

16th Nordic Reading

Conference

Closing the Reading Achievement Gap for Boys: Engaging Texts, Engaging Practices

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Jacquis in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*

*And then the whining schoolboy
with his satchel and shiny morning
face
creeping like a snail
unwillingly to school.*

The “Big” Issues for Supporters

Academic Achievement

Boys underperform relative to girls on most measures of verbal ability (e.g. state reading and writing high-stakes tests; NAEP; PISA; PIRLS; etc.)

Boys comprise much greater percentage of weak readers on PISA as compared with girls

Boys are overrepresented in remedial reading, learning disabilities classes

Boys receive most of the Ds and Fs in elementary school

Boys are far more likely to be retained at grade level than girls

Fewer boys than girls attend/graduate from college

Point Difference in favor of Girls on PISA 2000 & 2009 for Nordic Countries

	Denmark	Finland	Iceland	Norway	Sweden
2000	25 points	51 points	40 points	43 points	37 points
2009	29 points	55 points	44 points	47 points	46 points

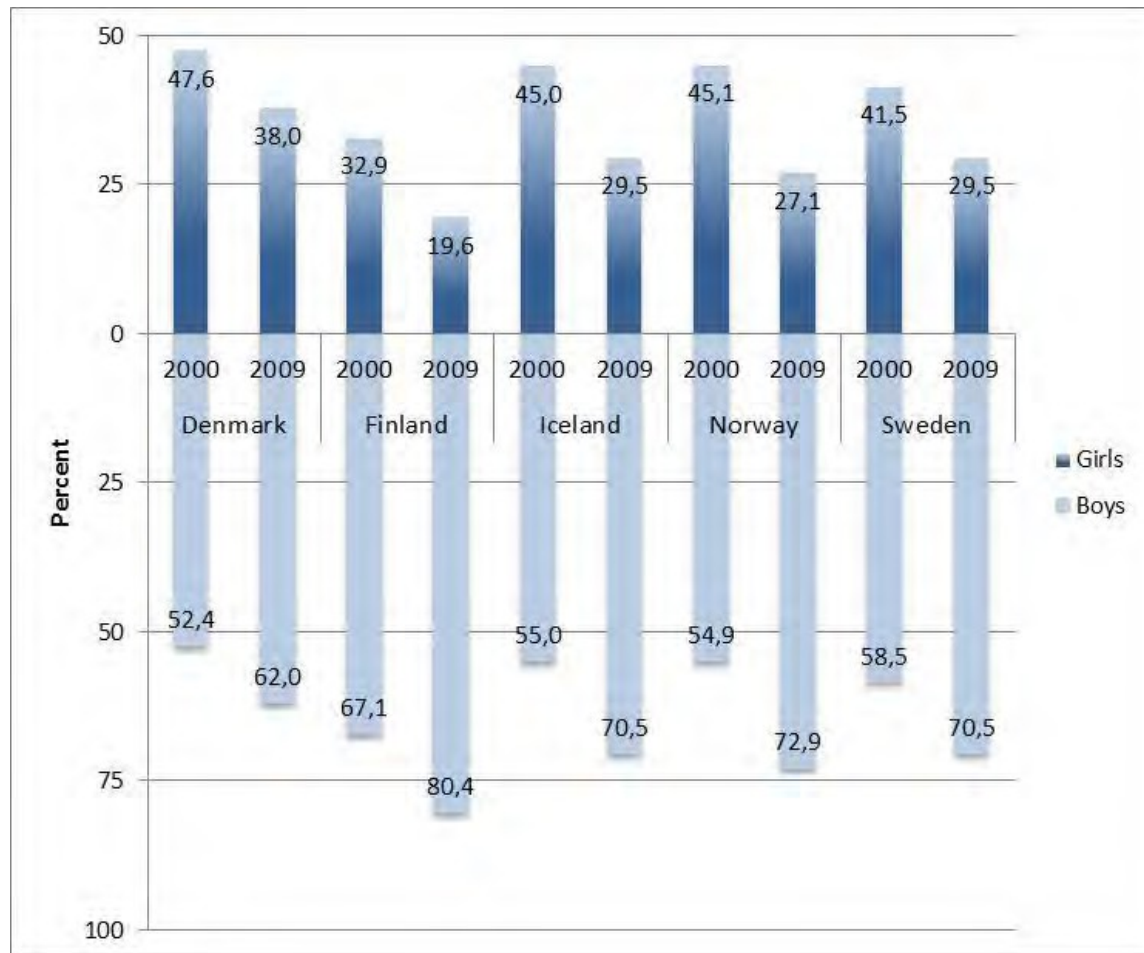
OECD Average = 32 points in 2000; 39 points in 2009

