

BOYS READ!



Dear Barry,

My son dislikes reading. He loathes to open his Grade 5 novel and later answer the comprehension questions about what happened in the book. He says he'd rather clean his room than answer the questions. I know that he is smart and interested in a lot of things - just not interested in reading novels. Is this typical for boys?

Ruth - a concerned mom in Halifax



Dear Ruth,

You are not alone. Many parents struggle with encouraging their sons to read.

Deeply ingrained in our experience of schooling is the notion that reading a novel provides educational sustenance. But is it really that straightforward - especially in our rapidly changing, technologically complex and highly visual society?

It is often typical for boys his age to resist certain forms of literacy. Responsive education understands his lack of enthusiasm and promotes positive reading experiences through literacies he can enjoy.

Indeed, a love of reading has even been shown to be more important for children's academic success than their family's economic background. According to research carried out by the *Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development*, school success is more determined by the extent children read for pleasure in their spare time than their degree of affluence; especially reading forms of literacy they enjoy - comics, magazines, websites, newspapers, games, etc. Encouraging all boys to read for pleasure is essential.

Boys indeed read - but what? The truth is that many boys read widely, just not the books they are sometimes asked to read. Because most lukewarm readers prefer non-fiction it is vitally important that we expand our notion of traditional literacy to include multiple literacies; visual and technological literacy, for example, as well as literacy with forms from the performing arts such as storytelling, music, and video.

**The
electronic
media
with all
its games
& gizmos
have
suffered
from
criticism**



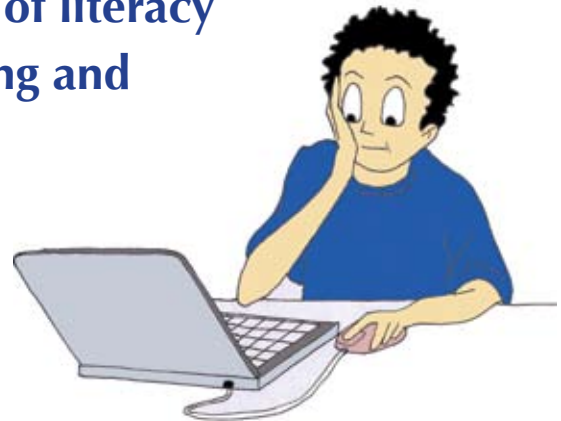
Boys Read multiple literacies...

In fact, *The United Nations* recently declared, "...that a renewed and expanded vision of literacy is essential for success...that it embraces a wide range of dimensions of personal and social life and development – and that is a lifelong learning process."

We can attract boys to reading for pleasure by tapping into their interests and by drawing on a diverse range of texts – for example, technological and media literacies such as text-messaging, decoding of online gaming rules and music lyrics, reading of cartoons, writing of graffiti, blogging, YouTube, drawing and even doodling.

Today's students need a broad range of literacy experiences to face a rapidly changing and increasing technological world.

Also, when we view reading as a social act, and not just a string of words on a page, opportunities for fun with literacies are abundant. Laughter and social interactions, when channeled, are valuable forms of oral literacy that help open boys to other forms of literacy. Encouraging fun with reading is critical.



And your son? - let him know that you believe he is smart and that you understand he is a proficient reader despite his reluctance to read his school novel. Keep your involvement with his home reading assignment positive and encouraging. Avoid forcing him to read.

Find an opportunity to check in with his teacher to glean an understanding of how she or he views multiple literacies and the place of humour and fun to inspire motivation and the love of reading. Explain your son's needs to the teacher.

Boy Smarts offers teachers ten practical guidelines to turn boys onto reading. Teachers everywhere report success when they draw on a wide range of literacy experiences that are fun and socially engaging.