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On Getting Boys to Acquire a Love of Reading Books

In a perfect world I would like boys and girls reading great stories regardless of the main character's gender, but in the real world I want children reading, period. Girls usually cross the gender divide more easily than boys, and some children don't need to identify with the character's gender. But for those who do, there are plenty of good books.

Respect a boy's taste in the books he wants to read. Many boys prefer nonfiction—books with facts, biographies, history, how-to books or books of science. The goal is to make sure every boy meets his "home-run" book. The love of that book will lead to the next book, and the next and the next. But without that first home-run read, the battle to get boys to read continues and continues and continues.

Diane W. Frankenstein
San Francisco

Thank God for Thomas Spence ("How to Raise Boys Who Read," Taste, Sept. 24), who not only has the guts to use out-of-fashion words like "taste," "manners" and "barbarian," but to shamelessly claim that they still have value. The pervasiveness of frat-boy humor in popular culture today is well known, but his directory of the vulgar parading as the educational is truly disturbing. Once we surrender the responsibility for teaching eight-year-old boys that public discussion of body functions is improper, how do we regain it for the much larger challenge of teaching against drugs, violence and unwed pregnancy just a few years later?

Every generation wants to believe that its young have crossed an unbridgeable gulf due to the particulars of its time. The young are then written off as insular and unresponsive, when what works for their instruction is what has always worked: the highest expectations from the adults in their lives.

Bob Simeone
Pittsburgh

For the record, we have a PlayStation 3 that my husband enjoys playing on with our three boys. Would my sons rather do that than read? Sure. We limit it. That's called parenting, whether your child is in a public, private or home school.

Ethel Harris
Hoover, Ala.

One way to appeal to boys' better reading tastes is to read to them aloud. Sharing beautiful language and great stories that thrill and inspire is a pleasure for adults and children well into the middle-school years, and storytelling is such a welcome relief from all the policing jobs parents have to do. In addition to the classic favorites, there is an unlimited supply of new, high-quality young-adult fiction to choose from.

We must also be careful not to typecast boys. They may love their blood-and-guts stories but they are also sentimental. With hearts as big as girls' hearts, they, too, love to be moved and are as likely as their sisters to choke up at the death of E.B. White's miraculous Charlotte.

Margaret McGirr
Greenwich, Conn.