

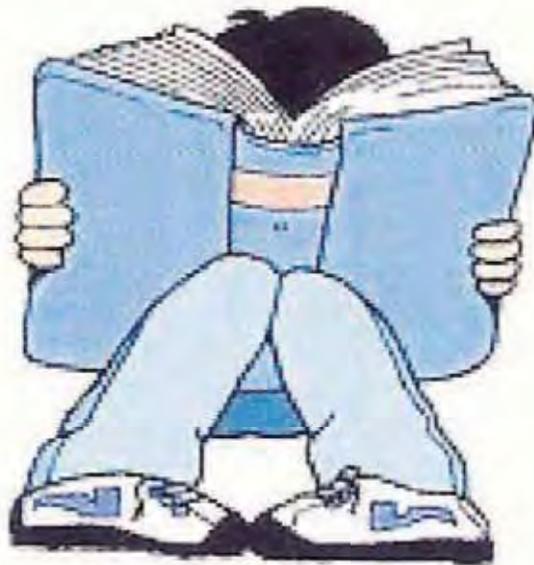
Rubric for Study of Literacy-Based Lessons

CRITERIA	7 or 8 points	5 or 6 points	3 or 4 points	1 or 2 points
Descriptive Language	Language is consistently used with careful precision and evident respect for learners and their learning activity. <b>7</b>	Language is mostly used with careful precision and evident respect for learners and their learning activity.	Language is sometimes used with careful precision and evident respect for learners and their learning activity.	Language is almost never used with careful precision and evident respect for learners and their learning activity.
Description of Context	Description of the context richly frames the discussion and supports the analysis and interpretation of data. <b>8</b>	Description of the context helps to frame the discussion and to provides some support for the analysis and interpretation of data.	Description of the context is somewhat disconnected from the discussion and provides limited support for the analysis and interpretation of data.	Description of the context adds little to the discussion and fails to support the analysis and interpretation of data.
Amount of Information	All topics are addressed and all questions answered with enough material and explanation about each. <b>7</b>	All topics are addressed and most questions answered with enough material and explanation about each.	All topics are addressed, and most questions answered with some material and explanation about each.	One or more topics were not addressed.
Quality of Analysis	Discussion clearly presents the data and analysis and includes several supporting details and/or examples. <b>8</b>	Discussion clearly presents the data and analysis and includes some supporting details and/or examples.	Discussion relates to the data, but gives insufficient analysis or not enough details and/or examples.	Discussion presents inadequate data and analysis.
Concept(s) from Readings	Any Concept from the course reading is fully explained and the application of the concept to the case study is clear.	Any Concept from the course reading is fully explained and the application of the concept to the case study is somewhat clear.	Any Concept from the course reading is somewhat explained but the application of the concept to the case study is somewhat unclear.	Any Concept from the course reading is not well explained and the application of the concept to the case study is unclear.
Reflection	Reflection offers important insights into the process and results of conducting the instruction. <b>8</b>	Reflection offers some insights into the process and results of conducting the instruction.	Reflection offers limited insight into the process and results of conducting the instruction.	Reflection offers no insights into the process or results of conducting the instruction.
Organization	Discussion is very well-organized with well-constructed sections and paragraphs. <b>7</b>	Discussion is organized with either well-constructed sections or well-constructed paragraphs.	Discussion is organized, but paragraphs are not well-constructed.	The discussion is not well-organized at the section or paragraph level.
Mechanics	No grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors. <b>7</b>	Almost no grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors.	A few grammatical, spelling, or punctuation errors.	Many grammatical, spelling, or punctuation errors.