United States = 28 points in 2000; 25 points in 2009

Percentage of Boys and Girls Who Responded “I do not read for enjoyment” in PISA 2000 and PISA 2009 for Nordic Countries

	Denmark (N=5718)		Finland (N=5725)		Iceland (N=3582)		Norway (N=4598)		Sweden (N=4490)	
	2000	2009	2000	2009	2000	2009	2000	2009	2000	2009
Boys	36	41	35	47	37	49	45	50	45	49
Girls	18	23	10	19	23	28	24	30	25	27

Percentage Distribution of Weak Readers (Below Level 2 on PISA Reading Proficiency Scale) by Gender on PISA 2000 and 2009 for Nordic Countries



From: ***Northern Lights on PISA 2009 - focus on reading***
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The “Big” Issues for Supporters

New Literacies

- ❑ Definitions of literacy are expanding to include digital literacies, youth media, and virtually any act of meaning making as “reading.”
- ❑ Evidence can be found for male youth participating actively in the “mediasphere”
- ❑ Boys’ expertise with digital and media literacy may not be privileged and/or valued in most academic contexts

The “Big” Issues for Supporters

Social & Economic Justice

Boys of color and immigrant boys have very low reading achievement

Boys from low-income households have very low reading achievement

Male youth of color are over-represented among the ranks of high school dropouts

Boys of color disproportionately represent incarcerated youth who also have very low literacy skills

The “Big” Issues for Supporters

Sociopathy

Males commit most suicides

Males perpetrate most homicides

Males commit most acts of family violence

Males comprise most of the homeless

Males comprise most drug addicts

Males comprise most AIDS carriers

*Low levels of literacy are often associated with these syndromes

The “Big” Issues for Detractors

Insidious Sexism

Males continue to dominate political, corporate, and institutional life in America and elsewhere in the world

As girls make significant strides academically and professionally, advocates of boys' academic needs ensure male primacy by regularly invoking “crisis” to rally popular support

