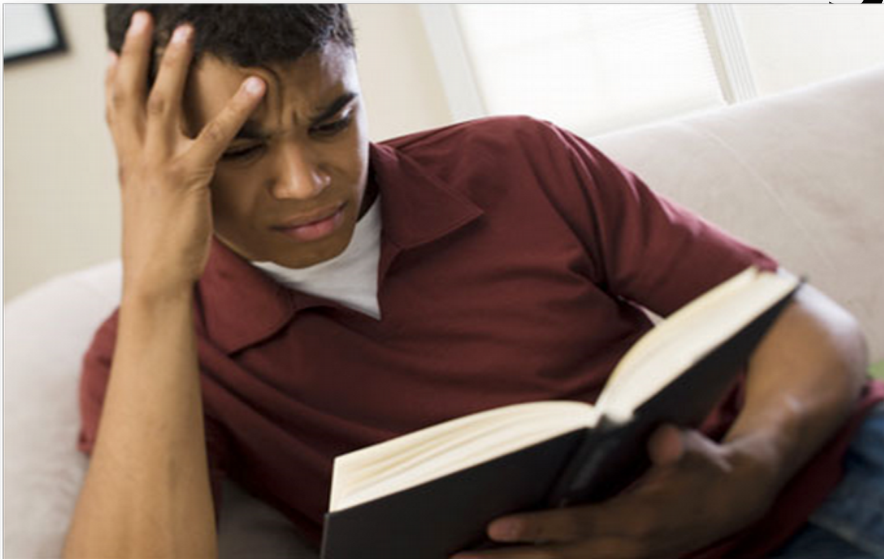


Leaving No Boy Behind: Empowering Struggling and Disengaged Male Readers



Dr. William G. Brozo
Professor of Literacy
George Mason University
Virginia, USA

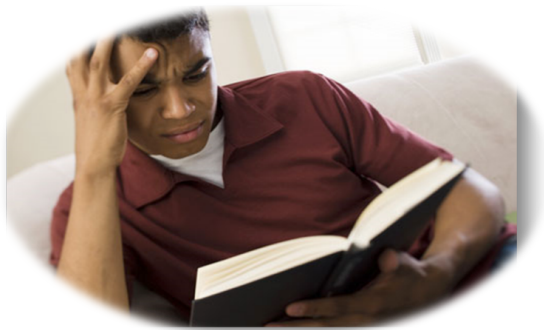
Author of

To Be a Boy, To Be a Reader:
Engaging Teen and Preteen Boys in Active Literacy

Jacquis in *As You Like It*

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

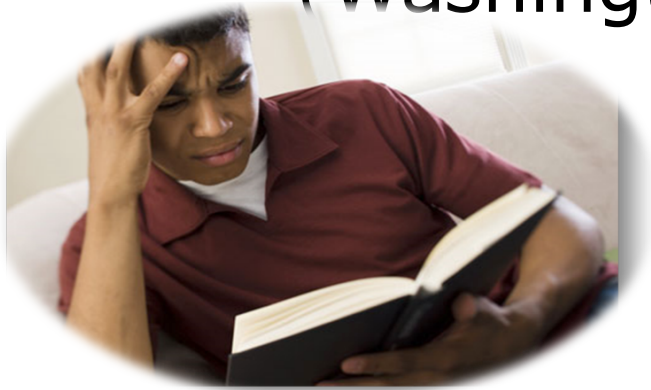
(Shakespeare, 1599)



Reynaldo, a ninth-grader

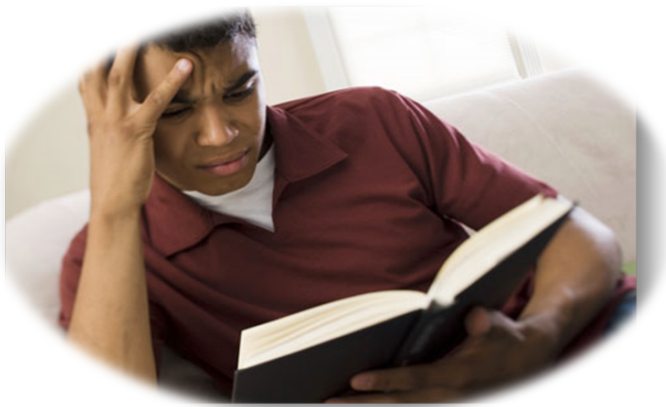
I have no idea how my parents or someone else could get me to read, because I don't like reading. No one ever read to me before I fell asleep. No one ever bought me a book or some reading material they knew I might be into. And no one ever said, "You can do it, man," or something like that.

(Washington, DC, 2010)



What Are Your Opinions About Boys and Reading?

With a colleague or the person sitting next to you, discuss your opinions of each of the following statements



- Boys read less well than girls because media and pop culture tell boys reading is not cool by reinforcing stereotypic images of males and masculinity

- Even if many boys are poor readers, males in our society are privileged and do not need special attention

- Boys are genetically and cognitively capable of the same high level of reading achievement as girls

- Reading is not as important for boys today, since they can find jobs in service or technology fields that do not require high levels of traditional print literacy

- Our feminized school environment has contributed to boys' lack of interest and achievement in reading

- The books and other reading material boys are asked to read in school contribute to their lack of interest in reading

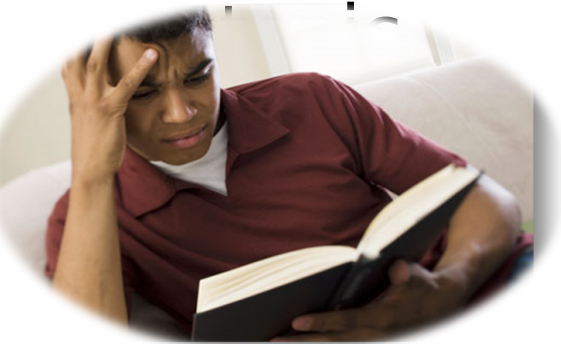
- The surest way to get boys to read is to give them text related to what they like to do outside of school

- **Electronic media are keeping boys from reading**

- Boys should be encouraged to read whatever they like, even if it isn't quality literature

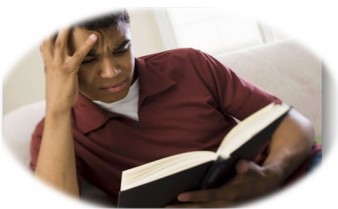
The issue doesn't seem to go away...

