

Boys, Books, and ...Batteries?

Getting boys to read is often a struggle! Luckily, this is not new information, and there are plenty of resources available to help our boys on the road to lifelong literacy.

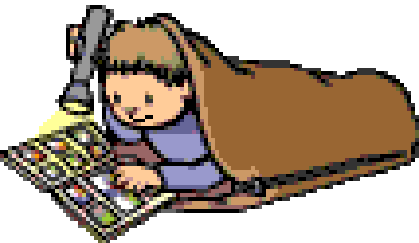
In Michael Sullivan's article written for the *School Library Journal* entitled "Why Johnny Won't Read" (August 2004), he points out that boys just don't read the same way as their mothers and mostly female teachers and librarians. Boys prefer reading for information (newspapers, magazines, nonfiction and how-to manuals), and oftentimes need activity to accompany their reading, such as acting out the story or building something. When it comes to fiction, they like their stories to be filled with action and scenes that grab their attention. Sullivan emphasizes that while boys' book choices may not be what we want for them to read, these self-picked books may be the gateway to continued, broader reading to follow. If literacy is the goal, is *Captain Underpants* really the worst thing for a boy to pick up and read? Sullivan gives a resounding "no", and offers many suggestions to shake up the way we present books and reading in the classroom, library, and home.

Sullivan's picks for elementary level boys' reading:

Loser (HarperCollins/Joanna Cotler Bks., 2002) by Jerry Spinelli. (Early elementary to middle school)

Phineas Gage: A Gruesome but True Story about Brain Science (Houghton, 2002) by John Fleischman. (Middle to upper elementary)

The Transmogrification of Roscoe Wizzle (Candlewick, 2001) by David Elliott. (Early elementary to middle school)



Guys Write for Guys Read edited by Jon Scieszka

A fun way to entice boys to read more is to introduce them to authors and illustrators in the book *Guys Write for Guys Read*. Here are six examples you may want to share with your preteen:

- "Superpatriot" by Avi. This popular author shares his love of comic books as a boy, and his goal of becoming a superhero. A charitable act gone awry makes him realize just how human he is.
- "Gondwanaland" by Tony DiTerlizzi. The illustrator remembers an imaginary land and its characters that he drew as a child, and how they influence his drawing today.
- "Triplets" by Timothy Basil Ering. Ering, the illustrator of *The Tale of Despereaux*, still feels pride over an award won in fifth grade for poetry and illustrations. Updated versions of those pictures are included!
- "The Legend of Tripod" by Eoin Colfer. Colfer, probably best known for his *Artemis Fowl* books, attempts an animal story, only to find out that gaseous dwarfs are really what people want to read about.
- "Any Questions, Class?" by Matt Groening. Fans of *Bart Simpson*, especially older children, will appreciate the unasked questions about school in Groening's cartoon offering.
- "My First Step to the White House" by Chris Van Allsburg. A childhood confession makes Van Allsburg feel akin to George Washington, and one step closer to the Oval Office.

A Dozen Ways to Start

There are an increasing number of resources available to steer parents and boys towards reading material. *Guys Write for Guys Read* has a bibliography from each author and illustrator; the accompanying website, www.guysread.com, has an even more extensive list grouped by theme (i.e. explosions, aliens, action, books for little guys). Remember that many boys need to be active with their books; that's where the batteries may come into play (think lightsabers, robots, DVDs, computer games). Here are a dozen books to get you started (recommended grade levels from Horn Book Guide website):

Artemis Fowl (Disney-Hyperion, 2002) by Eoin Colfer. (Grades 3-6) Artemis is a twelve-year-old criminal genius who hatches a plot to steal gold from the fairy world. The story is packed with leprechauns, trolls, explosions, and even a secret code running along the bottom of each page, just begging to be cracked. And when you're through with this mission, there's six more in the series, as well as a companion book and graphic novels.

The Curse of the Campfire Weenies and Other Warped and Creepy Tales (Starscape, 2008) by David Lubar. (Grades 3-6) The title should be enough to grab boys' attention; the book is a collection of stories with fun and creepy twists. Another series to explore, with **In the Land of the Lawn Weenies** and **Invasion of the Road Weenies** to keep your boy reading past the campfire.

