrative because they appeal to boys' need to understand the world around them.

Boys enjoy being experts on topics of personal significance to them and will enjoy reading when the purpose of the book is to teach them something (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). An additional benefit of using nonfiction with both genders in the primary grades is that it exposes students to academic vocabulary that will be useful to them in the content areas as they progress through school.

Because instruction focuses much more on textbooks as students approach the intermediate grades, students' background with nonfiction may help to avoid a struggle with nonfiction comprehension (Granowsky, 2004). Read (2005) summarized, "For some children, interacting with non-narrative texts may be the best path to overall literacy, particularly for boys and struggling readers" (p. 36).

When seeking to engage boys in reading, books that are part of a series are also valuable ones to consider. Research, surveys, and conversations with boys in the elementary grades suggest that boys are more likely to have a positive response to reading when they have a connection to the characters (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002).

Series books with characters such as Percy Jackson, Harry Potter, Bone, or the Pigeon are an excellent way to help boys develop these relationships. The boys are reassured by the familiarity of the character (Fisher, 2001) and can share in their favorite character's experiences that sometimes span years (Farris et al., 2009).

According to Farris and colleagues (2009), specifically popular with boys are characters who are not "depicted as perfect but rather [have] believable flaws" (p. 184). Following these characters through a series as they encounter trials and tribulations shows boys that challenges can be overcome (Farris et al., 2009).

The visual appeal and conciseness of a text are important to consider when selecting reading material for boys. Boys have a tendency to evaluate books strictly on their appearance. Attention-grabbing cover designs, easy-to-read text, large print, large areas of "white space," photographs, frequent illustrations, and short length are all characteristics that boys find appealing. Boys often use these criteria when they decide whether or not to give a book a try (Farris et al., 2009).

Teachers do not often present magazines, newspapers, graphic novels,

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books of captioned photos, or websites as reading options. These short pieces of text, however, provide instant feedback and accomplishment and do not demand prolonged attention, making them popular with boys (Farris et al., 2009; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). Keeping these factors in mind might make it easier for teachers to find books boys will enjoy.

Make Literacy Relevant

In the same way that literacy needs to be made interesting to effectively engage boys, it also needs to be made relevant. According to King and Gurian (2006), "Boys do their best work when teachers establish authentic purpose and meaningful real-life connections," (p. 60). In many cases, part of the reason boys become unmotivated to read or write is because they do not see how literacy can be of value to them outside the four walls of their classrooms (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). When reading and writing are presented strictly as assignments to complete, boys are not given an opportunity to become personally invested in the material (Boltz, 2007).

Boys (and girls) need to have a purpose for the work they are asked to do. When students are asked to write, for example, there should be a clear audience for whom they are writing and a distinct purpose *why* they are writing, a purpose that does not exist solely for school. Writing a book report for the teacher contains little relevance, whereas writing a book review for classmates is far more purposeful and shows boys that there is a place for writing in their lives (Fletcher, 2006).

Fletcher (2006) noted, "Writing is much more than just another school subject. It is a life skill, a lifeline we throw out at the darkest, as well as the most triumphant moments of our lives" (p. 15). Likewise, personal relevance for reading can also be established when boys are offered an opportunity to read about topics that connect to their own lives.

Give Boys a Choice

As often as possible, teachers should offer boys the opportunity to choose the topics about which they read and write. If boys are to see that reading and writing are personally relevant to them, they need to be allowed to read and write about topics that are of interest to them.

In a survey of intermediate-grade boys who were asked what teachers could do to help boys read more, 25% responded that their only advice was to give boys a choice of what they read (Boltz, 2007). Similarly, Fletcher (2006) asked 500 boys to explain what they wish they were allowed to do in terms of writing. The responses he received were all of a similar nature: "create our own topic," "choose," and "write whatever we want."

Studies show that boys do not often develop new interests when they read but instead read to fuel preexisting interests, and this is what makes the power of choice such a key factor when working to engage boys in literacy (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). Research also indicates that one of the best ways to improve the reading and writing of both boys *and* girls is to give students greater freedom to explore literacy through a wide variety of topics and formats and for multiple purposes (Boltz, 2007; King & Gurian, 2006; Moss, 2000).

Because boys often fear judgment regarding their reading and writing topic choice and format, be sure to let them know that you value and see purpose in the choices they make. Even if these choices involve drawings, crass humor, slang language, and poor grammar, increased opportunities for choice in reading and writing allow boys to (a) better experiment with topics, styles, and formats; (b) use newly acquired vocabulary; (c) practice skills and strategies; and above all, (d) read and write about what is important to them (Fletcher, 2006; Graham, 2001).

When teachers allow boys to choose the topics that they read and write about, boys "develop a sense of ownership" about their learning, which gives them greater motivation to read and write. In addition, to the degree that boys feel they are part of the decision-making process in their learning, it "strengthens the level of trust between student and teacher" (Jenkins, 2009, p. 161). This level of trust between student and teacher requires balance

"The power of choice is…key when working to engage boys in literacy."

and can be difficult to maintain; it therefore requires an open mind of both the teacher and the student.

Be Open Minded

Remembering that boys have different interests and tastes than girls, teachers may need to re-evaluate their expectation levels as well as what is considered "acceptable" or "appropriate." Sometimes, this may require teachers to allow a bit of leeway in the manner of how boys present their work. Remember: The ultimate goal is for boys to *want* to read and write.