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# **Boys and Books:**

*Ways to Better Connect Them in an  
Eighth Grade English Classroom*



## **Introduction:**

A good teacher never stops learning. Knowledge can be obtained in a myriad of places and situations: in a college classroom, at a parent-teacher conference, in the employee lunchroom, in a junior high school classroom... There are countless opportunities for learning, and a good teacher is open to all of them. Rhode Island College's Feinstein School of Education and Human Development M.Ed. program in Advanced Studies in Teaching and Learning is designed to capitalize on the teacher's experience in the classroom. Graduate students are encouraged to conduct teacher research. The concept of teacher research is the focus of Marian M. Mohr's book, Teaching Research for Better Schools. "Teacher researchers begin conducting research by identifying a topic or framing a question they wish to explore and investigate. Teacher research starts with a commitment to examine an aspect of teaching and learning and is carried out through the intentional and systematic collection of classroom data. Teacher researchers choose research questions that matter to them" (23).

Throughout my two years in this M.Ed. program, I have conducted four teacher research studies. I have found them to be invaluable learning experiences. Albert Einstein once said, "The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing." Teacher research has opened my eyes to the trap of teaching the same content the same way every year, despite my changing clientele. Now, I examine my classroom practices: I ask questions, collect data, and think, *how can I make this better?*

## **Context of School:**

There are two widespread approaches to teaching early adolescents: *the junior high school model and the middle school concept*. The junior high is a traditional approach to middle level education that essentially replicates the high school experience. Classes are approximately 45-55 minutes long and teacher interaction is typically limited to his/her individual departments. In contrast, the middle school model focuses on the developmental needs of the adolescent and emphasizes teamwork across disciplines.

Flexible scheduling and collaboration among staff members are key elements to a successful middle school. Aldrich Junior High School, although labeled a junior high, is actually an amalgamation of the two approaches.

Five years ago, Aldrich started to evolve into a middle school. Teaming and common planning time were established. Despite the efforts of committed administrators and teachers to complete the reformation, there had been resistance. The district refused to relinquish homogeneous grouping, especially at the honors level, and the rest of the classes were “tracked” accordingly. On the low end of this class hierarchy were the low-level groups and the self-contained classroom. Thus, Aldrich had been termed a quasi-middle school.

In 2008, according to the web site [city-data.com](http://city-data.com), Aldrich Junior High School consisted of 628 students: 54% male and 46% female, 90% Caucasian, 3% Black, 5% Hispanic and less than 3% Asian Pacific Islander and Native American. Demographic information provided a glimpse of what Aldrich was like, but it was only one part of the big picture. We were also judged upon how we performed on the state testing. In October of 2008, our student body participated in a series of tests called NECAPS, an acronym that stands for *New England Common Assessments Program*. For six days in a two week period, seventh and eighth grade students were administered tests in reading and math. Each session per day lasted 90 minutes. Finally, the first two days of a third week (200 minutes total) were devoted to a writing test that was administered to the eighth grade only. The following chart, located on the Rhode Island Department of Education web-site (RIDE), provides general descriptions of achievement levels 1-4. This information will lead to a better understanding of Aldrich Junior High School’s 2007-2008 reading test results.

<b>PROFICIENT WITH DISTINCTION</b> (LEVEL 4)	Students performing at this level demonstrate the prerequisite knowledge and skills needed to participate and excel in instructional activities aligned with the GLEs at the current grade level. Errors made by these students are few and minor and do not reflect gaps in prerequisite knowledge and skills.
<b>PROFICIENT</b> (LEVEL 3)	Students performing at this level demonstrate minor gaps in the prerequisite knowledge and skills needed to participate and perform successfully in instructional activities aligned with the GLEs at the current grade level. It is likely that any gaps in prerequisite knowledge and skills demonstrated by these students can be addressed during the course of typical classroom instruction.
<b>PARTIALLY PROFICIENT</b> (LEVEL 2)	Students performing at this level demonstrate gaps in prerequisite knowledge and skills needed to participate and perform successfully in instructional activities aligned with the GLEs at the current grade level. Additional instructional support may be necessary for these students to meet grade level expectations.
<b>SUBSTANTIALLY BELOW PROFICIENT</b> (LEVEL 1)	Students performing at this level demonstrate extensive and significant gaps in prerequisite knowledge and skills needed to participate and perform successfully in instructional activities aligned with the GLEs at the current grade level. Additional instructional support is necessary for these students to meet grade level expectations.