- Amazon lists 100 current book titles in relation to boys education
- Google lists over 152,000 separate website results for “boys education”
- Google Scholar has over 5,690 academic articles on the



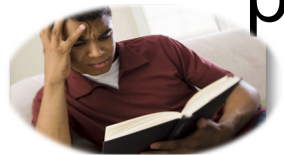
What we know about U.S. boys' academic achievement

- The average high school grade point average for girls is significantly higher than for boys
- Boys are almost twice as likely as girls to repeat a grade
- Boys are twice as likely to get suspended as girls, and three times as likely to be expelled
- 25% more boys drop out of school than girls
- Among whites, women earn 57% of bachelor's degrees and 62% of master's degrees
- Among black women, the figures are 66% and 72%
- On national writing tests, 32% of girls are considered "proficient" or better; for boys, the figure is 16%



Proposed causes for boys' underachievement

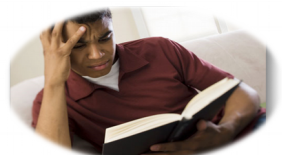
- Peer pressure exerts a negative influence on boys who don't see reading as "cool"
- Boys reading interests clash with more feminine curriculum texts
- Male reading role models are absent in their peer group and at home
- A largely female school workforce impacts on boys' perceptions of reading and their reading behavior



Proposed causes for boys' underachievement

- Girls are favored by assessment (See Rauch and Hartig, 2010 re: PISA)
- Boys have more active learning styles that are less compatible with reading and writing literacy
- Boys' challenges with proper classroom decorum influences teachers' perceptions about their achievement and translate into lower grades for boys

Zyngier, D. (2009). Doing it to (for) boys (again): Do we really need more books telling us there is a problem with boys' underachievement in education? *Gender and Education*, 21(1), 11-118.



Are classrooms more favorable to girls?

According to Whitmire (*Why Boys Fail: Saving Our Sons from an Educational System That's Leaving Them Behind*, 2011):

- Teaching methods are not designed to engage the minds of boys
- Boredom is an all too familiar side effect of classroom teaching, which leads to frustration and causes boys to showcase behavioral problems and/or dislike going to school

According to Jones and Myhill (2004):

- Teachers tend to associate boys with underachievement and girls with high achievement

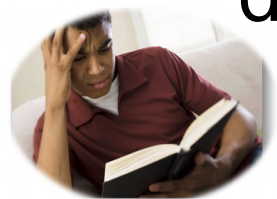
According to Cornwell, Mustard, and Parys (2013):

- Boys commonly display worse behavior than girls, which can cause teachers to assign higher grades to girls over boys



Cornwell, C., Mustard, D.B., & Parys, J.V. (2013). Noncognitive skills and the gender disparities in test scores and teacher assessments: Evidence from primary school. *Journal of Human Resources*, 48(1), 23-264.

- Analyzed the performance data on more than 5,800 students from kindergarten through fifth grade on standardized tests in reading, math and science and linked test scores to teachers' assessments of their students' progress, both academically and more broadly
- Gender disparities in teacher grades start early and uniformly favor girls
- In every subject area, boys are represented in grade distributions below where their test scores would predict



Cornwell, C., Mustard, D.B., & Parys, J.V. (2013). Noncognitive skills and the gender disparities in test scores and teacher assessments: Evidence from primary school. *Journal of Human Resources*, 48(1), 23-264.

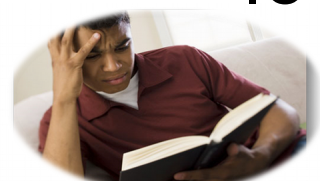
- This misalignment is attributed to non-cognitive skills, or "how well each child was engaged in the classroom, how often the child externalized or internalized problems, how often the child lost control and how well the child developed interpersonal skills."
- They also report evidence of a grade bonus for boys with behavior similar to their girl counterparts





Is boys' underachievement a new phenomenon?

- In the U.S., gender-based achievement disparities evident in the early 1940s (Stroud & Lindquist, 1942)
- There may have always been a significant numbers of boys who have underachieved; more noticeable since the decline of industry and manufacturing
- Changes in the workplace focus attention on boys' underachievement --up until the 1970s low academic qualifications were not necessarily a barrier to relatively high-paying jobs in manufacturing and industry
- Today there is a direct correlation between low qualifications and both joblessness and being trapped in low pay and unskilled work



Reading literacy in presidential politics in the U.S.

- President Barack Obama routinely visits independent bookstores and releases his summer reading list every

