

Studies show boys lag behind in reading

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

Conventional wisdom has long intimated that girls are more adept at language arts and reading than boys of the same age. A recent study indicates there may be some merit to the assumption that boys tend to lag behind girls in reading. In order to bolster interest in books and reading comprehension, parents and educators can look to many successful literary series that tend to draw the attention of boys.

A 2010 study by the Center on Education Policy that looked at trends beginning from 2002 to 2008 found boys have been lagging behind girls on standardized reading tests in all 50 states. According to Jack Jennings, president of the Center on Education Policy, “We found no state in which boys did not lag behind girls in reading at the elementary level, the middle school level and the high school level. So it’s pretty clear: Boys are not doing as well as girls in reading.”

There are many theories as to why boys seem to eschew reading for other things. Some say that boys in general are always on the defensive, and reading—which often calls to mind emotion and vulnerability—is not something that boys would like to admit to doing.

Furthermore, schools heavily push classics full of fictional characters as the mainstay of literary curricula. However, research points out that boys tend to gravitate toward nonfiction. Others argue that boys do not have enough male literary role models. The majority of adults involved in shaping boys’ interest in reading are women, and boys might not view picking up a good book as a masculine activity.

Another theory as to why girls perform better on standardized reading tests revolves around brain function. Girls’ brains tend to be more verbally oriented, which can make reading skills easier. Boys are more visually oriented.

It stands to reason that boys are more physically restless than girls as well. Sitting for long periods of time reading can be challenging, even for an otherwise well-behaved male student. This was discovered as early as 1986 in an analysis of more than 100 studies by psychologist Warren Eaton and his colleagues at the University of Manitoba in Canada. The findings revealed that the average boy is more active than about 69 percent of girls.

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Choosing reading materials is challenging

Finding reading material to which boys will relate can be challenging. There is no blanket approach to finding the right books. Boys may need to be approached individually to find subject matter that will interest them and take them out of their comfort zones. Should schoolmates be viewed reading frequently, it may help other boys surpass their own reading fears and hurdles. Here are some titles boys can explore:

—“2095” by Adam McCauley: Children on a field trip to New York’s Museum of Natural History travel one hundred years into the future.

—“Adventures of Captain Underpants” by Dav Pilkey: Fourth-grade boys get into trouble with their principal and decide to hypnotize him into the superhero “Captain Underpants.”

—“Babe & Me: A Baseball Card Adventure” by Dan Gutman: Main character Joe wants to discover the legend of Babe Ruth and his home run predictions.

—“The Beast in Ms. Rooney’s Room” by Patricia Reilly Giff: Ms. Paris, the reading teacher, helps Richard get serious about reading and win a contest for best class.

—“Encyclopedia Brown” series, by Donald Sobol: Readers solve the cases and explore adventures through the stories.

—“Hatchet” by Gary Paulsen: A boy must learn to live in the wild alone after the plane he was traveling in with his father crashes.

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—“Lunch Money” by Andrew Clements: Greg is a sixth-grader who is good with money. He begins creating and selling comic books at lunch until a rival cuts into his business.

—“Rufus and Magic Run Amok” by Marilyn Levinson: Rufus discovers he has magical powers, but this special talent isn’t what he expected.

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