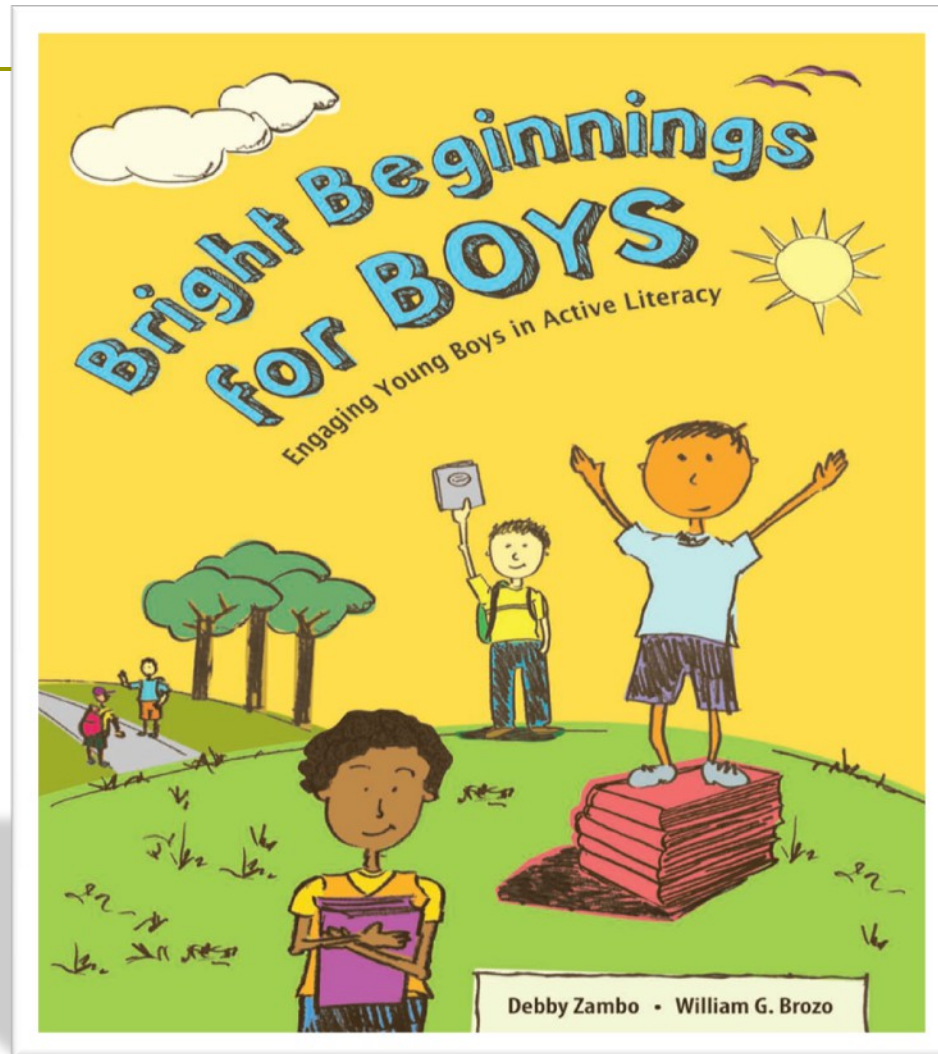
The “Big” Issues for Detractors

Hegemonic Masculinity

“Boy-friendly” curricular schemes do little more than perpetuate gender myths and stereotypes

Binary notions of gender as a basis for literacy curricular decisions exclude all the different ways of “being male” or “being female”

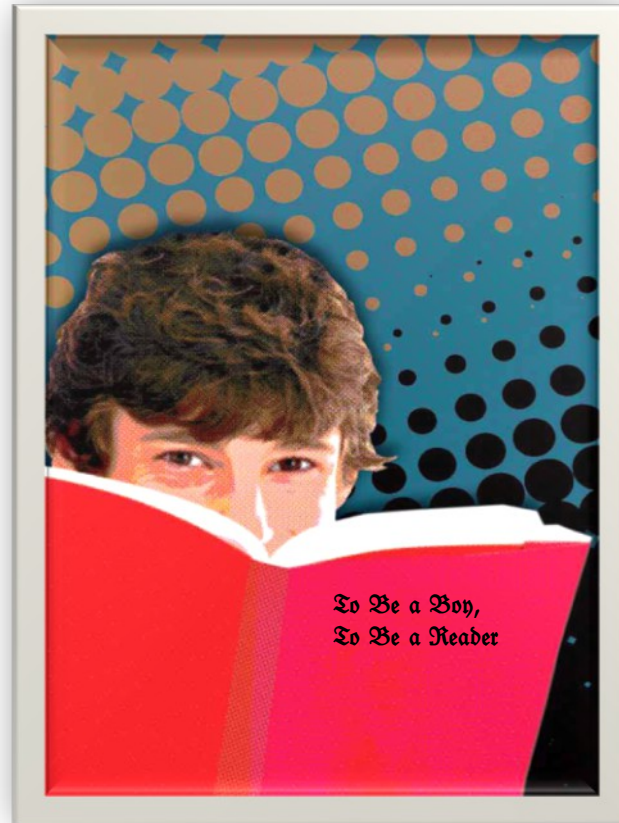
Debbie Zambo & Bill Brozo, International Reading Association, 2009



From *Bright Beginnings for Boys*

“Failing to meet the literacy needs of all young boys isn’t so much a crisis as it is an imperative educational challenge. Furthermore, concerns about boys’ reading attitudes and achievement should be framed around more responsive literacy instruction and interactions for *all* children. Boys need to be engaged and capable readers not solely to be as good as or better than girls, but to increase their educational, occupational, and civic opportunities and, above all, to become thoughtful and resourceful men.”

Engaging Teen and Preteen Boys in Active Literacy



*"A Boy's Love of Reading
Doesn't Begin with Scholarship...*

It Begins with Discovery"

SUPPORTING BOYS ON THEIR LITERATE JOURNEYS

Four Important Guidelines

- 1. Match Reading Material to Outside-of-School Interests***
- 2. Bridge Competencies with Familiar Texts to Academic Literacy***
- 3. Form Cross-Age Tutoring Partnerships and Use Community Mentors as Reading Buddies***
- 4. Expose Boys to Texts with Positive Male Values and Archetypes***

1. Match Reading Material to Outside-of-School Interests

- "My Bag"
- Boys Book Clubs

DISCOVERING BOYS' OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL INTERESTS WITH THE “*MY BAG*” STRATEGY

***The Goal of the “My Bag” Strategy
is to Tie Reading and
Learning Experiences
to Students’ Interests***

***Boys Should be Shown That They
Can Read About What
They Like to Do***

“My Bag”

- * ***A Strategy That Allows The Teacher to Get to Know Students in an Interesting and Fun Way***
- * ***Students Gather Emblems, Symbols, and Other Items That Represent Who They Are; Their Interests, Hobbies, Loves, Relationships, etc.***
- * ***Emblems Often Include Photographs, Memorabilia, Souvenirs, Toys, etc.***
- * ***Items Are Placed in a Bag or Backpack and Shared With Classmates in Small Groups and the Teacher***
- * ***Students May Also Create a digital My Bag***
- * ***Students Should Provide a Written List of Items and a Brief Statement About Each Item’s Significance***

