

# Getting Boys to Read

In this article in *The Reading Teacher*, Frank Serafini (Arizona State University) addresses boys' chronic underachievement in reading. Some of the reasons:

- On average, boys spend less time reading than girls.
- Boys may have few male readers in their lives to emulate.
- The things boys like to read are often not allowed in school.
- Boys are generally less concerned with reading to please the teacher.
- About 90% of elementary teachers are women and may relate less well to boy readers.
- Boys are often more physically active than girls and less willing to read for extended periods of time.

“Our goal is to get boys to comprehend more difficult, complex material,” says Serafini, “but first we have to get them reading... In all too many classrooms, dramatic novels with female protagonists tend to outnumber books about worms and sports. As a boy reader, I was starved throughout elementary school for books on topics that really interested me.” Researchers have found that boys are drawn to books with these characteristics:

- Focused on plot, not drama and emotions;
- Visually appealing, for example, magazines and graphic novels;
- Practical, with information boys can use;
- Main characters boys can easily relate to;
- Funny, with elements of mischief and slapstick.

Making books like these readily available is a good start. Here are Serafini's follow-up suggestions:

- *Support browsing.* Walking a boy through a library can give him a sense of what's there that he wasn't aware of. Book talks are also important; the best ones begin, “If you liked that book, you will enjoy this book as well.” There are also a number of websites to steer boys toward just the right book, including [www.guysread.com](http://www.guysread.com), [www.readkiddoread.com](http://www.readkiddoread.com), and [www.gettingboystoread.com](http://www.gettingboystoread.com).

- *Use shorter texts.* “Reading opinion columns, essays, news articles, featured magazine articles, short stories, and informational texts is just as important as reading novels,” says Serafini. Complex picture books are also good. Here is a list of his favorite picture books and novels for boy readers: [www.frankserafini.com/book-lists/boysbooks.pdf](http://www.frankserafini.com/book-lists/boysbooks.pdf).

- *Provide extended amounts of time to read.* “You cannot get better at reading if you don't spend time reading,” says Serafini; “it's just that simple... We need to help boy readers figure out when they are going to find space for reading in their busy lives.”

- *Reduce the focus on after-reading activities.* This includes quizzes, worksheets, book reports, dioramas, and other “enrichment” activities, which Serafini thinks take up too much time in the reading program. “Sharing one’s noticings and interpretations in whole-class and small-group discussions should be the primary way of responding to texts,” he says. “Rereading favorites, selecting texts that are connected to what has been read, and offering recommendations for other readers are things lifelong readers say they do on their own. If these activities support successful, lifelong readers, they will support boy readers as well.”

- *View reading as a social activity.* Many boys don’t enjoy reading as a solitary activity; they want to talk to their friends about what they’re reading.

- *Focus on visual and multimodal texts.* Picture books, comics, graphic novels, and informational texts help boy readers make sense of complex material.

- *Invite male readers into the classroom.* Role models can debunk the notion that real men don’t read. “The more boys can connect to other literate males,” says Serafini, “the better the chance they will come to see themselves as readers.”

- *Develop boys’ identities as readers.* “All the access to books in the world will not make boys pick up a book if being a reader is not something they aspire to become or isn’t an identity their peers would approve of,” says Serafini. “In other words, we have to find ways to make reading cool both in and out of school.”

“Supporting Boys As Readers” by Frank Serafini in *The Reading Teacher*, September 2013 (Vol. 67, #1, p. 40-42), <http://bit.ly/1bXsodP>; Serafini can be reached at [fserafini@mac.com](mailto:fserafini@mac.com).