Obama's 2016 Summer Reading List

"Barbarian Days: A Surfing Life" by William Finnegan

"The Underground Railroad" by Colson Whitehead

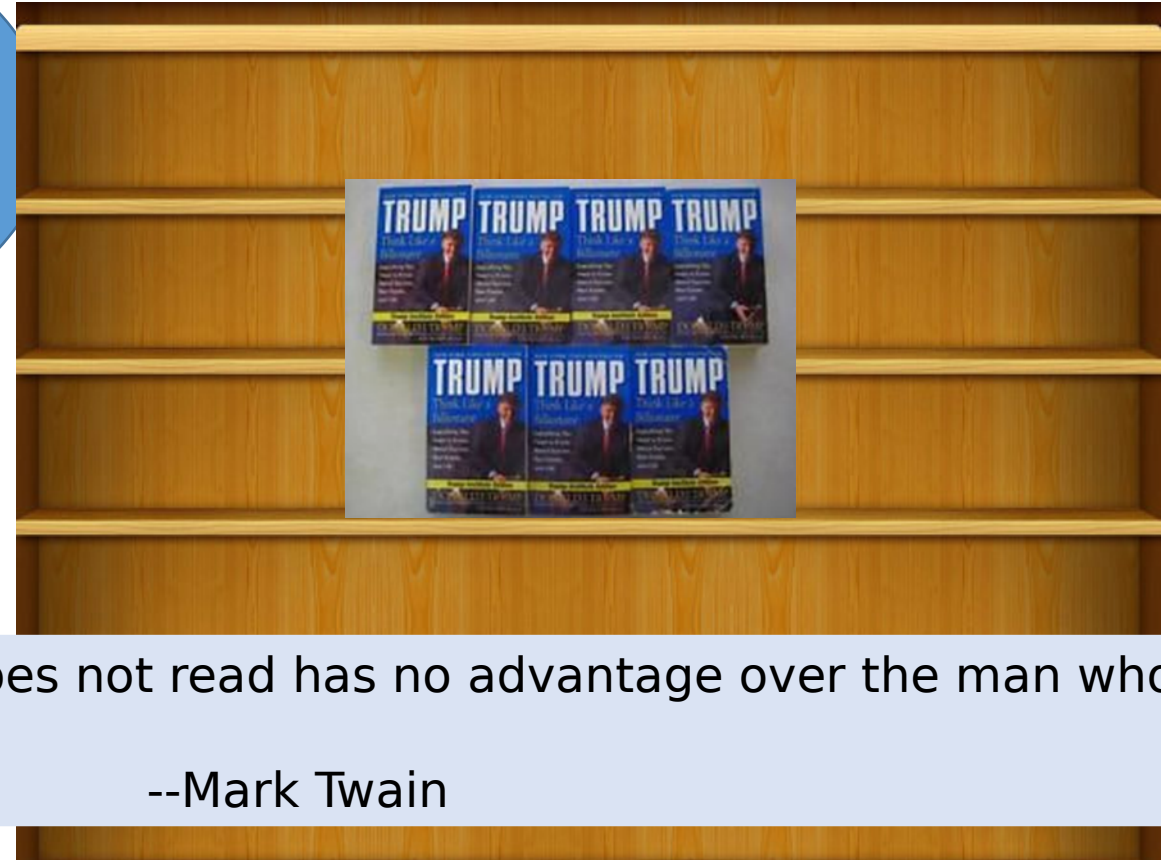
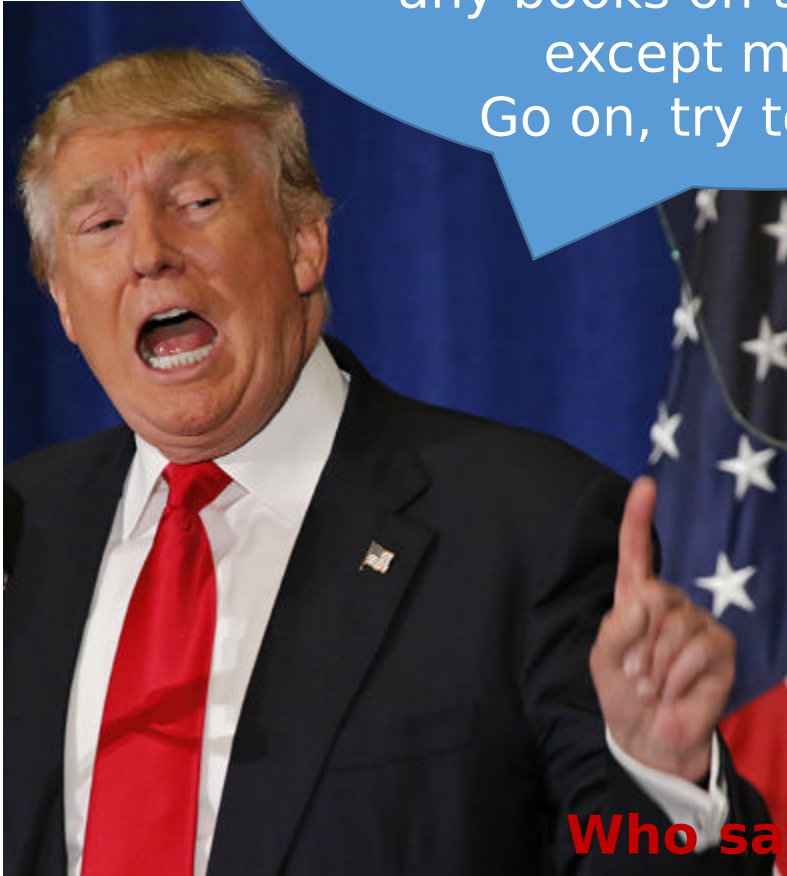
"H Is for Hawk" by Helen Macdonald

"The Girl on the Train" by Paula Hawkins

"Seventeen" by Neal Stephenson



I haven't read any presidential biographies. I despise reports that run more than three pages, and my office doesn't have any books on the shelves... except my own.
Go on, try to sue me!



"The man who does not read has no advantage over the man who read."

--Mark Twain

Who says boys and men need to be active engaged readers to be successful?



Privilege and Reading Proficiency

- Boys who grow up in families and communities with high levels of class and status (according to social theorist Max Weber), and the privileges that come with these, have financial and social protections against disengaged literacy, aliteracy, poor academic performance, and lack of academic motivation
- Boys without these protections, need to “read for their lives” (according to Al Tatum)

Tatum, A. (2009). *Reading for their life: (Re)building the textual lineages of African American adolescence*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.



Privilege and Reading Proficiency

- Hill's (2014) path analysis of 117 African-American males who participated in PISA 2009 revealed a strong and significant direct effect of their fathers' status and class on their sons' print reading literacy proficiency
- Overall reading scores of these Black male participants were linked directly to the financial well-being and occupational status of their fathers
- As Hill stated it: "The more material resources Black fathers' can provide to support their adolescent sons' print reading literacy proficiency, the better they performed on PISA 2009 reading examination"



- Hernandez (2011) determined a boy who can't read on grade level by 3rd grade is four times less likely to graduate by age 19 than one who does read proficiently at that time
- If the boy who can't read on grade level lives in poverty, then that same student is 13 times less likely to graduate on time
- Many of these dropouts find themselves among the ranks of the United State's growing prison population



What about those boys without financial and social privileges?

- Sum and his colleagues (2009) found that about 1 in every 10 young male high school dropout is in jail or juvenile detention centers as compared to one in 35 young male high school graduates
- The picture is even bleaker for African-Americans, with nearly 1 in 4 young black male dropouts incarcerated or otherwise institutionalized on an average day



What about those boys without financial and social privileges?

- There is an undeniable relationship between lack of literacy and the probability of being imprisoned in the U.S.
- Cohen (2010) has shown that more than 60% of America's inmates are illiterate, and 85% of all juvenile offenders have reading problems



Do large databases and big relationships tell the whole story?

- Reading scores for girls exceed those for boys on many assessments of reading achievement (i.e., NAEP, PIRLS, PISA)
- The gap in favor of girls tends to be higher at the secondary level
- In the U.S. the gap has been apparent since the first NAEP in the 1970s, though the gap has been trending smaller



Do large databases and big relationships tell the whole story?

- On PISA, Finland has one of the largest gender achievement gaps and it has been growing since the first PISA cycle in 2000



Score Point Difference in favor of Girls on PISA 2000 & 2012 for Selected Nordic & Baltic Countries

	Estonia	Finland	Iceland	Norway	Sweden
2000	25	51	40	43	37
2009	44	55	44	47	46
2012	44	62	51	46	51

OECD Average = 32 points in 2000; 38 points in 2012



Do large databases and big relationships tell the whole story?

- On PIAAC 2012, reading scores for men and women were statistically indistinguishable up to age 35 (even in Finland and the United States)
- After age 35, men's higher scores in reading, up to the oldest group, age 55 and older, were statistically significant



If boys enjoyed reading as much as girls, according to OECD...

- Boys' reading scores would be 23 points higher, on average across OECD countries, if boys had the same value on the index of enjoyment of reading as girls



Do large databases and big relationships tell the whole story?