Supporting Content Area Literacy *with* Technology

Meeting the Needs of Diverse Learners



William G. Brozo Kathleen Puckett



My Bag can Help in Finding Entry Points to Active Literacy for Boys

Entry Point Texts:

- ❑ *The Reading Material that First Captures One's Imagination*
- ❑ *The Beginning of a Lifelong Journey Of Reading*
- ❑ *All of Us Start Humbly Down the Path of Active Literacy*
- ❑ *We Should Not Be Too Judgmental About a Boy's Initial Reading Choices, Because They May Become His Entry Point to Active Literacy*

WHY FINDING ENTRY POINTS TO READING IS SO IMPORTANT TO BOYS

- *The More Boys Are Engaged in Reading and Learning, the Higher Their Academic Achievement*
- *Engaged Male Readers Can Make Up for Low Family Income and Parental Educational Backgrounds*
- *Motivation for Boys is Inextricably Tied to the Text Topic, the Level of Difficulty of the Text, and the Instructional Practices Used with the Text*
- *Boys Who Are Non-Disruptive But Disengaged Are Often Ignored While They Continue to Lose Skill and Interest in Reading*

SETTING UP A BOYS BOOK CLUB

- **IDENTIFY MALE STUDENTS WHO WOULD MOST BENEFIT:**

STRUGGLING READERS, DISENGAGED READERS

- **CREATE A TIME AND SPACE FOR BOOK CLUB ACTIVITIES:**

*BEST IF HANDLED WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF
NORMAL SCHOL DAY, DURING READING CLASS
TIME; LUNCH AND AFTER SCHOOL CLUBS*

- **DETERMINE THE *RIGHT STUFF* AT THE *RIGHT LEVEL* SINCE THE**

**GOAL OF THE BOOK CLUB IS TO PROMOTE ENGAGED
READING, EVERY EFFORT NEEDS TO BE MADE TO PUT INTO
BOYS' HANDS READING MATERIAL THEY FIND INTERESTING
AND ACCESSIBLE IN TERMS OF DIFFICULTY**

BOYS BOOK CLUB

- **ALLOW BOOK CLUB MEMBERS MULTIPLE MODES OF EXPRESSION**
- **MAKE HAVING FUN WITH BOOKS A HIGH PRIORITY**
- **ENSURE ADULT MEN--PREFERABLY THOSE WHO ARE ACTIVE READERS--PARTICIPATE IN THE BOOK CLUB**

PREFERRED READING MATERIAL FOR A BOYS BOOK CLUB

- *SHORT IN LENGTH*
- *ACTION PACKED*
- *MALE PROTAGONIST*
- *HUMOROUS*
- *ARCHETYPAL*
- *INFORMATIONAL*

Actual Boys Book Clubs

- He-Man Book Club – Kalispell, MT
- Club BILI – Alexandria, VA
- Books and Balls – California
- Boys, Books, and Blokes – Australia
- Guys Read – Fairbanks, AK

My Participation in a Boys Book Club

- Book Club Members included Nara, Colin, Ricardo, Jaimi, Michael, Renard, Tony and Esteban
- All were male youth of color in a school with an ethnic mix to the overall school population: 46% Hispanic American; 22% African American; 22% Euro American; and 9% Asian American

“Renard”



“Tony”



“Estaban”



Context and Method

- My participation spanned seven months from October to May, 2003-04
- The eight male students along with their teacher read various culturally relevant texts and engaged in culturally informed practices
- I was a cyber member of this all-boys book club

Examples of Culturally Relevant Texts

- *Scorpions* (Walter Dean Myers)
- *Trino's Choice* (Diane Gonzalez Bertrand)
- *The Watson's Go to Birmingham—1963* (Christopher Paul Curtis)

Examples of Culturally Relevant Texts

- Member-Centered
 - Reading material was selected based on boys' interests and approval
 - Boys' helped generate and were given choice of response options to material read

Examples of Culturally Informed Practices

Sample Activities in Response to Books:

- Exploration of violence by male youth within book club members' neighborhoods and community
- Exploration of gangs in club members' neighborhoods and community
- Celebration of members' family histories

Major Findings

- ❑ Boys were more engaged in book club than in regular reading class
- ❑ Boys attitudes toward reading improved
- ❑ Boys developed healthier understanding of masculinity
- ❑ Six of the eight boys passed the reading portion of the state test that spring

2. Bridge Competencies with Familiar Texts to Academic Literacy

By eliminating barriers between students' competencies with outside-of-school texts and classroom practices it is possible to increase engagement in learning and expand literacy abilities for striving readers (Sturtevant, Boyd, Brozo, Hinchman, Alvermann, & Moore, 2006).