In early 2009, the teachers at Aldrich Junior High school received a breakdown of how well their students performed on the NECAP standardized reading test administered in October of 2008. For the purpose of my teacher research, I focused only on the eighth graders. Altogether, 325 eighth graders took the test: 171 males and 154 females. The following chart is a breakdown of the results. According to these results and the general descriptors for achievement levels 1-4, it was obvious that boys were twice as likely to be below proficient in reading. These students exhibited gaps in the pre-requisite knowledge

Reading Achievement Levels	Females 154	Males 171
4	22%	8%
3	60%	58%
2	14%	22%
1	3%	12%

and skills needed to succeed at reading for their current grade level. According to these results, teachers needed to provide additional instructional support in order for

these students to meet the grade level expectations set by the state of Rhode Island.

I had a dual reaction to these results. First, I realized that 34% of Aldrich's male eighth graders were in need of some serious intervention attention. The teachers in my school needed to find out what

was causing this serious phenomenon and strategize ways to fix it. Second, I began to wonder how my own students fared on this standardized test. This was the impetus for the teacher research project that I eventually embarked upon. I decided to take this journey with my two low-level classes because they seemed to be in the most jeopardy.

## **Study Group:**

The group that I chose for my study was comprised of eighteen boys. These low-level classes contained many self-proclaimed nonreaders. It was not that they could not read (this may have been the case for one or two), but that they did not like to read. According to them, “reading was boring.”

Throughout my years of teaching, and this year was no exception, I had seen the following behaviors occur repeatedly, especially in my low-level classes.

- Fake reading
- Coming to class unprepared
- Frequent book abandonment
- Choosing text that is too difficult
- Taking too long to read one book
- Frequent requests to leave the room...

One boy in the study group forgot his book in his locker every Monday and Friday just so he could leave the room to get it. His “coming to class prepared” grade had dwindled to practically nothing. To limit unnecessary disturbances, lav and bubbler visits were reserved for the very beginning or the very end of the period, unless it was an emergency. Even library visits were carefully considered. If the student wanted to return or renew a book, it was handled at the end of the period. It was with this kind of structure that I sent the message that *reading is important and nothing should interfere.*

Despite my efforts to convey the importance of reading, many of my male students resisted these attempts and challenged me constantly. It was not surprising then that the male students in the study

group fared far worse than the school as a whole. The chart to the left reveals that more than twice the amount of boys than girls were not proficient in reading at their

Reading Achievement Levels	Females 12	Males 15 (3 not tested)
4	17%	0%
3	50%	13%
2	33%	47%
1	0%	40%

current grade level.

## Statement of Problem:

My male students were proclaimed nonreaders. They did not like to read; therefore, they did not want to read. It was my job as their teacher to try to instill in them a habit of reading. This habit of reading, once established, would benefit them throughout their academic and nonacademic lives. My question was: *how do I engage my reluctant readers in the process of reading?* To investigate feasible ways to better connect boys and books, I decided to delve into the massive amounts of literature written about this very problem.

## Literature Review:

Teenage boys were an enigma to me. I understood teenage girls far better; the obvious reason being that I once was one, but also because I was in various stages of raising my own teenage daughters. As a young child, I was an avid reader. I *devoured* Nancy Drew mysteries and Barbara Cartland romances. I was thankful that my favorite authors were prolific, and thus I never lacked books to read.

My daughters followed in my footsteps, although their literary tastes differed; they loved to read anything of the macabre.

My experience with trying to get teenage boys to read resembled a roller coaster ride. Finding books they like was akin to slowly and painstakingly climbing the tracks of a steep hill in a rickety wooden cart. The time they actually spent reading the books was the whirlwind rush of descent. More times than not, they would close their eyes, and would not enjoy the ride or they would raise their hands high, favoring immediate excitement over the slow gratification of a good read. I realized that if I was going to change my male students' reading attitudes, then this age was the time to do it. Edward Sullivan, author of Reaching Reluctant Young Adult Readers, supports my assessment. "If these young people on the brink of adolescence or already engaged in the early stages of it are not already firmly established as enthusiastic, lifelong readers, then this is the last chance librarians and teachers have to take them down that road. If we miss this final opportunity to turn them on to reading, then they are doomed to live their lives as alliterates" (3).