Drawing, Violence, and Humor. Fletcher (2006) said that "boy writers have unique strengths, quirks, and weaknesses that every thoughtful practitioner or parent will want to be aware of" (pp. 7–8). Boys do express their thoughts differently than girls, and it is important that drawing not be ruled out as part of the writing process, especially when boys are involved.

Drawing is a means of communication boys may be more comfortable with than traditional reading or writing. The illustrations that often accompany their stories or journal entries may contain key information, details, settings, or plots in a format that better suits them. When allowed to incorporate drawings as part of their written work, boys are given an opportunity to develop their voice (Fletcher, 2006). In this same way, boys who enjoy reading graphic novels and comics should be encouraged because these genres are a means of helping boys acquire skills that they can then put back into their own writing.

Boys' fascination with action, adventure, and consequently violence, can be a tricky matter when it comes to what they read and write. Although information from brain-based research makes boys' interest in such subjects easier to understand, many teachers are uncomfortable when boys elect to read or write about violent topics (Fletcher, 2006; Gurian & Henley, 2001).

Fletcher (2006) explained that there is "a built-in culture (and gender) clash between the student's world and the world of the teacher" (p. 55). It is critical for teachers to remember to place "commonsense limitations" (p. 54) on the amount and type of violence allowed in a boy's writing and that the violence a boy reads or writes about may not be just about the violence—there is often humor lurking beneath the seemingly violent surface (Fletcher, 2006).

Boys enjoy both reading and writing humor, and their sense of what is funny is often different from that of girls. Humor offers boys a way to take risks, "demonstrate their independence, and

TAKE ACTION!

1. Invite male role models into your classroom.
   - Guest readers—Family members (your own or those of your students), friends, other staff members
   - Writing mentors—Family members (your own or those of your students), friends, other staff members to teach students about the writing they do in their jobs
   - Male authors and illustrators—Highlight examples in author or genre studies.
2. Consider your read-aloud selections: Will they be appealing to the boys in your class?
3. Maintain a balance of fiction and nonfiction in your classroom read-alouds.
4. Assess your classroom library:
   - Is there a reasonable amount of nonfiction about a wide variety of topics?
   - Does your fiction collection contain books with male characters?
   - Do you have books that are part of a series that may help to hook some of your reluctant readers?
   - Is there access to reading material with visual appeal?
     - Interesting cover art
     - Books with large print/easy-to-read text
     - Photographs or frequent illustrations
     - Magazines, newspapers, comics, graphic novels
5. Allow the boys (and girls!) in your class to choose what they read and to read with their peers.
6. Allow your students to choose their own writing topics and formats whenever possible. Encourage them to illustrate their work.
7. Provide time to share, collaborate on, and celebrate writing.
8. Incorporate technology whenever possible.
9. Remember that boys need opportunities for frequent movement.
10. Keep an eye and ear out for your boys' humor. Let them be funny, and enjoy it yourself!

resist authority" (Fletcher, 2006, p. 62). Humor requires intelligence, and some of the cleverest writing is expressed through satire and spoofs.

Allowing boys opportunities to read humorous texts to discover what makes them funny and then model these strategies in their own writing will help them be motivated readers and writers (Fletcher, 2006). Fletcher (2006) suggested, "Take your boys' humor seriously. Look for the intelligence behind the apparent silliness. Instead of 'humor,' think 'voice.' Instead of 'silly,' think 'satire.' Be as generous as possible with their humor. Give yourself permission to enjoy their humor" (pp. 67–68).

MORE TO EXPLORE

ReadWriteThink.org Lesson Plans

- "Book Report Alternative: Hooking a Reader With a Book Cover" by Cassandra Love
- "Using Greeting Cards to Motivate Students and Enhance Literacy Skills" by Tara Barnstead

IRA Journal Articles

- "Motivating Students to Read in the Content Classroom: Six Evidence-Based Principles" by William G. Brozo and E.Sutton Flynt, *The Reading Teacher*, October 2008
- "Reading Adventures Online: Five Ways to Introduce the New Literacies of the Internet Through Children's Literature" by Jill Castek, Jessica Bevans-Mangelson, and Bette Goldstone, *The Reading Teacher*, April 2006
- "What Teachers Can Learn About Reading Motivation Through Conversations With Children" by Kathryn M. Edmunds and Kathryn L. Bauserman, *The Reading Teacher*, February 2006

Even More!

- Layne, S.L. (2009). *Igniting a passion for reading: Successful strategies for building lifetime readers.* Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

Be Flexible. To better reach all students in their classrooms, teachers may need to "think outside the box" when it comes to creating assignments and learning experiences in literacy. For boys, one of the best ways to improve their experiences in these areas is to allow more frequent opportunities for movement. Gurian and Henley (2001) recommended that desks and chairs never be kept in a row or fixed permanently to the floor before students reach the third grade.

Sax (2007) noted the increased success of schools in Chicago and Waterloo that have made sitting optional and have instead allowed boys to stand, sit in chairs, or sit on the floor. Whether it is through novelty desks, sitting options, or lessons that incorporate play and natural motion, kinesthetic learning will keep boys' brains active and enhance literacy learning (King & Gurian, 2006; Klebanoff, 2009).

All teachers of literacy want to help their students develop into successful readers and writers. Even more than that, teachers of literacy hope to instill in their students a love of reading and writing. Boys can be the most difficult of students with whom to accomplish this goal, but when teachers look at literacy from a boy's perspective, then they can begin teaching in ways that will motivate boys to want to read and write.

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