Take advantage of boys' relative strengths with language and literacy outside of school

Boys may enjoy:

- *playing computer and video games*
- *reading comic books and graphic novels*
- *reading magazines related to their hobbies (skateboarding, collecting, sports)*
- *listening to music and reading and writing song lyrics*

Bridge Books and Texts

- Goal is to motivate reluctant and disinterested boys to read required academic texts
- Canonical and required texts, even if “readable,” may turn boys off to reading without prior exposure to bridge texts
- Transition boys into challenging academic texts with texts that are engaging and put knowledge bases in place for academic literate tasks

Examples of Bridge Books/Texts

Young Adult Novel

- ▣ *Across the Barricades* as a bridge to *Romeo and Juliet*

Graphic novels

- ▣ *Max Axiom* as a bridge to reading and studying science
- ▣ *Palestine* as a bridge to reading and learning about the Arab/Israeli conflict
- ▣ Manga versions of Shakespeare plays

Websites

- ▣ Skateboard Science as a bridge to reading and studying laws of physics
<http://www.exploratorium.edu/skateboarding/>

Graphic Novels in the Disciplines

- “Mr. Brown” – American History teacher
 - Incorporated graphic novels into units and lessons
 - Had students read *Incognegro* (Pleece, 2008) in connection with a study of pre-Civil Rights era southern U.S.

- “Dane” – 10th grader in Mr. Brown’s history class, unmotivated, struggling reader, African-American

Incognegro

by Matt Johnson & Warren Pleece

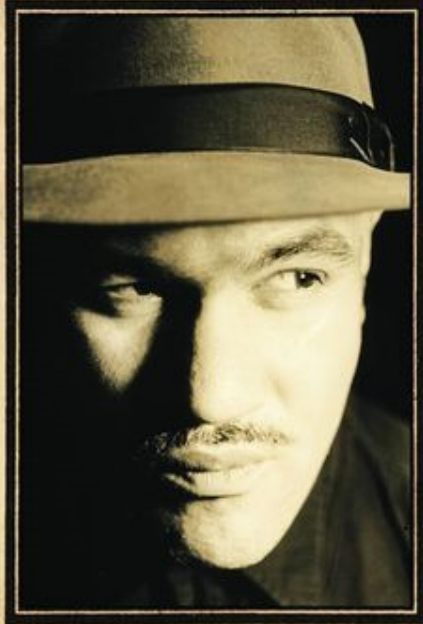
INCOGNEGRO
A GRAPHIC MYSTERY

WRITTEN BY **MAT JOHNSON** ART BY **WARREN PLEECE**

"Mat Johnson has done it again, namely written a deep story of pain and laughter that probes the complex dynamics of white supremacy in America. Don't miss it!"
Cornel West,
Princeton University

Tupelo, Mississippi — Once again in this column I bring you news that a colored man stands accused of the molestation of a white woman, and once again, though there be no proof nor realistic motive, the mere accusation could be enough to result in this innocent Ething's persecution. "Strange fruit," wrote the poet, and strange fruit indeed threatens to bloom here in Mississippi: if men do not stand up to injustice, stand up to intolerance and instead give in to fear and hysteria. This strange and wretched fruit, ladies and gentlemen, is not merely a reference to the molested bodies left to rot on the trees they are hung from, but also refers to the horrid fruit of injustice that we are planting in this great nation. The reaper what you sow, the Bible tells us. So if we as a country reap hatred, violence, and evil, what do we expect to see?

"A talented writer of both fiction and creative nonfiction, Johnson's publications have established him as an important new voice in the African American tradition."
Walter Mosley



Warren Pleece

"Ingenious, enlightening and powerful!" **Paul Theroux**

"Mat Johnson's thoughtful writing and the moody realism of Warren Pleece's art make this nasty bit of tarnished Americana come alive like a prodded snake. An exciting, disturbing piece of work." **George Pelecanos**

Graphic Novels in the Disciplines

□ Dane's Journal Response to *Incognegro*

The main character is a real light colored Black guy named Zane Pinchback. So am I. My mother is white. She's from Germany and my father was from Ethiopia. Some kids with tans look darker than me. My hair is curly but not kinky. My mom is cool about who I hang out with. My friends are all Black. I also like this book because it's a graphic novel. For me, these kind of books are a lot easier to read. I can read the words and if I'm not sure what's going on or if the dialog isn't too interesting, I can also look at the illustrations. The illustrations in this book are awesome. They really help you get into the story.