- Countries that succeeded in raising boys' enjoyment of reading from 2000 to 2009 were no more likely to improve boys' reading performance than countries where boys' enjoyment of reading declined

PISA Country	Changes in Males' Enjoyment Index	Changes in Males' PISA Reading Literacy Score 2000-2009
Germany	.12	+10.33
France	.11	-15.26
Japan	.10	-6.23
Ireland	.05	-36.54
Finland	-.14	-11.73



It's a personal thing...

- As with any student, teachers need to learn about boys as individuals
- Responsive instruction for boys involves getting to know them, their learning histories, literacy challenges, aspirations and interests both inside and outside of school
- Large datasets provide a broad context, but effective work with boys on their literacy development happens locally



What do boys desire in a literacy curriculum?

- Blair & Sanford (2002)
- Canadian elementary school boys were tracked over three years.
- They were interviewed, observed in their classrooms, and observed during classroom literacy activities in which the boys were engaged



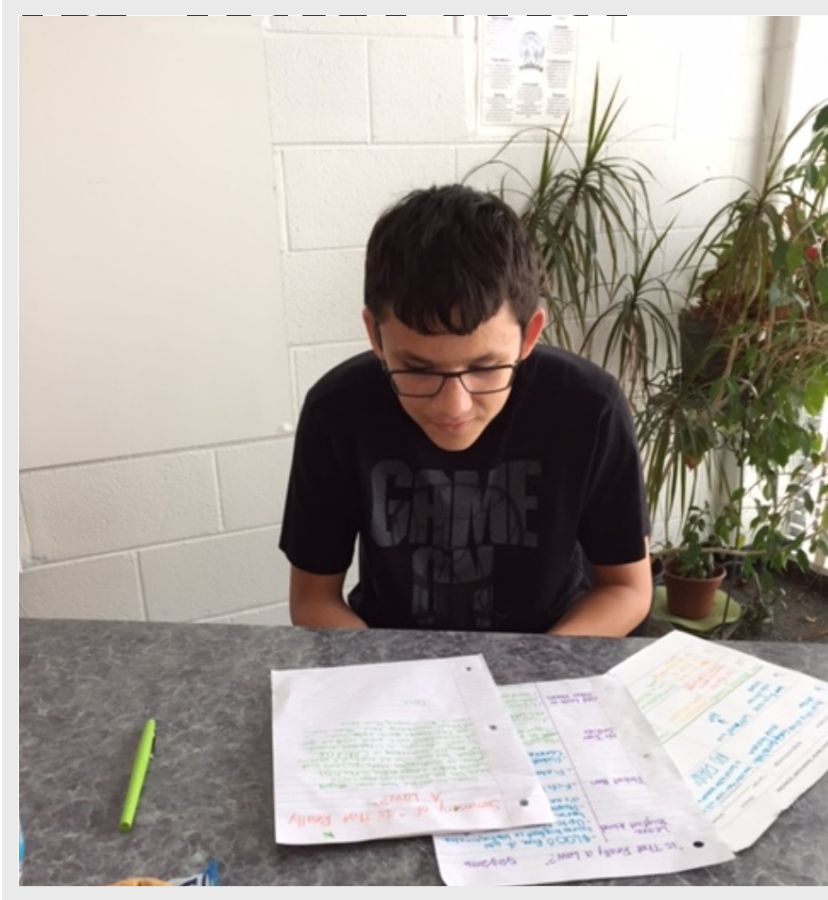
What do boys desire in a literacy curriculum?

Analysis revealed five themes around which the boys' literacy practices were constructed and which teachers would need to incorporate into their instructional activities to engage boys:

- personal interest
- action
- success
- fun
- purpose

Developing strategic literacy processes to be a *successful* reader and learner

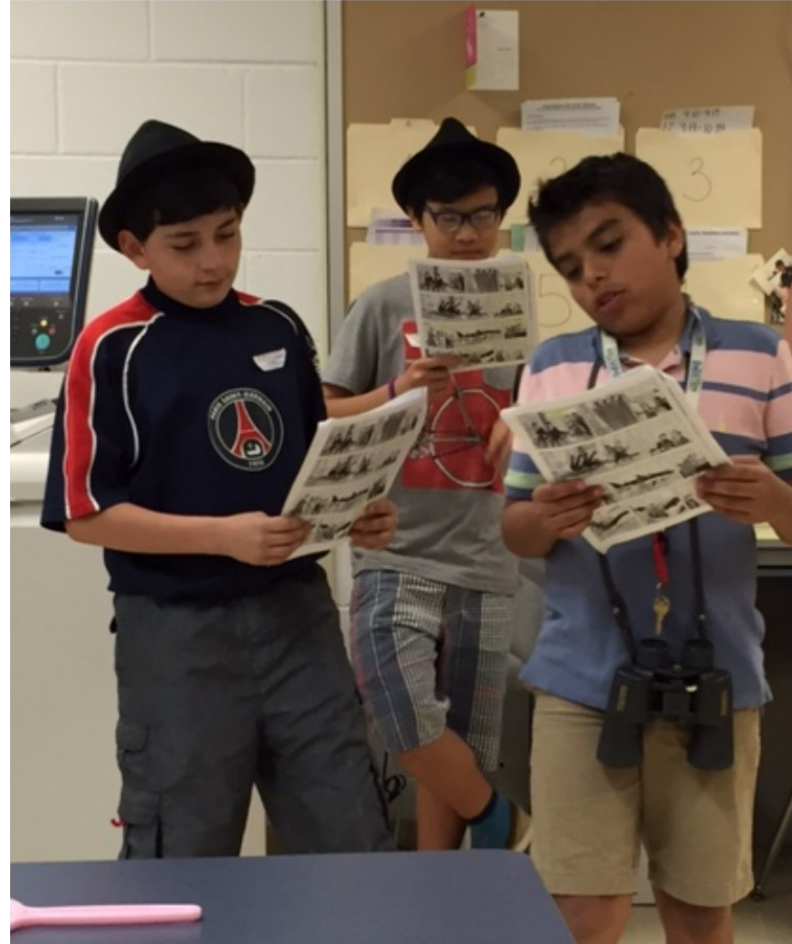
Nate



Evidence is available that shows by raising boys' metacognitive and strategic reading skills to the same level as girls will erase the reading literacy achievement disparity on PISA (Säälik, 2015)

