

Boys!

Don't Settle for Stupid!

by Hal Young

The problem of books and boys has been in the news lately. It's a known fact that boys generally read less than girls and seem to enjoy it less when they do read. Teachers and librarians have worried about it for years, and some of their suggestions border on desperation. Should we embrace comic books and potty humour to entice our boys to read? Some schools and libraries already have. Here are your tax dollars at work ...

A sampling of online catalogues in larger North Carolina cities uncovers hundreds of titles, everything from books about cartooning to Asian teen romance comics and educational titles like *The Manga Guide to Calculus*. Enter the term "manga" at the website for the Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, and over 600 entries come up in this one category of comics.

"A solid quarter to third of what I circulate is graphic novels," said Meg Harrison, the teen services coordinator for the Forsyth County Library [Winston-Salem, NC]. "Most of my readers are boys. If it's in manga or comic book format, they don't care if it's targeted for girls — they'll read it." (Carolina Journal, 8/31/10)



So if you start them with Japanese romance comics and *Captain Underpants*, somehow they get a taste for Shakespeare later on? I have to think content matters. I've read my share of superhero stories and other fluffy stuff, but not as a school assignment, and not as the preferred, promoted format.

We don't think boys should settle for stupid stuff, even when they're young. Thomas Spence had an excellent op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal* recently:

Education was once understood as training for freedom. Not merely the transmission of information, education entailed the formation of manners and taste. Aristotle thought we should be raised "so as both to delight in and to be pained by the things that we ought; this is the right education." ...

This kind of training goes against the grain, and who has time for that? How much easier to meet children where they are.

One obvious problem with the [pandering] philosophy of education is that it is more suited to producing a generation of barbarians and morons than to raising the sort of men who make good husbands, fathers and professionals. If you keep meeting a boy where he is, he doesn't go very far.

And the content issue extends beyond avoidance of the disgusting — we ought to be realistic about the interests of boys, outside the gross-out variety. Even while promoting the use of comics, the Canadian Council on Learning got this much right:

"Boys are much more likely [than girls] to enjoy reading science and nonfiction books, informational texts, and 'how-to' manuals," the authors wrote. "They are also more likely to enjoy fantasy [and] adventure stories ... [yet] these genres and media are generally underrepresented or even unavailable in school libraries, a reflection of the views of teachers and librarians who judge such material inappropriate."

So what do we do?

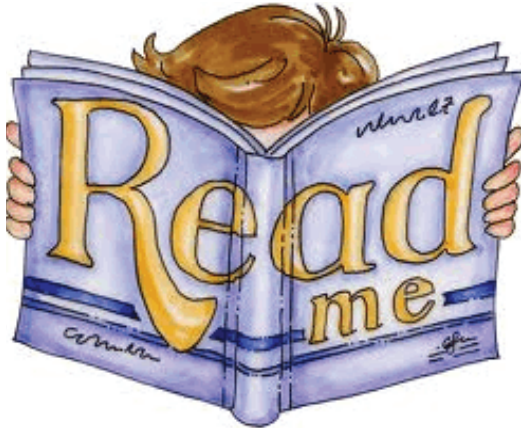
Here are some ideas we found helpful with our boys ...

Set the Example: Do your children ever see you reading a book for pleasure?

No, really — a book, not the newspaper, not online. I used to do my Bible reading on Bible Gateway or The Blue Letter Bible, — both useful websites, by the way — and carried my PDA to church (Multiple translations in my shirt pocket — cool, huh?) But then I realized my children couldn't tell at a glance whether I was deep in the Scriptures, or deep in my email and to-do lists. I went back to the big, solid study Bible as a testimony to my kids. Let them see you pick up a book for fun, too.

Read to Them. We know we're supposed to read to the little ones — try reading aloud as a family sometime. We've gotten tremendous enjoyment out of sharing classics like *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Little House on the Prairie*, and *The Swiss Family Robinson* (we wore out a copy!) Even the teenagers will hang on for the next chapter. Great fun, and it keeps us off the Internet in the evenings.

Introduce Them to Worthwhile Stuff, Early. Certainly there are the classic children's books like the ones above. There are some great biographies and histories written on a grade-school level, too. The *Childhoods of Famous Americans* series is good, and even now I enjoy the *Landmarks* series of nonfiction titles – they're better than Wikipedia for a quick overview of a subject! That's just scratching the surface. Sarah Clarkson has a new guidebook, *Read for the Heart: Whole Books for Wholehearted Families* (you can get it from Apologia), with lots of summaries and commentary to suggest what to look for.



Our own list of favourites includes, in no particular order,

- Norton Juster, *The Phantom Tollbooth*
- Ralph Moody, *Little Britches* (the series)
- J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*
- Rudyard Kipling, *Captains Courageous*
- Grace Livingston Hill, *The Witness*
- John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*
- C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* and the *Space Trilogy*
- Josh McDowell, *More Than A Carpenter*
- R. M. Ballentyne, *The Coral Island* and *The Gorilla Hunters*
- *Everything* by G.A. Henty!

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*We regretfully announce that
Sally Clarkson
has had to cancel her Christchurch
conference due to family illness
but we are hoping to have her back again
when she is able.*

Beware of Being Behind

Steve Demme

The most common myth that I am regularly addressing at fairs, on the phone, and in emails, is that someone's student is behind.

I often diffuse this by asking what the scripture reference is that determines what age a student must be to take Algebra 1 or Geometry or begin studying fractions. Is it in 1st Hezekiah or 2nd Assumptions? There is often a pause, then a light begins to dawn, and the look of consternation from wrongly surmising their child is behind, is replaced with a look of relief when they realize he is right where he needs to be.

Now if you have an 18 year old that is still counting on his fingers I recommend you consult a learning specialist to determine if there is a problem. But in 20 years will it make a difference whether your student is studying fractions when he is 10 or 12? The primary indicator is a child's readiness and math background, not his age, or God forbid, his grade level. Perhaps the root problem is not the student, but an insecure parent? While I am at it, most studies do not support putting children in school at 5 years old. Neither is it in the law given at Sinai, that children must leave home at 18 and enter college.

All three of our college graduates were 20 when they entered college, and they did fine. In fact I think they did better with a few more years of maturity than they would have done as an 18 year old.

This is not to say children can't begin formal schooling at 5 or enter college at 17, but please trust your instincts and teach and train your children according to what you know about their abilities and readiness.

Math-U-See does not have grade levels because so many older students have to go back and redo these levels. Most of these older students were moved through successive math classes based on their age and not their achievement. There's never enough time to do it right the first time, but there is always enough time to go back and do it again.

Please let your children move at their own pace and not some man made standard from one of the worst math nations on the planet, the good old USA.

Protect your children, those precious individuals that God has placed in your care, from state imposed guidelines and raise them and train them in the way they should go.

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