Graphic Novels in the Disciplines

□ Dane's Journal Response to *Incognegro*

I have a lot of respect for Blacks who fought for civil rights. They risked their lives. Zane is afraid whites will figure out he's black, but he does what he can for his brother anyway. Reading about Zane and looking at the drawings of him, his brother, the angry whites and the other people made the book so real.

Could I ever show the kind of courage Zane does or all those people who fought for their rights? I don't know. But I think I am strong enough and proud enough. There's one part of the book where Zane is looking right into your eyes. He is in Mississippi and he has found out who really killed the white woman. When I look into Zane's eyes in that picture, it's like I can see myself. He's scared but confident that he must do the right thing.

Popular Music as Context for Learning and Using New Vocabulary

With the American rapper Snoop Dogg's lyrics for "I Love to Give You Light" a 7th grade special reading class of mostly boys found numerous examples of words with /ck/ and /ch/ blends. These words were written into a t-chart in their vocabulary notebooks.

ch

choir
such
alchemist
preach
chuuch
teachin
watchin
each
preachin
reach
purchase
Beach
child

ck

background
jackers
glock
block
locked
black



Popular Music as Context for Learning and Using New Vocabulary

- The students worked with a partner to think of new words with the /ch/ and /ck/ sounds and add them to the t-chart.
- Student pairs then wrote their own rap lyrics that contained all or some of the new words they generated for the two word families.
- As one student read the rap the other kept rhythm on his desk top:

I put my **socks** in my **backpack** when I go to school. I put my backpack in my **locker** or I look like a fool. I get my **socks** from my backpack when I go to gym. Where I **catch** the ball then **stick** it in the rim.

- As a result, students were better able to recognize and pronounce words with these elements that they encountered in their school-related and everyday reading.

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3. Form Cross-Age Tutoring Partnerships and Use Community Mentors as Reading Buddies

“THE MOST POTENT BENEFIT OF SUCH A PROGRAM (CROSS-AGE TUTORING PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM) IS THAT IT IMBUES STRUGGLING READERS WITH A SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY AND PURPOSE FOR IMPROVING THEIR OWN ABILITIES”

--BROZO & HARGIS, JAAL, September 2003

Mentors and Reading Buddies for Boys

- Gender- and cultural-matched role models have the most positive effect on educational outcomes (Zirkel, 2002) and are sorely needed in the lives of many boys (Brozo, 2010)

COMPONENTS OF A CROSS-AGE BUDDY READING PROGRAM FOR BOYS

- **ONE OLDER STRUGGLING MALE READER PAIRED WITH ONE YOUNGER NOVICE OR STRUGGLING READER**
- **OLDER STUDENT PREPARES READING MATERIAL AND STRATEGIES**
- **READS TO AND WITH YOUNGER MALE STUDENT, HELPING WITH WORD ATTACK AND COMPRE-HENSION**
- **MAKES A BOOK OR SOME OTHER PROJECT TOGETHER BASED ON YOUNGER STUDENT'S INTERESTS AND EXPERIENCES**
- **ONE TO THREE SESSIONS PER WEEK**

Reading Buddies

- 17-year-old Tremayne & 2nd grader LaBron in a cross-age tutoring program
- Read about and researched Chicago Bears football
- Led to performance enhancement drugs, steroids
- Explored the exaggeratedly muscled heroes and villains in computer games, such as *True Crime: Streets of LA* (Activision), *WWF Wrestlemania* (THQ), *Take No Prisoners* (Red Orb), *The Hulk* (Vivendi-Universal), *Army Men: Sarge's Heroes* (3DO), and *X-Men: Mutant Academy* (Activision)

Reading Buddies

- Pictures were then downloaded into *Adobe Photoshop* so they could be altered
- Tremayne and LaBron learned how to rework the main characters' physiques, reshaping them in ways that were more proportional to normal muscle development
- They displayed their work in a PowerPoint presentation with "before" slides, accompanied by captions warning of the dangers of steroids and other illegal substances for building muscle, and "after" slides with statements about good health, diet, and fitness

***4. Expose Boys to Texts
with Positive Male
Values and Archetypes***

Books with Positive Male Values

- ❑ Imbue young boys with images and models of positive male values while at the same time capture their imaginations with print and engage them as readers.
- ❑ Help boys envision ways of being male that are different from the stereotypic images of masculinity that saturate popular media and culture in society
- ❑ Help boys incorporate thoughtful and competent reading into their burgeoning male identities

Children's Books with Positive Male Values

- **Respectfulness** - *Alley Oops* (Levy, J. 2005)
- **Responsibility** - *Just a Dream* (Van Allsburg, 2002)
- **Honesty** - *The Empty Pot* (Demi, 1996)
- **Courage** - *More Than Anything Else* (Bradby, 1995)

