

Top Ten Tips for Teaching Writing to Boys

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Use Graphics

The male brain is wired for visual-spatial. Encourage boys to draw pictures about what they want to write BEFORE writing the story. Expose boys to a variety of graphic organizers. Use comic strips and other interesting pictures as a prompt for their writing. During brainstorming for descriptive writing, turn on music and have students paint or draw pictures. This primes the pump for writing that is rich in sensorial and emotive detail.

Use Technology

Students can use a wealth of technology to get their ideas down AND to share their writing with a wider audience. Have students create a Podcast, either before or after writing. Create a classroom blog where students can respond to their fellow students' writing. Have students create a mock Facebook page for a book character before writing a traditional character analysis.

Incorporate Boys' Interests

Find out what your boys are passionate about outside of school. Then let them write about it. Make a PowerPoint slide show with pictures depicting what your boys love and let them watch it to get writing ideas. Be sure to let boys do lots of technical "real life" writing, such as video game reviews or how-to pieces about a favorite hobby or sport. If you are providing written prompts, be sure to include prompts that are boy-friendly with more of a focus on action over description and relational themes.

Don't Censor Too Much

Boys' writing is frequently aggressive, edgy, gross or slapstick. Be careful not to censor it too much, or you are taking away the one thing that keeps some boys motivated to write. Have boys consider their audience. What may not be appropriate to include in the school's literary magazine may be appropriate (and a real hit!) with other boys in the class.

Let Their Bodies Move

Even while writing, boys should have some freedom to move and fidget. Consider standing work stations, one-legged focus stools or therapy balls, gel cushions, koosh balls to squeeze, etc.

Let Boys Write For Boys

One of the most important things to know about boys and writing is: Boys Write For Boys. Pair male students up to share their writing and serve as peer editors for one another. Allow younger boys the opportunity to read their stories to older boys.

Men As Literacy Role-Models

Boys face many contradictions about being masculine and being a good student. Help them see that "real men read and write" by bringing men into your classroom who write for a living – reporters, screenwriters, authors, etc. Have students' fathers come in to do a book share with students. Invite older male students to share a piece of their own writing with your students. Encourage boy-to-boy book recommendations. Explore www.guysread.com with your students.

Start a "Boys Writing Club"

Create a boys writing club that meets during lunch a few times per month. In the writing club, you can really take the constraints off of what and how they write. Focus more on ideas and less on editing.

Provide Options for Book Reports

Book reports don't always need to be in standard written form. Boys especially like more active styles of demonstrating their understanding such as dramatizations and role-playing. They might also like to write a song or build a model.

Don't Forget Read-Alouds

Reading aloud to students – even at the upper grades – can spark a love of literature in students. It exposes students to a wider variety of literature without it being labor-intensive and encourages more visualization. To improve comprehension during the Read Aloud, encourage students to "doodle" while they listen, including doodling pictures that connect with the storyline.