



# Teaching for Reading and Writing Success to the Male Brain

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[www.kjodle.net](http://www.kjodle.net)  
[www.kjodle.net/boysliteracy](http://www.kjodle.net/boysliteracy) (active after this weekend)

Visit my "Boys and Literacy" forum! Go to this address:  
<http://interact.kjodle.net/forum/>  
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Board index All times are UTC - 5 hours

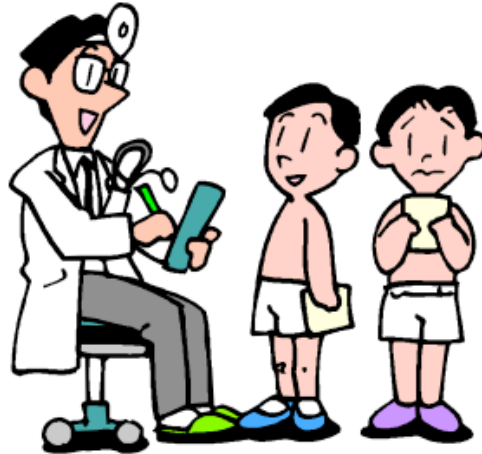
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Thanks for stopping by!

# Boys vs. Nature



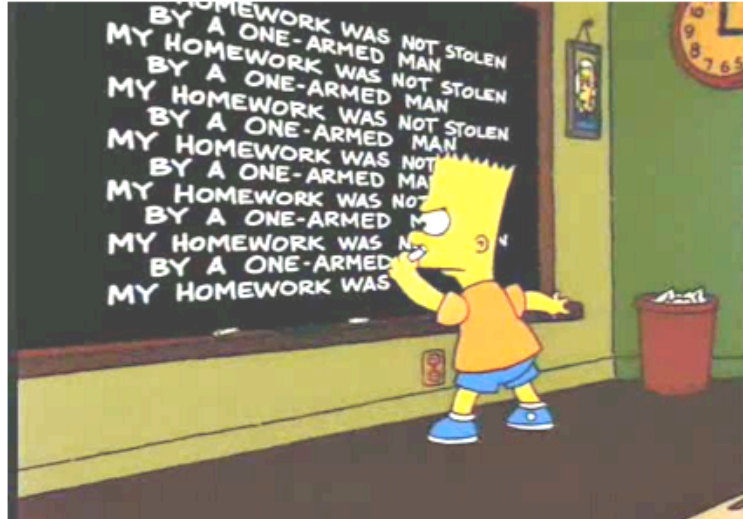
Biological differences are more pronounced at younger ages, but the psychological effects may last well into adulthood. Take them into account at all ages.

Fact	Implication	Strategies
Boys' brains are usually 6 to 18 months behind girls' brains in development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Especially at earlier ages, boys don't pick up skills as readily or as early as girls.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue oral reading to students at all ages.</li> </ul>
Boys' frontal lobes are less well-developed than in girls.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Boys are more impulsive.</li> <li>They are less able to sit still, and tend to fidget.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allow boys more movement, or even just to stand, if appropriate.</li> <li>Stress balls</li> </ul>
Girls tend to think more verbally, boys more visually.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Literature may be harder to approach.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use more "graphic" texts</li> <li>Use sticky notes and index cards as writing manipulatives</li> <li>Use storyboarding to organize writing</li> </ul>
Boys have less-developed fine motor skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bad handwriting</li> <li>"Handaches"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teach penmanship (but <b>not</b> the old-fashioned way—focus on the child's key problem areas, not on a scope-and-sequence)</li> <li>Use kindergarten pencils</li> <li>Use large-diameter pens</li> <li>Teach the "potato-chip" method</li> </ul>
The corpus callosum is larger in girls; thus, there is more cross-talk between hemispheres in girls' brains than in boys'.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Girls are better at multitasking.</li> <li>Boys prefer a more logical, A-Z focus on tasks.</li> <li>Boys can become irritable if moved too quickly between activities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teach boys to develop and use their own organizational strategies</li> <li>Don't push boys to take on a variety of tasks at once.</li> </ul>

<b>Fact</b>	<b>Implication</b>	<b>Strategies</b>
Boys' brains slip into a "neural rest state" more easily (i.e., they "spin down" more readily than girls').	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boys fidget to keep their minds active.</li> <li>• Boys may miss something if there is a lag in the instruction or activity.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accept the fidgeting, within reason.</li> <li>• Do not view "tuning out" as subversive or an insult to your teaching.</li> </ul>
Boys have a larger portion of testosterone than girls.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boys are more aggressive.</li> <li>• Boys are more overtly competitive.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Aggression Nurturance" – the playful hitting and "dissing" that boys engage in is not always bad. Sometimes it is a form of bonding.</li> <li>• Use games to achieve lower-level objectives.</li> </ul>
Boys have a smaller proportion of oxytocin (the "bonding hormone") than girls.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boys do not automatically bond with teachers as well as girls. (They have less reliance on "bonding malleability" – the desire to comply in order to please others.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suggest a specific person, other than yourself, as the audience for reading and writing.</li> <li>• Provide opportunities for boys to share their reading and writing experiences, especially with other boys.</li> </ul>

Never ask students to "cold read" aloud.  
 No round-robin reading.

