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## On Getting Boys to Read

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There is ample documentation to prove that boys are falling behind in reading skills at virtually every age level. In many cases, boys are semi-literate at best, and many never develop adequate reading skills. They never know the pleasures of a book.

Writing in today's edition of *The Wall Street Journal*, publisher Thomas Spence offers helpful advice and insight in "How to Raise Boys Who Read." After expressing appreciation for the fact that many authorities and parents now recognize the problem, Spence asserts: "The bad news is that many of them have perfectly awful ideas for solving it."

He writes:

*Everyone agrees that if boys don't read well, it's because they don't read enough. But why don't they read? A considerable number of teachers and librarians believe that boys are simply bored by the "stuffy" literature they encounter in school. According to a revealing Associated Press story in July these experts insist that we must "meet them where they are"—that is, pander to boys' untutored tastes.*

*For elementary- and middle-school boys, that means "books that exploit [their] love of bodily functions and gross-out humor." AP reported that one school librarian treats her pupils to "grossology" parties. "Just get 'em reading," she counsels cheerily. "Worry about what they're reading later."*

Spence isn't buying that argument, and for good reason. It turns out that boys are not finding an easy path from the "gross-out" books to the love of reading.

There are several enemies of reading in the lives of boys. The educational system is largely feminized, and boys are often not challenged. We must remember that boys have always been boys, as the saying goes. There is nothing in the constitutional makeup of boys that is opposed to reading. Generations of boys grew to love books and lost themselves in stories, adventures, historical biographies, and the like.

The most direct enemies of reading in the lives of today's boys are video games and digital media. These devices crowd out time and attention at the expense of reading. Spence cites one set of parents who tried to bribe their 13-year-old son to read by offering video games as a reward. Spence is exactly right — don't reward with video games. Instead, take the games away. If parents do not restrict time spent with digital devices, boys will never learn to read and to love reading.

In another interesting section, Spence cites C. S. Lewis, who expressed agreement with both Aristotle and Plato in arguing, without apology, that boys must be trained in matters of taste. Lewis wrote: "The little human animal will not at first have the right responses. It must be trained to feel pleasure, liking, disgust, and hatred at those things which really are pleasant, likable, disgusting, and hateful."

That is worth savoring, especially if you have those little human animals in your house.



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