Abstract: This paper summarizes some of the recent research into boys and reading, primarily carried out in Australia, but available online for international readers to read. The research makes it clear that many boys are still reading, but competing claims of busy lives can easily sidetrack them from making this their main activity. We can use many strategies to improve boys’ reading habits. Poor literacy will stand in the way of reading enjoyment. This paper outlines a number of these. Also included are an extensive suggested reading list and compilations of websites for further examination.

There are many fondly held views about books and reading and young people today. One is that they no longer read; that technological interests have replaced reading. Another is that boys do not enjoy reading and do not succeed at it. Many reiterate that boys only like a limited range of books, and that we should choose only a particular kind of book for boys. My experience working with boys over many years and specifically with boys alone for the last six and a half years is a little different from these stereotypes. An Australian research report, *Young Australian Reading* published in 2001 also reflects that the reality is somewhat different.

- The majority 69% boys and 80% girls actually enjoy reading to some extent (*Young*, 2001, p18). More recent figures (surveying 5-14 year olds) indicate that 75% of both
boys and girls spent time reading for pleasure and confirm 68% of boys did so. (ABS, 2003, p1)

- Eight out of 10 young people agree that books are exciting and interesting (88% in primary school) (Young, 2001, p22)

- 49% boys and 58% girls read every day or every few days (Young, 2001, p34)

- Although 41% boys consider reading is boring and 45% nerdy, 23% think that it is cool (Young, 2001, p20)

- Though reading for pleasure for boys drops from primary to secondary 67% to 43%; girls drop even more from 88% to 48% (Young, 2001, p34)

- 2/3 of both boys and girls would read more if they had time (Young, 2001, p37)

**Interests**

- When compared up with other activities that young people really like (after the top two: spending time with friends or playing sport) reading for pleasure shows up quite favourably. Reading 30%; TV 38%; Internet 31%; computer games 27% (Young, 2001, p18), The ABS data said that for boys reading for pleasure rates fourth after watching television or videos, playing electronic or computer games and bike riding. (ABS, 2003, p1)

- Older boys who had lost interest in reading usually think it is no longer relevant, or something they can share with their peers. (Young, 2001, p25)

- For 65% boys reading is irrelevant (Young, 2001, p23)

- Boys' imaginations are being captured by sport or computers; and 'real men don't read' (West, n.d., p.1)
Literacy

Unsurprisingly, there seems to be a tight correlation between those with poor literacy skills and those who do not like to read.

• 34% of boys, / 26% girls lack basic literacy skills (Alloway, 2002, p41);
• The easier reading is considered to be, the more enjoyable the reading experience. (Young, 2001, p20)
• 43% of boys do not associate reading for pleasure as being easy. (Young, 2001, p20)
• Young people who do not read estimate their reading speed to be slower than that of their peers. (Young, 2001, p38)

Influences of others

The greatest influences on young people who read every day are friends and family.

• “siblings and friends who read”. (Young, 2001, p26)
• “more likely to have a father who reads at least sometimes”. (Young, 2001,p26)
• “a mother who reads all the time”. (Young, 2001,p26)
• “lots of books to read at home” (Young, 2001, p27)
• boys who read are powerfully influenced by parental guidance and modelling. (Hamston, 2001, p1)

The biggest difference between readers and non-readers appears in the proportion who have friends who read, and parents who assist reading practices.

• friends are the main source of advice of books to read (Young, 2001, p26)
• “require and, importantly, accept, the interpersonal relationships that their parents endeavour to maintain around reading.” (Hamston, 2001, p.1)
• “real men don't read’. (West, n.d., p.1)
**Literacy Boys Enjoy**

- boys have a strong interest in electronic and graphic forms of literate practice  
  (Alloway, 2002, p.4)
- “boys are willing to ‘do’ literacy in active, public ways (such as debating, drama, public speaking)” (Alloway, 2002, p.4) but “Please don't make them read aloud”  
  (Sanderson, 1995)
- “boys are eager to engage with ‘real-life’ literacy contexts and ‘real life’ literacy practices”. (Alloway, 2002, p.4)
- boys and girls both enjoy action/adventure, science fiction, non-fiction similarly.  
  (Young, 2001, p42)
- books ‘about real people’ are preferred by one in two teens: though amongst boys 36% vs 60% for girls (Young, 2001, p42)

**Image**

- “home and school see reading as an interest more appropriate for girls than for boys” (Alloway, 2002, p.52)
- “fathers often identify themselves as non-readers” (Alloway, 2002, p.52)
- “boys are more likely to see it as boring and a bit nerdy”. (Young, 2001, p20)