# Boys vs. Nurture



Fact	Implication	Strategies
We expect boys not to be as literate as girls.	Boys don't expect to be as literate as girls.	Allow more time for sharing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• literature circles</li> <li>• readers' circles</li> <li>• publication</li> <li>• book talks</li> <li>• web sites</li> </ul>
There are few early role models for male literacy, especially for minority boys.	Reading and writing tend to be viewed as feminine activities, or something to be done in private. (Where do almost all adult men read?)	Provide more male role models in the schools. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• fathers</li> <li>• business &amp; community leaders</li> <li>• <b>the school janitor</b></li> </ul> <p>Encourage more men to be early-education teachers.</p>
"Literacy" is often viewed by teachers strictly in terms of fiction and poetry.	Boys infer that "literacy" is a strictly associated with school. Anything else that's fun and enjoyable simply isn't learning.	We need to start examining the wide range of literacies that boys already <b>do</b> use. <p>These are strengths that we can use to open up channels of communication.</p>

# Strengths of Boys



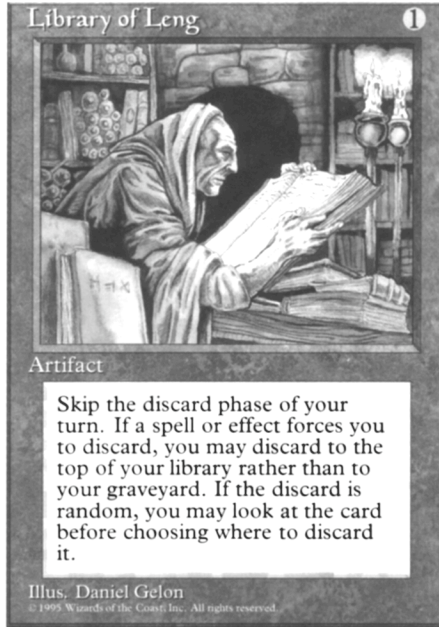
**As a matter of fact, I *did* read the repair manual.**

Too often, we assume that boys who don't like to read fiction or chapter books are "alliterate." Yet boys do use a lot of different literacies in their daily lives.

In order to reach them, we need to examine the kinds of literacies that they do use, such as:

- Periodical literature
- Informational literature (see above)
- Digital literature
- Video games
- RPG (role playing games, such as "Dungeons and Dragons" and "Magic: The Gathering") A lot of these have aspects of the hero quest that Joseph Campbell described.
- Coded language, such as riddles, puzzles, word games, etc.

As an example of how demanding some of this type of literacy can be, take a look at two cards from the "Magic: The Gathering" role-playing game.



Both of these cards make heavy intellectual demands on the players, both in terms of literacy and strategy. And while a lot of Magic players are adults, I've seen kids as young as eight playing the game.

It is essential that we do not dismiss these basic literacies that boys use, but rather, use them to build bridges between where boys are now and where we would like them to be in the future.

# Preferences of Boys



## **Luke...Come back! I don't like Jane Austen, either!**

Boys often have far different reading preferences than the adults around them. Michael Sullivan has observed that in comparing teen boys' book choices in a bookstore to the ninety books listed on the International Reading Association's Young Adults' Choices project book lists from the preceding three years "there was absolutely no overlap" (67) and that only two authors appeared on both lists.

If we take a narrow view of literature (i.e., the traditional canon) and try to reach boys using only that set of books, we have a tough job ahead of us. We need to start by looking at the kinds of books that boys do like, and if not outright embracing them, at least making space on the shelf for them.

So what kinds of books do boys like to read? Here's a partial list:

- comics
- Manga
- graphic fiction
- series books
- "Choose Your Own Adventure" books
- nonfiction (history, natural science, archeology)
- books with maps (think *Lord of the Rings*)
- sports, action, adventure (Mike Lupica and Gary Paulsen)
- humor (Dave Barry, plus anything with potty humor)
- fantasy and science fiction
- books in which real boys are reflected (Joey Pigza and all sorts of authentic multicultural literature)
- anything that is squishy, slimy, gruesome, gross, or sticky

Choice is absolutely essential for boys and for all reluctant readers! We must allow students the right we have as adults to choose what they want to read. Our responsibility is to make as much great literature available to them as possible.

# Other strategies to try

(that I just don't have time to talk about):

- ❖ single-gender learning environments (try all-boy and all-girl groups, alternated by mixed-gender groups)
- ❖ more technology (boys and their toys)
- ❖ create an interactive website about a book
- ❖ use drama and acting out scenes from books (boys love to be hams, especially the ones that aren't all that into reading)
- ❖ longer wait time (30-60 seconds) — this helps *everyone*