Children's Books with Positive Male Values

- **Cooperation** - *Elephant on my Roof* (Harris, 2006)
- **Tolerance** - *Teammates* (Golenback, 1992)
- **Generosity** - *Sam and the Lucky Money* (Chinn, 1997)
- **Perseverance** - *Leonardo's Dream* (de Beer, 2004)

POSITIVE MALE ARCHETYPES

- ❑ *“The Templates for the Uniqueness Of Males Are Found In Masculine Archetypes Of Humanity’s Collective Past.” --Carl Jung*
- ❑ *Recurring Patterns or Models of Masculine Behavior that Have Ancient Roots*
- ❑ *Positive Male Archetypes Stand in Sharp Contrast to Popular Media’s Spurious Conceptions of Masculinity*
- ❑ *These Archetypes Can be Found in Literature Both Old and New, Classical and Popular*

TEN POSITIVE MALE ARCHETYPES

□ Pilgrim

□ Patriarch

□ King

□ Warrior

□ Magician

□ Wildman

□ Healer

□ Prophet

□ Trickster

□ Lover

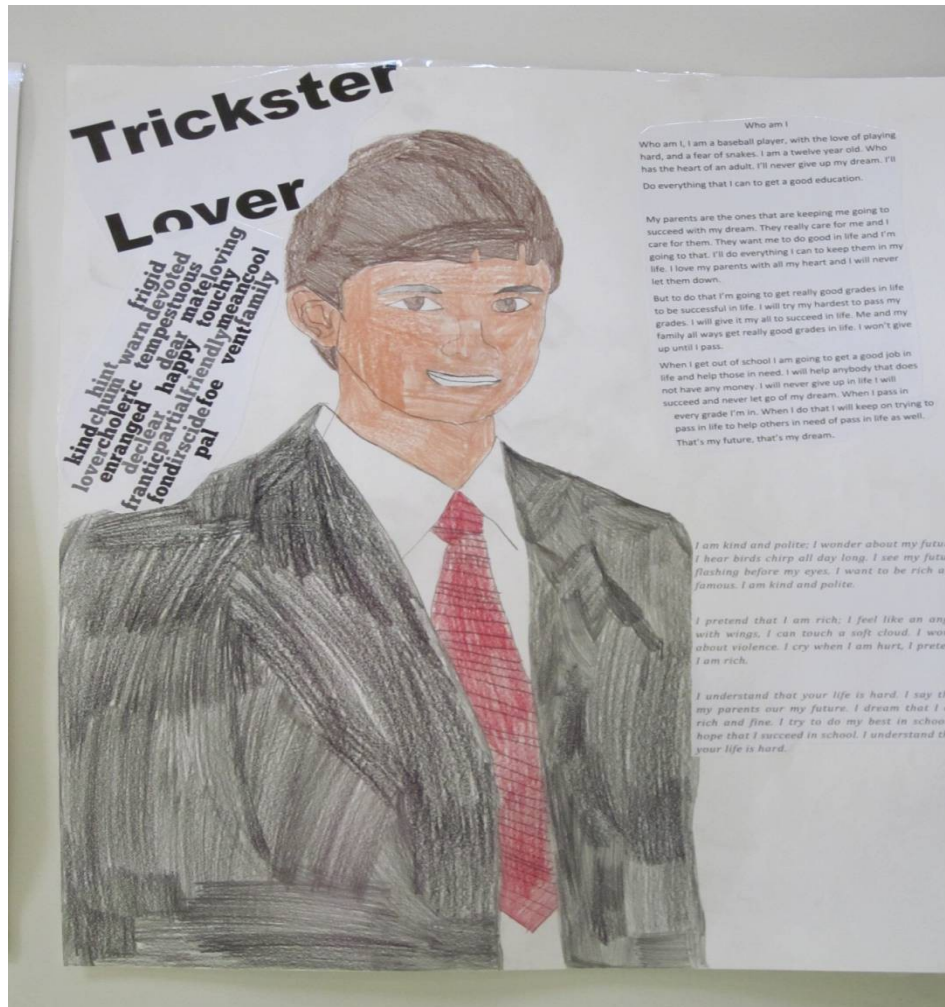
Instructional Activities with Texts with Positive Male Archetypes

- ❑ Expose boys to texts with real or fictional characters that embody these archetypes
- ❑ Boys can be brought to see the multifarious nature of masculinity and ways of being male
- ❑ Boys can be asked to explore their own identities through these archetypes
- ❑ Boys can engage in activities and projects around these texts