**Do Judge a Book by its Cover**

- promote male friendly policies and materials (Young, 2001, p.13) *but* encourage books that expand students’ versions of masculinity ((Sanderson, 1995)
- increase quantity & range of recreational reading, in more comfortable surroundings  
  (Young, 2001, p13)
• “select books appeal to students – not books that adults read as youngsters or award
winning books ” (Lingard, 2002, p 65)

• improve locations, age, appearance (covers), display and presentation of books
(Young, 2001, p13)

Action: Promote Role Models

Recognise the critical role of the trusted adult mediator (Young, 2001, p13)

• present male, book-positive role models including fathers and teachers sharing
reading for pleasure “having a Book Week in which every teacher talks about books
he/ she read in her/his mid-teens.” (West, n.d., p.1)

• “involve parents by compiling a good book list for them to buy from or developing a
‘take-home’ reading program ” (Lingard, 2002, p 65)

• “teachers talk about their process as a reader – eg. how they choose and read books ”
(Lingard, 2002, p 65)

• “powerful influence of parents in guiding children into valued discourses of
literacy” (Hamston, 2001, p1)

Action: Attitude

• Allow time for ‘free’ reading (Young, 2001, p9)

• validate personal choice ; allow in reading related activities in the curriculum
(Young, 2001, p13)

• “reduce the emphasis on the study of texts and extensive written responses and
increase time for reading for pleasure and for discussion and ‘booktalk’ “. (Young
2001, p9)

• “ensure that the roles of print-based texts and electronic materials are regarded as
complementary and of equal importance” (Young, 2001, p13)

Promote Peer Input
organise reading peer groups – so that students can enthuse each other, support fads, popular music, films with books (Sanderson, 2002)

make reading a social activity

Action: Literacy

- read aloud to students – “injecting drama, being a mediator between the book and the students” (Lingard, 2002, p 65) This is even to older boys!
- “use electronic media and attractive, accessible Websites to promote reading and involve in book- and reading-related activities”. (Young, 2001, p13)
- “strike a balance between reading enjoyment and reading skill. An excessive emphasis on the technical may discourage some readers. For some students, a primary concern with grammar and phonics can result in the story being lost” (Lingard, 2002, p 65)
- allow for opportunities for free reading “The dominant call for more free choice silent reading by students needs to be considered and allowed for within the English program.” (Barry, 1998, p127); (Young, 2001, p13)
- engage in ‘critical literacy’
  - “by challenging limited male stereotypes –showing students that books are not gender neutral – rather, they actively construct gender” (Lingard, 2002, p 65)
  - by encouraging other questions about the purpose of the writers, their biases, their agendas, the possibility of recreating the texts in different forms

What we do at Trinity

- buy books, lots of books of all kinds.– fiction collection more than doubled in last 6 years There are now many Graphic novels in the collection.Attached is long list of
books compiled from our observation of Trinity boys reading with other suggestions from other teacher librarians in Australia. Online at Books and Authors for Boys.

http://www.trinity.wa.edu.au/plduffyrc/teaching/bksboys.htm

- listen to suggestions
- run a book club with Mercedes (sister school) girls and Dymocks’ (local book shop) consultant
- book reviews by staff members Trinity Book Reviews

http://www.trinity.wa.edu.au/plduffyrc/library/review.htm

- promote Western Australian Young Readers Book Award and Children’s Book Council Book of the Year Award.
- encourage use of Information and Communication Technology and reading
  
  Australian Fiction

http://www.trinity.wa.edu.au/plduffyrc/subjects/english/aust/austfiction.htm and

  Fantasy Reading Journal Webquest

http://www.trinity.wa.edu.au/plduffyrc/subjects/english/fant/

Conclusions

The stereotypes about reading are not all quite true. There are many strategies we can implement to improve the reading habits of boys. Many of those strategies will work for girls as well. While we should be aware of boys’ interests, we really should not generalise on the type of material they like to read. Good readers of either sex will read anything; competent readers will read a wide range of material if encouraged and motivated. The best motivators are peers who read, and adults they respect. The time and space to read without always demanding assessment allows boys the opportunity to enjoy reading. Those boys who have trouble reading, and with poor literacy skills cannot enjoy reading, as it remains a difficult
task rather than a pleasure. Improving literacy skills seem to be a high priority if we value the gift of reading.