Readers theater with graphic novel to improve fluency and have *fun*

Timofey, Sirasak,
Fabrizzio

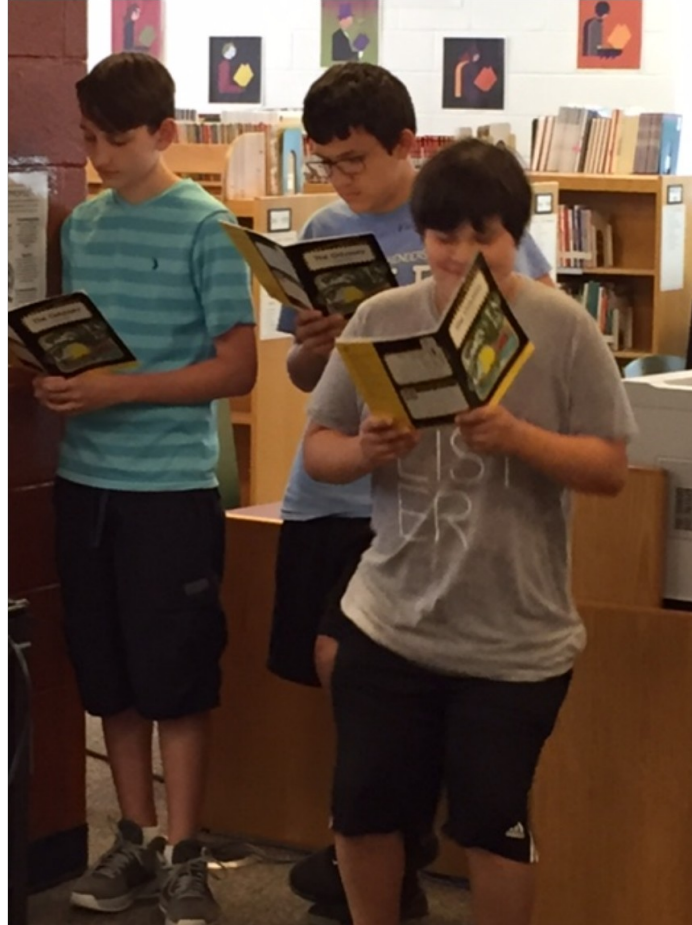


Brozo 2016 Baltic-Nordic Literacy Conference FinRA



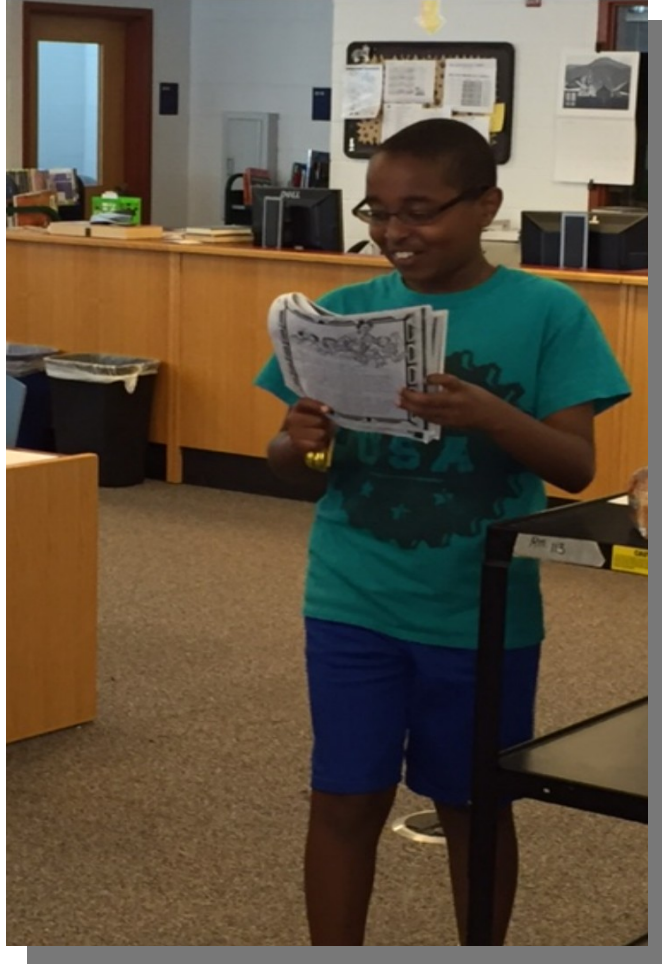
Readers Theater with comic book version of *The Odyssey* to *increase comprehension* and *have fun*

Ty, Nate, Lucas



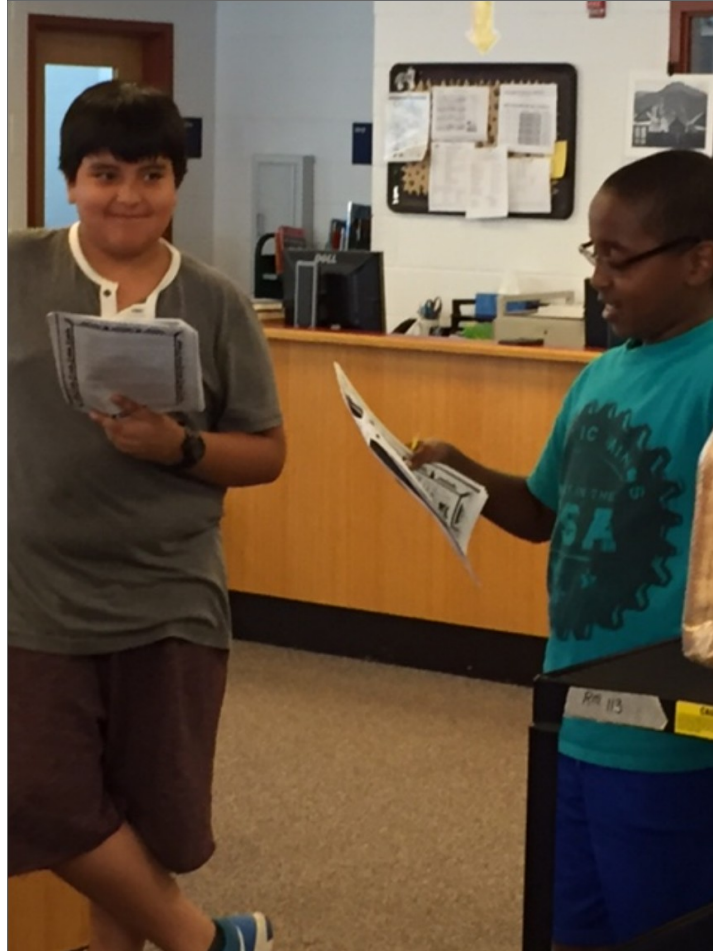
Readers Theater with comic book version of *The Odyssey* to *increase comprehension* and *have fun*

Isaac



Readers Theater with comic book version of *The Odyssey* to *increase comprehension* and *have fun*

Josè & Isaac



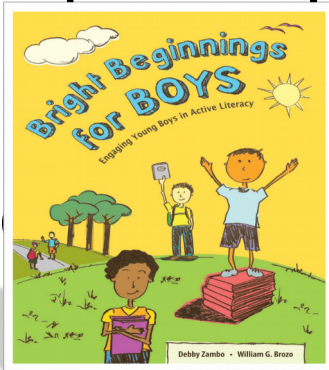
Framing the issue as a boy “crisis”...