Archetype Project

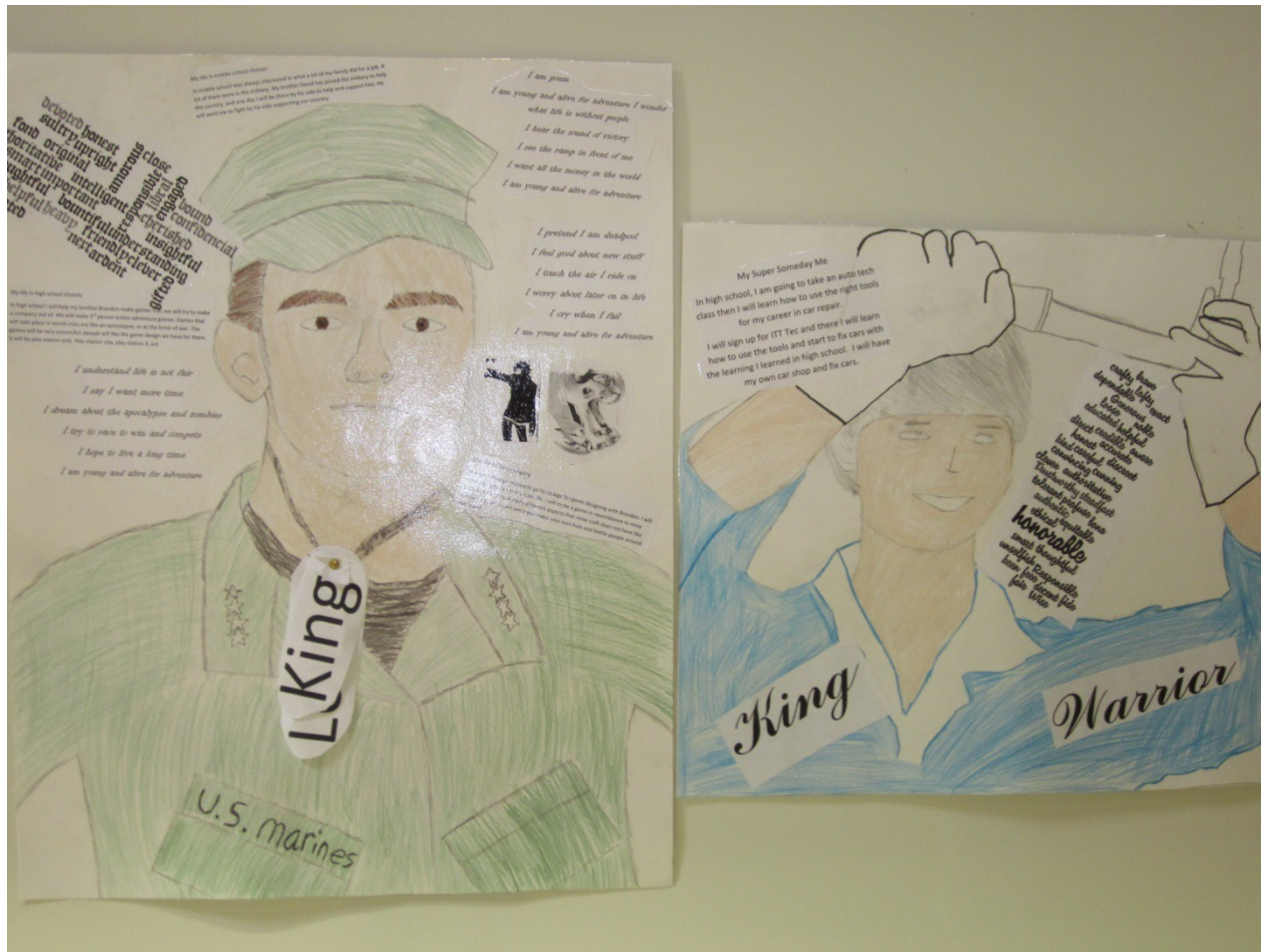
Kim DeRose, Secondary Reading Teacher

Cumming, Georgia, USA



Archetype Project

Kim DeRose, Secondary Reading Teacher
Cumming, Georgia, USA



“Magician”



“Wildman”



“Healer”



“Trickster”



REMEMBER...

WHEN IT COMES TO BOYS AND READING...

- *They Need the Right Stuff, at The Right Levels, in The Right Ways*
- *Parents, Teachers, and Librarians Should Respect Boys' Interests*
- *All Adults Can Model for Boys the Pleasures and Benefits of Active Literacy*
- *Finding Entry Points to a Personal Literate Journey is the Highest Goal When Working with Boys*
- *Viewing Boys as a Resource in Their Own Literacy Development Will Improve the Chances of Elevating Their Achievement*

BOYS ARE OUR HOPE FOR THE FUTURE,

BUT YOU ARE THEIR HOPE TODAY.



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