It was obvious that I had to come up with a plan. Through the reading of current literature about boys and books, I devised six steps I can take that I believe will influence the reading habits of my male students:

- Build relationships
- Teach the academic language associated with books
- Provide books that boys like to read
- Support reading with a purpose
- Make reading a social experience
- Make time in the school day for reading

### **Build Relationships:**

Common sense told me that first I needed to rid myself of this teen-age-boy-as-an-enigma complex and get to know my male students. I needed to build relationships with them. The following

quote from an excerpt of, “All the Stories We Have,” by Elizabeth Moje, affirms the necessity of such action. Moje, after conducting countless observations, concludes, “students were deeply affected emotionally, socially, and academically by their relationships with teachers” (65). Creating positive relationships with all my students, but specifically with my male students, may make them more receptive to my reading program. According to Moje, “research indicates that when kids feel cared for---when they believe they are working in a relationship with a teacher---they tend to be more willing to try different literacy practices and strategies that the teacher offers” (69).

### **Academic Language:**

Reading is a unique experience for every child. This was why it was important to find out what kids wanted to read and to respect their choices. My classroom experience had shown me that girls, in general, tended to be extremely vocal about what they read; they shared books, mooned over gorgeous characters and seemed to enjoy the act of reading. On the other hand, the boys, in general, were rather closemouthed about their reading, except maybe to say that they did not like it. The reason behind their reluctance may be because they lacked the academic language so often used when discussing literature. This deficit contributed to a lack of confidence. My male students in particular may have felt a sense of powerlessness; consequently, many gave up before they even started.

To compound the problem, many English educators may assume that their students have the prerequisite knowledge and language to discuss books. In the book, Building Academic Language: Essential Practices for Content Classrooms, Jeff Zwiers asserts that teachers cannot make assumptions about students’ background knowledge, but instead must explicitly teach the language they use in the classroom. He warns his readers that “academic language, for most teachers *is* our everyday language, which makes it hard to notice and, therefore, hard to teach” (39). I have made this mistake on many occasions. I have assumed past that since most of my eighth graders had been reading for many years

that they knew what genre was. Then every year I would be amazed when they look confused. This consistency of confusion has hence informed me to teach genre at the beginning of every year, and to reinforce it periodically throughout the year.

### **High Interest Books:**

Not being privy to the academic language was only part of the problem. Boys had become “at-risk” students because their reading interests were underrepresented in the classroom. For example, my classroom library contained far more books with female main characters and themes that appealed more to females (relationships, love, betrayal, social status...), although over the years, I have made an effort to include more nonfiction, adventure and sports fiction. According to a [washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com) article, “Why Johnny Won’t Read” by Mark Bauerlein and Sandra Stotsky, “boys prefer adventure tales, war, sports and historical nonfiction, while girls prefer stories about personal relationships and fantasy. Moreover, when given choices, boys do not choose stories that feature girls, while girls frequently select stories that appeal to boys” (1). It was interesting when the data I collected from the classroom coincided with current research. A week ago, I had inquired as to why a student put back on the shelf a book he had just begun reading. I had been excited that this particular student had found something that seemed to engage him for all of thirty minutes. His reply had been, “I liked the book ‘till I realized the main character was a chick.”

### **Purposeful Reading:**

Current research also suggests that boys need to read with a purpose; boys want what they read to be useful to them. In their book, “Reading Don’t Fix No Chevys” Literacy in the Lives of Young Men, Michael Smith and Jeffrey Wilhelm summarized the large body of research out there on gender differences in regards to reading. A few statements that made me see boys in a different light were:

- Boys tend to be better at information retrieval and work-related literacy tasks than girls do.
- Boys have much less interest in leisure reading and are far more likely to read for utilitarian purposes than girls are.
- Boys are more inclined to read informational texts.