Or seeking to find responsive instruction 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, ultimately, to become thoughtful and resourceful men.”

(Bright Beginnings for Boys,

Zambo 2009)



PISA 2009 Reading Literacy Scores by Race/Ethnicity:

U.S. 15-Year-Olds Compared with Highest Performing Countries

Race/Ethnicity	Score	P < .05
U.S. Average	500	
OECD Average	493	
White-Americans	525	X
Asian-Americans	541	X
Black-Americans	441	X
Hispanic-Americans	466	X
<i>Shanghai-China</i>	556	X
<i>Republic of Korea</i>	539	X
<i>Finland</i>	536	X
<i>Hong Kong China</i>	533	X
<i>Singapore</i>	526	X



Bridge Competencies with Familiar Texts to Academic Literacy

Siras
ak

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

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



Bridge Books and Texts

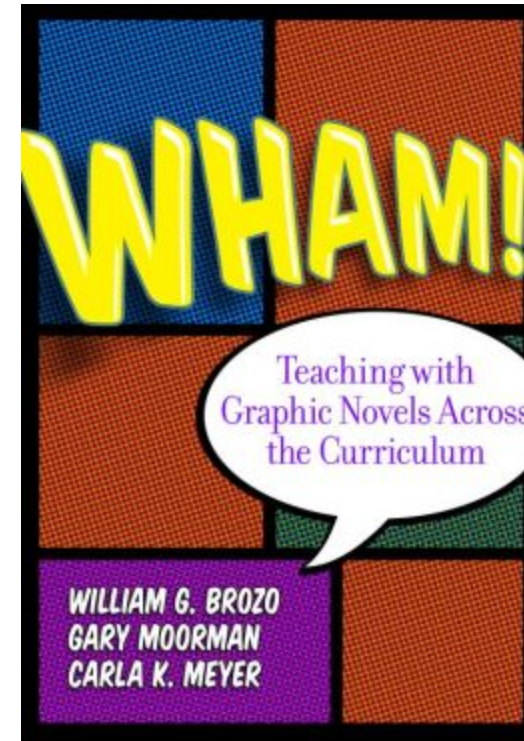
- Goal is to motivate reluctant and disinterested boys to read required academic texts
- Canonical and required texts, even if “readable,” may turn boys off to reading without prior exposure to bridge texts
- Transition boys into challenging academic texts with texts that are engaging and put knowledge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

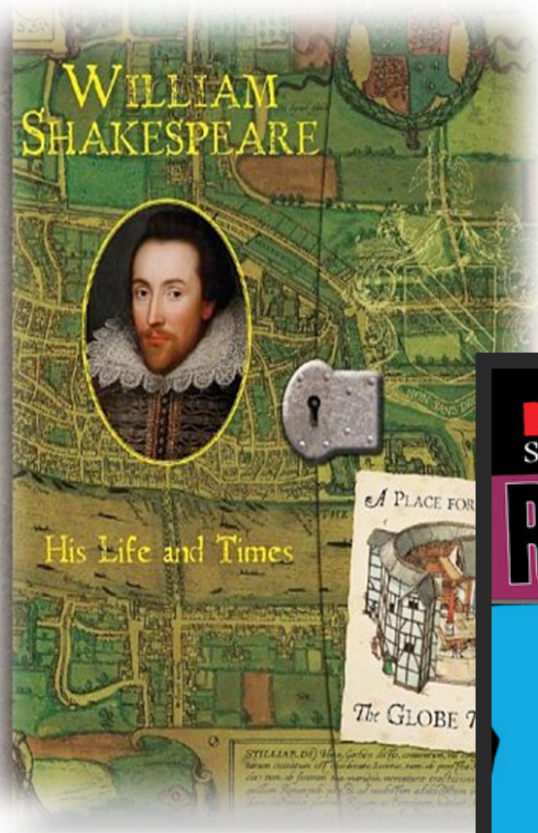


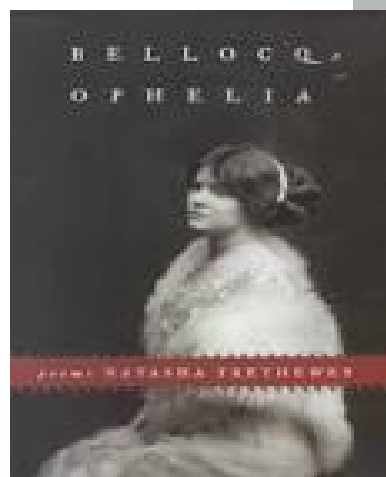
Professional Note

My newest book with Teachers College Press demonstrates how to integrate graphic novels into the four major disciplines.

This approach appears to have particular appeal to boys.

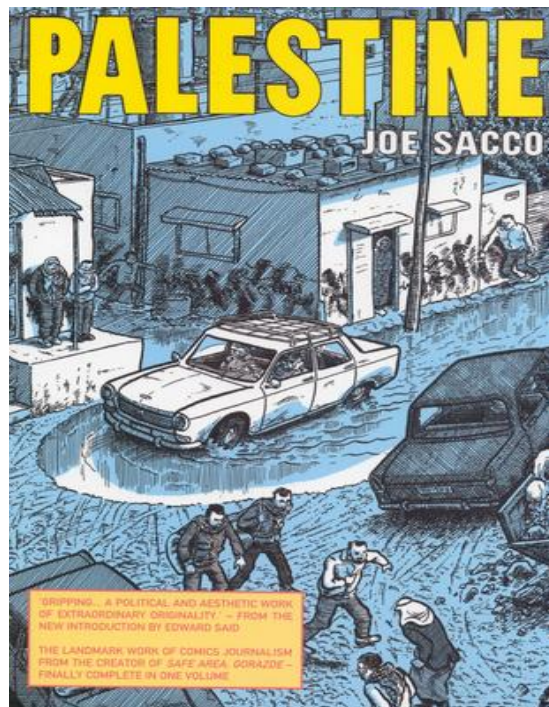




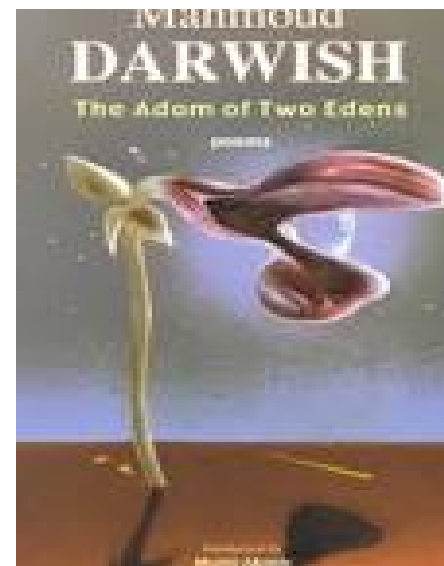


- United States Poet Laureate, Natasha Trethewey – poems set in New Orleans in early 20th century
- Graphic Novel about Katrina
- Story of Islamic man's generosity after the New Orleans' flood and then is a victim of racial profiling





