

Text Considerations to Motivate Boys to Want to Read

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ABSTRACT

Increasing motivation to read among elementary boys is an important consideration in closing the gender achievement gap in reading as students who are motivated to read typically increase their reading volume which can positively impact reading achievement. This article discusses the following text considerations that can impact boys' motivation to read: (a) topic; (b) genre; (c) series, and (d) text layout. It is critical that books with these text considerations are accessible in classroom libraries, as male students in previous studies have not found texts of interest at school. The article provides a checklist for teachers to self-evaluate the types of texts that are needed in classroom libraries that can appeal to male students.

KEYWORDS

boys reading;
reading
achievement gap;
motivation;
interests; texts

The most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2022) reading achievement levels reveal that girls outperform boys. While this occurred at all grade levels that were assessed: fourth, eighth, and twelfth, this article focuses on the elementary grades. Sixty-six percent of fourth-grade girls performed at or above the NAEP Basic Level, while 60 percent of boys performed at this level (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). Further, in one study, a higher percentage of female students engaged in leisure reading and stated spending money on buying books for pleasure than male students (Griva et al., 2012). Mitigating the gender reading achievement gap is an important topic for educators to address.

Motivation is a critical consideration in closing the gender reading achievement gap as students who are motivated to read tend to increase their reading volume (Stutz et al., 2016), and Allington and McGill-Franzen (2021) cite numerous studies that demonstrate that reading volume positively affects reading achievement. Further, in one study, students not originally identified as remedial readers and who did not engage in reading during their free time eventually lost academic ground (Anderson et al., 1988). In a study conducted by Marinak and Gambrell (2010), findings revealed that third-grade boys who were average readers were less motivated to read than third-grade girls, and they indicated that many boys valued reading less than girls who were also average readers.

While there are numerous strategies to contemplate when motivating boys to read, this article focuses on text considerations that include the following: (a) topic; (b) genre; (c) series, and (d) text layout. As some studies found that texts that boys want to read are not readily available in classrooms (Husband, 2012; Scholes et al., 2021), the information in this article can help educators become more informed about the types of books to provide to help mitigate the gender achievement gap in reading. A checklist is provided so that teachers can self-evaluate their libraries in order to ensure variation in texts to increase boys' motivation.

Topic

It is helpful to know what research reveals regarding topics of interest to boys so that this information can provide guidance in making these texts easily accessible. Books with animals such as sharks and reptiles were of interest to many elementary aged boys in some studies (Cervetti et al., 2009; Correia, 2011; Scott & Williams, 2016; Sturm, 2003). Sports, specifically football and basketball, were preferences of many male participants (Griva et al., 2012; Scott & Williams, 2016; Sturm, 2003; Williams, 2008), and cars were also of interest in one study's findings (Boltz, 2007). Further, some studies revealed that boys were interested in reading books about favorite movies (Scholes et al, 2021) and other popular culture topics such as superheroes and singers (Williams, 2008).

Genre

Fiction or nonfiction, what do boys prefer? In some studies, fiction was more popular among boys (Williams, 2008, 2016) while in other studies, nonfiction was of more interest (Husband, 2012; Repaskey et al, 2017; Senn, 2012). Perhaps educators should ask students what types of books they like to read within the fiction genre as well as within the nonfiction genre, comparable to Bonto and colleagues (2016), as opposed to asking which genre they prefer to read most. It is critical that both genres are represented in libraries, particularly as most teachers expose students to more fiction texts in the classroom (Senn, 2012). Some studies mentioned specific types of fiction that boys preferred, including fantasy (Bonto et al., 2016; Dillon et al., 2017), comics (Bonto et al, 2016; Dillon et al., 2017; Griva et al., 2012; Senn, 2012), realistic fiction (Bonto et al., 2016), and humor (Bonto et al., 2016). Others noted that how-to manuals and newspapers (Husband, 2012), reference books such as almanacs and history books (Bonto et al, 2016), and sports magazines (Bonto et al, 2016; Griva et al., 2012) were forms of nonfiction that boys enjoyed.

Series

Numerous studies indicated boys' desire to read books in a series (Bonto et al., 2016; Dillon et al., 2017; Farris et al., 2009; Scholes et al., 2021; Senn, 2012; Thomas, 2018; Williams, 2008). Farris and colleagues (2009) noted, "By reading a series book, he'd cut down on his 'getting to know the book's setup' because he'd already been introduced to the setting, plot structure, and usual characters in previous books in the series" (p. 180). Similarly, Senn (2012) stated that series books can be of interest to boys as they have a preexisting connection to the characters. Examples of popular book series among elementary boys included *Miami Jackson* (Thomas, 2018), *Horrible Harry* (Thomas, 2018), *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* (Scholes et al, 2021), and *Big Nate* (Scholes et al, 2021).

Text Layout

While two studies found that boys prefer short, succinct texts (Husband, 2012; Senn, 2012), one study's male participants preferred longer books that were more than 32 pages, the typical page length of picture books (Williams, 2016). Perhaps the types of books (e.g. topics, series) provided should be considered as someone might be more apt to read a longer book about a topic of high interest or that is a part of a familiar series. Also, Farris et al. (2009) discovered that striving male readers were interested in wide margins, easy-to-read fonts, large print, and ample white space such as *Who Is LeBron James* (Hubbard, 2023). Their data revealed that boys who were not struggling readers enjoyed unusual fonts and books with unique textual features such as *Ben*

Yokoyama and the Cookie of Doom (Swanson & Behr, 2021) and *ChupCarter* (Lopez & Calejo, 2023). Figure 1 can be used to self-evaluate texts that are in classroom libraries to note the amount of representation of the text considerations that are mentioned in this article.

Figure 1: Self-Evaluation Checklist for Text Considerations in a Library

Text Consideration	Adequate Representation	Minimal Representation	Need Representation
Sharks			
Reptiles			
Football			
Basketball			
Cars			
Popular Culture			
Fiction			
Nonfiction			
Series books			
Various text lengths			
Various text features (e.g. white space, unique font)			

Conclusion

Educators must attend to the data that reveals elementary boys tend to achieve at lower levels in reading than elementary girls (NAEP, 2022). In addressing this issue, motivation should be considered as students who are motivated to read tend to read more (Stutz et al., 2016), and reading volume positively affects reading achievement (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2021; Anderson et al., 1988). One strategy that can enhance reading motivation among boys is providing access to books with particular text considerations that are mentioned in this article: a) topic, b) genre, c) series, and d) text layout. It is critical to evaluate if books in classroom libraries have these text considerations as male participants in one study (Scholes et al., 2021) indicated that they did not often find books that they desired at school, which negatively impacted their motivation to read. A self-evaluation checklist provided in the article serves as a quick way to assess texts that are provided in classrooms. While offering access to books with these text considerations is important, it is also critical to recommend these texts during reading conferences and read them aloud for exposure. Our role as educators is crucial in mitigating the gender reading achievement gap.

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