- Boys like to read about hobbies, sports, and things they might do or be interested in doing.
- Boys prefer active responses to reading in which they physically act out responses, do, or make something (10-11).

According to Smith and Wilhelm, “boys reject schoolish forms of literacy...because of its very schoolishness---that is, its future orientation, its separation from immediate uses and functions, its emphasis on knowledge that is not valued outside school” (84). I interpreted this statement as boys wanting to read about what they experience and enjoy outside of school. I have one student who went home every day and played his base guitar. It was his first love. I did not find it unusual that this student read books about musicians and had a subscription to “Guitar” magazine. I have another student who was an avid skateboarder and “soaked” up anything that had to do with the sport. As a matter of fact, my male students were engaged more than ever when the reading focus was nonfiction.

### **Reading is Social:**

Another way to engage my male readers was to offer them multiple opportunities to be social. One may assume that reading is an independent process done solely in isolation, but in actuality many of my students, especially the females, liked to talk about what they read. Alex Kozulin, author of Psychological Tools: A Socio-cultural Approach to Education suggests that since adolescents love to talk, that “learning based on collaborative activity thus has a greater chance of success at this age, because instead of fighting the students’ tendency to talk to one another during the lesson, it uses this tendency for educational goals” (162). Providing my students with opportunities to present projects to the class, participate in book groups and present book talks in front of their peers may possibly coax my reluctant male readers to discuss the books they read.

### **Time for Reading:**

In order to accomplish all that I have set out to do, I needed to make time in my school year for this enormous emphasis on reading. For many years now, my students had been participating in a process

dubbed SSR<sup>2</sup> which is a combination of self-selected reading and sustained silent reading. We have engaged in SSR<sup>2</sup> every Monday and Friday for the entire year. I have enjoyed the time set aside for this reading and I know many of my students did as well. In the past, I have had parents complain because they do not see it as teaching. I had one parent a few years ago who went straight to the superintendent with a complaint and was told that SSR<sup>2</sup> was a district-wide policy.

Many teachers, especially teachers with a prescribed curriculum, may think SSR<sup>2</sup> is impossible to do because it takes away from all the teaching that must be done. Marilyn Reynolds, author of I won't Read and You Can't Make Me defends the process, "If you are buried in the muck and mire of mandates, it helps to remember that the practice of Sustained Silent Reading unquestionably leads to improved skills. But the essence of such reading has to do with the increased understanding of one's self and the world, of enabling the wounded to heal, the isolated to know they are not alone, the bigoted to see the humanity of others. It is about helping the disconnected connect with the world beyond them, and the world within them. These are the standards by which all curriculum and learning activities should be measured" (8).

My ultimate goal with this teacher research was to motivate my reluctant male readers to read more and in the process instill a habit of reading. In order to accomplish this feat, I realized I had to make an effort to know my students better by conducting reading surveys and one-on-one conferences. I also needed to explicitly teach the academic language that will ease their reticence, and thus build their confidence. I must maintain a well-stocked library and allow frequent trips to the school library to ensure that my students have a variety of genres to choose from. I must provide time in their school day for reading, because for many of my students, this is the only time they read. Lastly, I need to give them multiple opportunities to be social, and through this interaction, make reading an enjoyable experience. If reading is fun for everyone, then any reluctance will be nothing but a distant memory.