Hoot (Knopf/ Random House Children's Books, 2002) by Carl Hiaasen. (Grade 4 and up) If your boy is into animals, the ecology, and misfit characters, then *Hoot* may be a good fit story. The new boy in town gets involved with some wayward youths who are bent on saving the habitat of the burrowing owl. The setting is South Florida, so you know reptiles are included in the book, as well as some creative uses for them (alligators in a port-a-potty!).

How Angel Peterson Got His Name (Yearling, 2004) by Gary Paulsen. (Grades 3-6) In this series of stories about the rambunctious stunts of twelve and thirteen year old boys living in Minnesota in the early fifties, boys can read about jumping barrels with bicycles, trying to break a skiing speed record by being towed behind a car, wrestling with a bear, and homemade skateboards. The author does caution the reader not to try this at home! There's enough action to elicit a "whoa" from adults as well as kids, coupled with a lot of humor.

The Invention of Hugo Cabret (Scholastic, 2007) by Brian Selznick. (Grades 3-6) Hugo is an orphan living in a train station in Paris, taking care of the clocks and trying to survive. His run-in with a toyshop owner working in the station, and friendship with the owner's goddaughter, leads to surprising discoveries about his own family. This book's length may seem daunting, but there are a large number of illustrations that tell parts of the story without words. A good story about surviving hardship, with a mysterious and historical twist.

Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key (Farrar, Strauss, & Giroux, 1998) by Jack Gantos. (Grades 3-6) Joey is a character dealing with emotional abuse, an absent father, and attention deficit disorder (ADD). His problems with behavior and schoolwork may hit home with your child, or echo the troubles of a friend or classmate. The story is told by Joey himself, so boys can easily identify with his voice and views on life.

Jumanji (Houghton Mifflin, 1981) by Chris Van Allsburg. (Grades 1 and up) This book won a Caldecott Medal for illustrations, and later became a movie starring Robin Williams. A story of a fantastical game turned into reality, it's got animals, dire predicaments, and a great storyline of two bored siblings who become risk-takers on a deadline; the house has to return to normal before mom

and dad get home!

Love That Dog (HarperCollins, 2001) by Sharon Creech. (Grades 2-5) This is a book of non-rhyming poetry told in a boy's voice--one that doesn't believe he can write poetry or that boys/ men write poetry. Even if your boy is not into poems, the narrator's coming to terms with the death of his dog may echo a sad experience and help with the grief from the loss.

Marsupials (Scholastic, 2009) by Nic Bishop. (Grades 3-6) Boys tend to like nonfiction, and Nic Bishop's photographic essays accompanied by interesting facts grab their attention. *Marsupials* introduces animals beyond the kangaroos and possums with which we're familiar. Early/ struggling readers can focus on main ideas presented in larger text on each page.

Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief (Hyperion/Miramax, 2005) by Rick Riordan. (Grades 3-6) Percy thinks he's just a kid with learning difficulties until he attends a summer camp and learns that he's half-human, half-god; his father just happens to be Poseidon. Lots of action (learning god-like powers, fighting mythological foes) and scene changes (urban living to summer camp to a hunt for Zeus' lightning bolt). Doesn't hurt that there's a movie available on DVD to compare the book to when you're done reading.

Simpsons Comics Extravaganza (Harper Paperbacks, 1994) by Matt Groening. (No age/ grade specified) Yes, they're comics, but if it gets your boy reading, it could be a great jumping-off place to get him into books and writing. Connections with the nightly TV show can stimulate conversations about characters, plots, and settings, and the differences between the animated world and reality (i.e. if you tell your teacher to "Eat my shorts", you undoubtedly will get into very real trouble!). (Info from Guys Read and Amazon websites.)

Toilets, Toasters and Telephones: The How and Why of Everyday Objects (Harcourt, 1998) by Susan Goldman Rubin, illustrated by Elsa Warnick. (Grades 5-8) For the boy who likes to take things apart, this book contains explanations of how things we use everyday work. There are lessons in history and design, and enough information to make you look at household items in a different light. (Info from Horn Book Guide and Amazon websites.)

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