

Importance of READING

Dear Parents

I found this article on reading by Jerry Large. I found it very interesting and want to share it with you. Please encourage your son to read. It is imperative for his academic growth.

Abrie Pepler



Jerry Large

Jerry Large / Times staff columnist

Teaching boys the joy of books

A few years ago my son's school had an auction, and we bid successfully on a week's vacation in Mexico.

I spent hours lying in a hammock reading, which apparently is an odd thing to do. Three vacationing women in the next house speculated for days on my habits and finally concluded that I must be a professor. Why else would a man spend so much time reading?

Men don't read nearly as much as women, of course, but does it have to be that way?

When the Public Library Association was in town recently, one of the speakers talked about the problem of boys drifting away from libraries as the boys get older. So I asked him about boys and reading.

"Boys are a year and a half behind girls throughout school," Michael Sullivan told me, when I caught up with him by phone the other day.

Sullivan is director of the Weeks Public Library in Greenland, N.H., population 3,000. He's spent 15 years as a teacher and a librarian.

"I'm a fairly rare breed, a man who works in early childhood education." Sullivan is also a children's librarian who has often thought about boys and books. "Whenever a parent of a boy sees a man teaching, they run up to him and ask, 'How do you get boys to read?'"

The American Library Association asked him the same thing. "They came to me and said, 'You're a man who works with kids; will you write a book?'" And so he did, "Connecting Boys with Books," published last year by the ALA. Here's what he says.

"Allow a lot of choice. We tend to steer boys to books we like and 'we' in education is 95 percent women." The books boys choose on their own appall teachers and parents because they are full of action, gross stuff and silly humor. But that's just what boys like. What do many boys think of the books that win awards are on recommended lists? Boring.

Let them read what they like. They'll be so hooked on reading that later they'll try something else, maybe even something with mushy stuff in it. If they give up on reading nothing has been gained.

Lots of men have given up on reading and that's too bad, because Sullivan thinks part of the reason boys don't read is that they don't see men reading. He says it is especially important for fathers to let their sons see them reading.

"Men, if you don't want to read, just prop a book in front of your face." At least let the kid think you are reading. He says men who do read tend to do so in isolation, so no one sees them.

More role models in school might help too. "I can't remember a male teacher until I was in middle school," Sullivan says.

"I was a terrible reader as a boy. I read very slowly now, but I love to read." What got him hooked was "The Lord of the Rings" books, which he discovered in college. All that action, you know.

"I'm still catching up. I read 'The Jungle Book' and 'The Wizard of Oz' a couple of months ago." That's one of the reasons he's so intent on getting boys' noses into books. "I hate to see other kids grow up that way."

Whether boys connect with reading is a critical issue. Eighty percent of high-school dropouts are male, he says. That 80 percent figure shows up in a lot of statistics, he reels off: youth suicides, kids with emotional disturbances. Again and again, boys are affected out of proportion to their numbers.

He thinks whether boys connect with reading and with school makes a difference in those statistics.

"It's only in the last five or 10 years that people have been looking at boys and reading critically. Now it's showing up in library conferences and teacher training days."

Boys' brains are wired different from girls; they learn differently. "Boys need multiple stimuli to get their brains going — noise and color and motion."

Classrooms and libraries are quiet and orderly, the way women and girls like them.

But what about all the success boys have outside of school, I asked? If boys are being shortchanged, why are men so dominant?

It's a question he gets all the time. "If all this is true, how come women are still fighting to become presidents in board rooms and for positions at the top of the society? I think that says something about our society; that we really don't honour reading."

Boys know you can succeed without being a reader. They see the evidence every day.

Boys see high officials who don't read. Basketball players now don't even have to finish high school. What's a boy to think?

Well, he may think what those women at the beach thought. That reading is for women, unless your job requires it.

We have to let boys read like boys. My son loves to read, but he doesn't always read what you'd call classics. My wife groans sometimes over his choices, and I think he may even like that.

Sullivan has a Web site with more tips on helping boys learn to love reading (www.geocities.com/talestoldtall) and it includes lots of recommendations of gross, goofy, rough stuff for gross and goofy guys who might actually grow up to be book-reading gentlemen.

U as Parents R very NB in this process. **Encourage Reading.**
Especially the DADS



**U HOLD THE KEY TO THEIR
SUCCESS**