The full text of a roadmap to peace in the Middle East, presented to Palestinian and Israeli leaders by Quartet mediators - the United Nations, European Union, United States and Russia. A performance-based roadmap to a permanent two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

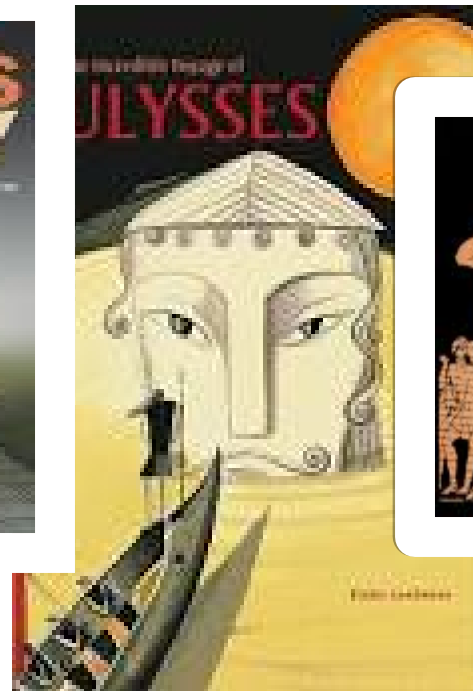
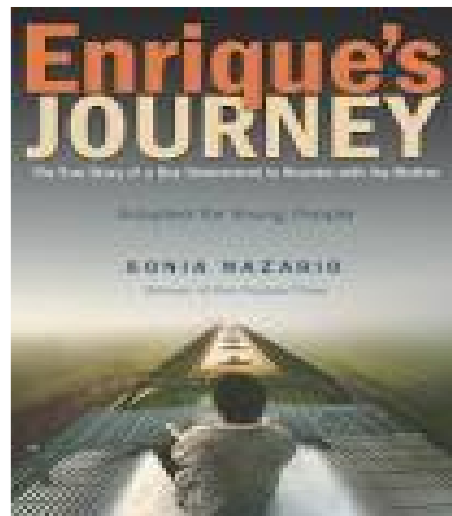


http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/mpapps/pagetools/print/news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/2989783.stm

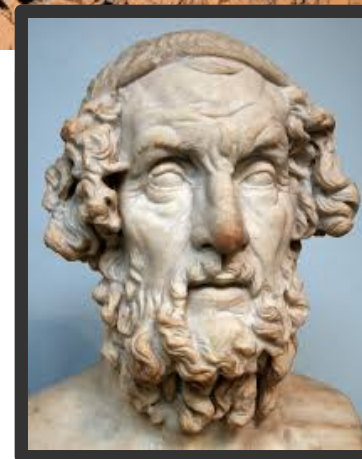
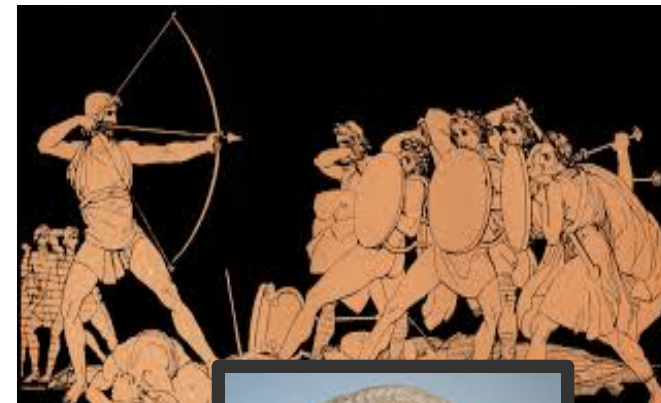


- Poetry of Palestinian poet, Mahmoud Darwish
- Graphic Novel about Palestine
- Road Map to Peace to settle the Israeli-Palestinian conflict





The Odyssey



The Odyssey

- Homer's original epic poem
- Graphic novel about Ulysses (Roman version of Odysseus)
- *Enrique's Journey*, Sonia Nazario's novel about a Honduran boy's own epic journey to find his mother in the United States



Graphic Novels: An Ideal Bridge Text for Boys

- “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.
 - Students also read *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*
- “Dane” – 10th grader in Mr. Brown’s history class, unmotivated, struggling reader, African-American

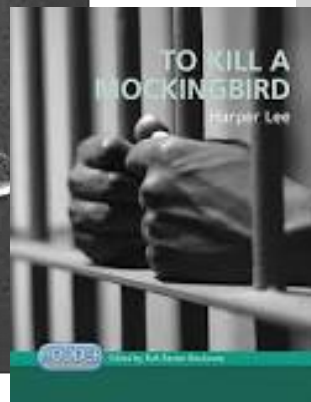




**“Letter from a
Birmingham Jail”**

To Kill a Mockingbird

Incognegro



**“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.
We are caught in an inescapable network of
mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.
Whatever affects one directly,
affects all indirectly...”**

--M.L. King



“Dane”

Science - D
Math - D
English - C
History - D+
PE - B
Tardy often,
Several detentions



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.



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.



Dane's literate practices outside of school: Rappin' with his "Wingmen"

This beat ain't right," Dane tells Kwame and Jovan, stopping his rap after just a few lines. "It's gotta be more lazy for the mood I'm trying to create."

"That's cause you lazy," Jovan quips, leaving the three of them laughing. Dane and his two friends are in a small room adjacent to Dane's bedroom that has become a make-shift recording studio. Kwame searches another website where they usually find the best beats and calls up a slower, almost jazzy one with a muted though emphatic bass. Jovan returns to the cheap Casio keyboard, the one he had since he was a kid, that he excavated from the back of his closet, and puts down a repeating pattern of chords to go with the beat. Dane, using the handle King Negus, smiles, shifts his head from side to side with the rhythm, and restarts his rap:

BROZO, W.G. (2013). The many faces of Dane: Viewing boys as a resource in their own literacy development. In N. Nilsson & S. Gandy (Eds.), *Struggling readers can succeed: Teaching solutions based on real kids in classrooms and communities*. Information Age Publishing.