Further investigations

Boys and Reading  http://www.trinity.wa.edu.au/plduffyrc/teaching/boyread.htm

Books and Authors for Boys http://www.trinity.wa.edu.au/plduffyrc/teaching/bksboys.htm


Boys Education http://www.trinity.wa.edu.au/plduffyrc/teaching/boys.htm

Trinity Book Reviews (by staff) http://www.trinity.wa.edu.au/plduffyrc/library/review.htm

Works Cited


Books Boys Like to Read

1. Applegate; K.A. [*Animorphs*] *Predator* 0590629816 etc; [*Remnants*] *Mayflower* 0590879979 etc

2. Asimov; Isaac [*Foundation*] *Foundation* 0586010807; *The Moons of Jupiter* 0340491108

3. Baillie Allan *Treasure Hunters* 0143300075; *The Last Shot* 1862913161 etc

4. Ball Duncan [*Selby*] *Selby Screams* 0207167281; etc [*Ghost*] *Ghost And The Goggle Box* 0207191492 etc;

5. Blacklock Dyan. *Pankration* 1864482958; *Comet vomit* 186373810X

6. Bowles; Colin *Surfing Mr Petrovic* 0140386416

7. Broderick; Damien *Zones* 0732257603; *Stuck in Fast Forward* 0732265622

8. Brooks; Terry [*Shannara*] *Sword of Shannara* 1857231511 etc

9. Caddy David *Smash* 1863682716; *Whacko* 1863683089

10. Card; Orson Scott [*Ender*] *Ender's game* 185723720X etc

11. Caisley; Raewyn *Monkey trix* 0140386572 [*Aussie Bites*]; *Karate Star* 0091838967

12. Carey Peter *The Big Bazoolhley* 070222832X.

13. Carmichael; Claire *Originator* 0091829534; *Saving Aunt Alice* 1740517296

14. Carmody; Isobell [*Obernewton Chronicles*] *The Gathering* 014036059X etc

15. Carroll Jane *Front Runner Thambaroo* 1862915423

16. Caswell; Brian *Merryl of the stones* 070222250x; *Deucalion* 0702228656; etc

17. Chris Ryan *The one that got away* 0712677356

18. Clark Margaret *Care factor zero* 0091833043; *Back on track* 0091831628 [*Short*].

   *S.N.A.G. : sensitive new-age gladiator* [*Aussie Bites*]; Lee Striker [*HairRaisers*]

   *Copycat* 0140379606

19. Clark; Sherryl *Batter up!* 0141308478 [*Aussie Bites*]
20. Colfer, Eoin [Artemis Fowl] Artemis Fowl 067091133X etc
21. Condon; Bill; Robert Hood Dogs 0733612040; Freak out! 0733603661;
22. Cornwell; Patricia Isle of dogs 075153188X; Southern Cross 0751527130
23. Coville; Bruce My Teacher Flunked the Planet 0006940889 etc
24. Crew G. The Blue Feather 1863307508; Gothic Hospital 0734402325 The Inner Circle
   186330686; [After Dark] The Watertower 1863743200
25. Cross Gillian [The Demon Headmaster] The Demon Headmaster 019271855X etc
26. Clancy; Tom [Net force] The deadliest game 0747260702 etc,
27. Daddon, Andrew.; Denton, Terry You're dropped! 0733616127
28. Dahl; Roald Charlie and the Chocolate Factory 0141311630; The Vicar of
   Nibbleswicke: The Witches 0141311398; etc Boy ; and, Going solo 0140349170 etc
29. DeFalco, Tom Spiderman: The ultimate guide 078947946X
30. Denton; Terry The eye of Ulam 1865083585; The ultimate wave 186508378X etc
31. De Goldi; Kate Closed, Stranger 0141305045
32. Dezago, Todd Tellos: Reluctant heroes 1582401861
33. Dickinson; Peter Shadow of a hero 0552528447; The Ropemaker 0330397133
34. Disher Garry Past the headlands 1865085391; The Divine Wind 0733605265
35. Drewe Robert The Shark Net 0141002549 994.1104092-DRE-
36. Earls Nick. After January 0702228230; 48 Shades of Brown 0140287698 etc
37. Eaton; Anthony The Darkness 0702231525; New Kind of Dreaming 0702232289;
   Nathan Nuttboard hits the beach 0702233404 ; Fireshadow 0702233811 etc
38. Eddings David [The Belgariad] Pawn of Prophecy 0552148075 etc [Malloreon]
   Guardians of the West0552148024 ; etc [Elenium]The Diamond Throne 0586203729 etc
39. Evans Alwyn Walk in my shoes 0143002317
40. Feist; Raymond *The Riftwar* Magician 0586217835 etc; *The Serpentwar saga* Rise of a merchant prince 0006497012