Dane's literate practices outside of school: Rappin' with his "Wingmen"



*One plus two plus three ways to be
lon' matter to me 'cause I'm divisible by th
er brothas wanna be one thing, one thing
t there's a whole lotta lonely in acting one
nking one way like this is yo last day to liv
e, unable to deliver when somethin' new
comes yo way*

*When I was a kid I got these faces from
One had a smile one was sad
Like my face when my rap goes down
Or goes down in flames...*



Case Study: Graphic Novels in Science

- **Where**

8th grade science class in a suburban community in the national capital region

- **Who**

Melissa—the science teacher, doctoral student in literacy/policy, former engineer

Students—culturally and ethnically diverse group; 10% ELs

- **Gender Ratio**

24 total: 17 boys; 7 girls

BROZO, W.G., & MAYVILLE, M. (2012). Reforming secondary disciplinary instruction with graphic novels. *New England Reading Association Journal*, 48(1), 11-21.



Case Study: Graphic Novels in Science

- **Background**

- Melissa had been concerned about a mismatch between the school-provided texts and the reading abilities and interests of her students.

- Often complained that the assigned text book is written at a level that exceeds the abilities of many of her students, especially English Learners (ELs), struggling readers, and reluctant readers—most of whom were boys



Case Study: Graphic Novels in Science

- Melissa made alternative texts available to her students at a lower reading level than the textbook
- Many boys, who could benefit the most from these materials, tended to reject these texts, because they felt peers perceived this as “easy stuff” of “baby books”



Case Study: Graphic Novels in Science

- Melissa examined the results of state-level test data to isolate a curricular area in science which was problematic and decided to use a graphic novel that was related to that curricular strand—in this case, chemical reactions
- Finding a science graphic novel that was appropriate for her eighth grade science class involved visits to the school and local public libraries, as well as extensive Internet searches



Case Study: Graphic Novels in Science

- **The Materials & Method**

- Graphic novel: *Chemical Reactions with Max Axiom* (Biskup, 2011)

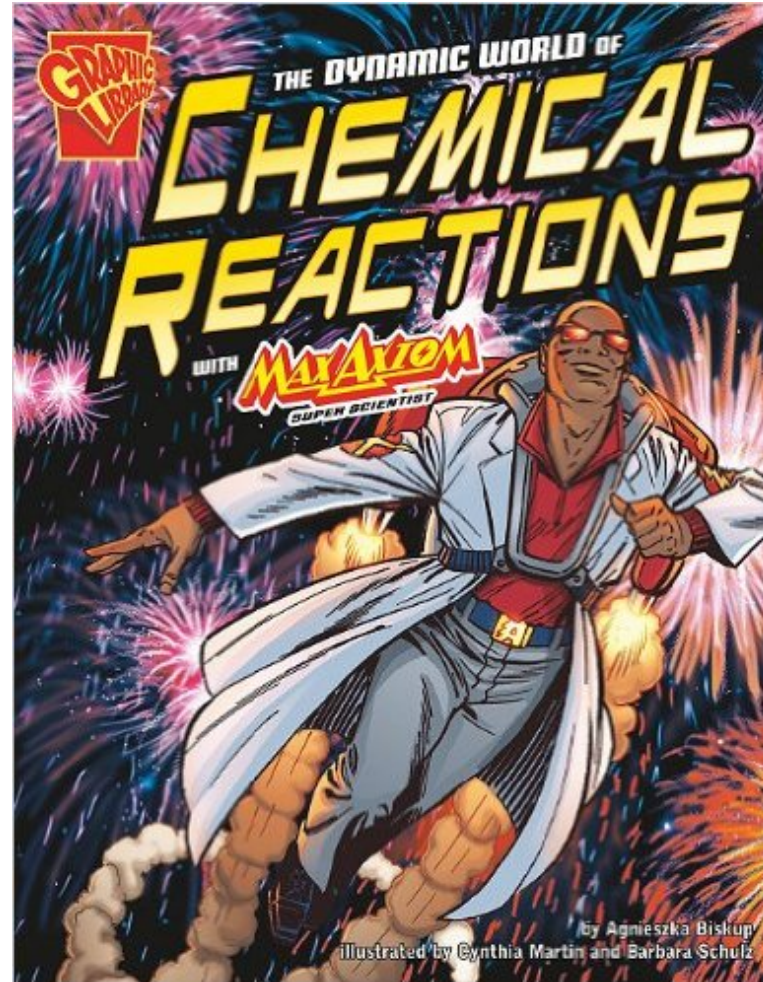
- Written in a story format, with textbook features that include a table of contents, a glossary and suggestions for further reading

- Main character is Max Axiom, an African American scientist working in an innovative laboratory, and just the kind of character who could make the science of chemical reactions interesting for her students

- Illustrations are vivid and the vocabulary-rich; text is broken into frames and supported by insets that reinforce vocabulary and important concepts.



Using powers he acquired in a freak accident, Max teaches science in ways never before seen in a classroom. Whether shrinking to explore an atom or riding on a sound wave, Max does what it takes to make science super cool.



Case Study: Graphic Novels in Science

- Using the graphic novel, Melissa's goal was to help students attain a deeper understanding of the new vocabulary and to reinforce the familiar vocabulary on chemical reactions
- One week unit
- In addition to the graphic novel for this unit, a variety of materials, including class textbook, magazine articles, and video were used



Case Study: Graphic Novels in Science

Overall Findings

- Of particular interest was how a handful of the boys who were generally indifferent to class activities and assignments were much more engaged during this unit
- The test, quiz, and assignment grades for these students were well above their average scores on previous units
- This was encouraging, since the unit on chemical reactions always posed significant challenges to the students, especially struggling ones



Boys' Comments about the Unit

- **Miguel**

“My English isn’t good, but Max Axiom had pictures that showed me what I needed to know.”

- **Louis**

“The book is too hard; this was a lot easier.”

- **Dre**

“Max is cool. He shows you stuff you can’t get in the book. I got a good grade over it.”

- **Manolo**

“This is the first book (in English) I read all the way through.”



Popular Music as Contexts for Learning and Using Vocabulary

ch	ck
such preach chuuch teachin watchin each preachin reach purchase beach child	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.



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, (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 comprehension
- Makes a book or some other project together based on younger student's interests and experiences
- One to three sessions per week
- Can occur in the school or public library

Reading Buddies

- 17-year-old Tremayne & 2nd grader LaBron in a cross-age tutoring program
- Read about and researched Chicago Bears football
- Led to reading about 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

FINAL THOUGHTS ABOUT BOYS AND READING...

- *Discover who each boy is individually*
- *Find the right reading material, at the right levels, and offer it in the right ways*
- *Respect boys' interests and work cooperatively to gain and hold boys' reading interests*
- *Support relationships between younger and older boys and men who can model the pleasures and benefits of active literacy*
- *View boys as a resource in their own literacy development to improve the chances of elevating their achievement*

Thank You!



**Youth are our hope
for the future...**

**But you are their
hope today!**



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