41. Flynn; Rachel *I Hate Fridays* 0140341021; *On the team* 014330044X

42. Flynn; Warren Escaping paradise 1863682805 Return Ticket 1920731903 etc

43. French; Jackie *Soldier on the Hill* 0207196370; The black house 0864615078

44. Fusillo; Archimede Sparring with Shadows 0140386564; *The Dons* 014131334X


46. Gleitzman; Morris *Misery Guts* 0330272314; *Teacher's pet* 0140387994 etc

47. Griffiths Andy *Just* *Just Tricking* 0330361414 etc

48. Grisham; John *The client* 0099179415; *The summons* 0099406136 etc

49. Gwynne; Phillip. *Deadly Unna* 0141300493; *Nukkin Ya* 0141309431

50. Harlen; Jonathan *Brain Scam* 1865086878 *Circus berzerkus* 186508770X

51. Harris; Christine *Fortune Cookies* 0091834872; *Omega* 009183970X etc

52. Hartnett; Sonya *Sleeping Dogs* 0140385355; *All My Dangerous Friends* 0670880272;

53. Hathorn; Libby *The Climb* 0670870781; *Feral Kid* 0340612673; *Rift* 0733608795

54. Heffernan; John *Spud* 0947241930; *CBD* 1876289376 *GBH* 1876289597

55. Herbert; Frank *Dune* *Dune* 0450011844 etc

56. Hirsch; Odo Antonio S and the Mystery of Theodore Guzman 1864484098; *Bartlett*
   Bartlett and the City of Flames 1865081167 *Slaughterboy* 1741144868 etc

57. Herrick; Steven *A Simple Gift* 0702231339; *A Place Like This* 0702229849

58. Hill; David. *Where all things end* 0143318004 *The high wind blows* 0141313366

59. Hobb; Robin *Farseer Trilogy* Assassin's apprentice 0006480098 etc *Tawny Man*
   Fool's Errand 0006486010 etc; *Liveship Traders* Ship of Magic 000649885X etc

60. Horowitz, Anthony *Alex Rider* Stormbreaker 074455943X etc *Point Blanc* 0744559715
61. Hornby; Nick *About a boy* 0141007338; *High Fidelity* 0140293469.

62. Howarth; Lesley *Ultra Violet* 0141310782; *The Pits* 0744547679

63. Jacques; Brian [*Redwall*] *Redwall* 0099512009

64. Jennings; Paul [*Un*-] *Unreal!* 0140319654; *Wicked* 0141310227; *Grandad's Gifts* 0670846554; *Spoonor or Later* 0670837458; *Quirky tails* 0141301783 etc

65. Jordan Robert [*The Wheel of Time*] *The Eye of the World* 1857230760 etc

66. Kelleher; Victor *Slow Burn* 0140269886; *The Other* 0732273714; etc

67. King; Stephen *The Talisman* 0340674458; *Green Mile* 0752834223 etc

68. Larkin; John *Pizza features* 0733611370; *Growing Payne* 0091830044 etc

69. Lasenby; Jack [*Travellers*] *Because We Were the Travellers* 187713502X etc

70. Lisson; Deborah *Red Hugh* 0850919134; *The Yankee Whaler* 1865044385 etc

71. Luckett; Dave [*The Tenabran trilogy*] *A Dark Winter* 1862913684 etc

72. Lurie; Morris *The Twenty-Seventh Annual African Hippopotamus Race* 0140342974

73. Marsden; John [*The tomorrow*] *Tomorrow When the War Began* 0330274864 etc

74. Mattingley Christobel [*Asmir*] *No guns for Asmir* 0140367292 etc, etc;

75. McRobbie; David *The Wayne Dynasty* 0855612711; *Fergus McPhail* 0141309229

76. Metzenthen; David *Brocky's bananagram* 1865045780; *Johnny Hart's heroes* 0140379398; *Finn and the big guy* 0140382674; *Boys of blood & bone* 0143001302

77. Mitchell, Euan *Feral Tracks* 064634675X

78. Moloney; James; *Dougy* 0702224995; *Touch Me* 0702231517; *Moving house* 0141308931 [*Aussie Bites*] *The scorpion's tail* 0207196664 etc

79. Monk; Scott - *Boyz r’ Us* 0091831660; *Raw* 0091837545; *The crush* 0091839734

80. Nilsson Eleanor *Outside Permission* 0670863807; *The house guest* 0140346015

81. Nix Garth [*Seventh Tower*] *Sabriel* 1865080403; *Shade's children* 1864483784 etc

82. Ottley Ted *Code of Occult* 0091832721; *Roadies* 0091828902
83. Parry Glyn; *Stoked!* 1863737111; *Spooking the cows* 0733610250; *Sad Boys* 0733608221; *Scooterboy* 0733610250 etc

84. Paulsen Gary [*Hatchet* Hatchet 0330310453 etc; *Mr Tucket* 0340754133; etc, etc]

85. Pausacker Jenny. [*Blake mysteries*] *Time to go* 0733610803 etc

86. Pierce; Tamora  [*The Song of the Lioness*]; *Alanna: the first adventure* 0099435608 etc; [*Immortals*] *Wild Magic* 0590551795 etc; [*The circle opens*] *Magic steps* 0439992605 etc

87. Pratchett Terry [*The Disc World*] *The Colour of Magic* 0552124753 etc; *Truckers* 0552525952; *Johnny and the Dead* 0552527408; etc

88. Pullman; Phillip *Northern Lights* 0590660543; *The subtle knife* 0590112899

89. Price Willard *Arctic adventure* 0099183218; *South sea adventure* 0099182513; etc

90. Pryor; Michael *The Unmaker* 0733609295; *Dog Days* 0733934757 etc

91. Puzo; Mario *The Godfather* 0749309466 etc

92. Raglus; Jeff *Dream Boy* 1740517555; *Big Funky Action* 0091837693

93. Rankin Robert *Raiders of the lost car park* 0552138339; etc

94. Reilly, Matthew *Ice Station* 0330360892; *Area 7* 0330363654; etc

95. Robinson; Barbara *My brother Louis measures worms* 0064403629 ;etc

96. Rockwell; Thomas *How to Eat Fried Worms* 1852137223

97. Rodda; Emily [*Deltora Quest*] *The Forests Of Silence* 1865042250 etc; [*Rowan of Rin*]

   Rowan of Rin 1862915350 etc

98. Rowling; J.K. [*Harry Potter*] *Harry Potter & the Philosopher's Stone* 0747532745 etc

99. Rubinstein Gillian [*Space Demons*] *Shinkei* 1862912602 etc; *Terra-Farma* 0670889784

100. Sachar Louis *Holes* 0747548471; *Dogs don't tell jokes*; 0747555249

101. Smith; Wilbur *The Seventh Scroll* 0330344153; *Birds of Prey* 033035289X etc

102. Snicket; Lemony [*A of Unfortunate Events*] *The Bad Beginning* 0064407667 etc
103. Spinelli Jerry *Crash* 1860394655; Wringer 0007156014

104. Starke; Ruth *Nips* NIPS XI 0734401132 etc

105. Stephenson, Neal *Cryptonomicon* 0099410672; *Snow Crash* 0140232923

106. Swindell; Robert *Stone cold* 0140362517; *A Wish for Wings* 0440863961

107. Tolbert S *Escape to Kalimantan* 0733902359

108. Tolkien; J.R.R. *Hobbit* 0006754023; *[Lord of the Rings]* Fellowship of the Ring 0007123825

109. Townsend; Sue *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* 0413537900

110. Walker Kate *Peter* 1862910650; *I Hate Books* 1862912491

111. White; Osmar *The Superoo of Mungalongaloo* 0140311106

112. Williams, Sean *[The Change]* The stone mage & the sea 0732269954 etc,

113. Winton; Tim *[Lockie Leonard]* Lockie Leonard Human Torpedo 0140366512; *The Bugalugs Bum Thief* 0140347348; *Cloudstreet* 0869142240 etc

114. Wynne-Jones; Tim *The Flight of Burl Crow* 1864483806 etc

115. Zindel Paul *Raptor* 0340740140 etc

116. Zurbo; Matt *Idiot Pride* 1864423684 etc

117. Zusak Markus *Fighting Ruben Wolfe* 1862914311; *The messenger* 0330363883

**Biography**

Rosemary Horton is a practising teacher librarian at Trinity College, a boys' Catholic day school, on the banks of the Swan River in Western Australia. She has been a teacher, librarian and teacher librarian for over thirty years in government/private, primary/secondary schools. Her passions are children's literature and Information and Communication Technology (see her school library website