## Reading Lesson Unit Plan *Self-Selected Reading*

Description	Rationale
<b>Content/Level:</b> Reading/Grade 8	Reading is an integral part of our 8 <sup>th</sup> grade English Language Arts curriculum.
<b>Purpose:</b> To engage my reluctant readers in the act of reading and ultimately instill a habit of reading.	To raise the NECAP reading scores of many male readers from the unacceptable <i>substantially below proficient/partially proficient ranges</i> into the <i>proficient and proficient with distinction</i> ranges. Also, as lifelong readers these students will have more opportunities for success.
<b>Literacy Strategy:</b> Self-selected/sustained silent reading	Many of my students, predominantly my male nonreaders, do not read at home; therefore, the only time they can and do read is in the classroom.
<b>Materials:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• nonfiction reading book</li> <li>• self-selected reading form</li> <li>• various art supplies</li> </ul>	Current research has shown that many male students prefer nonfiction. Maintaining a SSR reading log keeps the student organized and on a schedule.
<b>Activities/Tasks:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visit to the library</li> <li>• Choose a book reflecting interest</li> <li>• Maintain SSR form</li> <li>• Select a reading activity</li> <li>• Complete project</li> <li>• Present project (optional)</li> </ul>	A visit to the library enlists the help of the media specialist and gives my students a greater variety of books to choose from. Current research has shown that students will be more engaged in the reading process if they can find a book that <u>they</u> really want to read. Research has also shown that many male students like to do hands-on activities in response to reading.
<b>Assessment:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dossier, Brochure, Timeline</li> </ul>	I do not want to eke the enjoyment out of reading by assigning dull book reports. My projects serve two functions: to be fun and to assess.

### Outline of Lessons in SSR Nonfiction Unit

Context of Lesson(s):

In my 8<sup>th</sup> grade classes, students participated in a program that I have dubbed SSR<sup>2</sup>. SSR<sup>2</sup> is a blending of self-selected reading and sustained silent reading. Students were required to read for approximately thirty

minutes two days a week (Mondays and Fridays) and complete two reading activities a quarter. For approximately five weeks, my students were engaged in a nonfiction reading unit that was comprised of several teacher-led lessons and an abundance of student-centered activity. The first lesson in the unit involved a trip to the library.

#### Day 1:

- Introduce the nonfiction reading unit briefly while in the classroom
- Take students to the library
- Have students listen to the media specialist do the following:
  - explain the genre of nonfiction
  - show examples of high-interest nonfiction
  - read some excerpts from nonfiction
  - review the various ways to find books (online catalog, where the biographies are located...)
- Set students free to find books of their liking
- Have students read first couple of pages before checking the book out

#### Day 2:

- Have students plot how long it will take them to read their books based on the length of their book and the time period allotted to read it (roughly one month).
  - SSR<sup>2</sup> books can be read during school and at home for reading homework.
- Students read their books.

#### Day 3:

- Introduce students to the three project choices (see assignment sheet next page)
  - Dossier
  - Brochure
  - Timeline
- Answer any questions they may have about the requirements
- Encourage students to choose a project relatively early in the reading of their books so they can take notes as they read.

#### Day 4 and beyond:

- Require students to bring their nonfiction books to class every Monday and Friday
- Walk around and observe. Be available to:
  - Ask questions about the books they are reading
  - Make comments about their topics
  - Get students to talk to you about what they are learning
  - Answer any questions they may have

#### Day 10-12:

- Have the students who are done reading their books begin their projects

**Dossier Project:** You are a CIA agent sent to spy on the main character of your non-fiction book. You must accumulate a folder of impressive information to make an impact on your superior and hopefully receive a much deserved promotion. Good luck!

The dossier should include the following:

1. \_\_\_ a manila folder
2. \_\_\_ a physical description of the character
3. \_\_\_ fingerprints and pictures of the character
4. \_\_\_ important information about the character's childhood, family, education an employment
5. \_\_\_ pictures of important events in the life of the character
6. \_\_\_ behavior traits of the character
7. \_\_\_ likes/dislikes of the character
8. \_\_\_ character's accomplishments
9. \_\_\_ character's failures
10. \_\_\_ character's current situation or character's death
11. \_\_\_ good grammar/spelling



## Non-fiction Book Report Due 2/13

**Brochure Project:** You are the curator of a famous museum who has been asked to create and promote a new exhibit. After reading a non-fiction book on the topic of the exhibit, you must create an enticing brochure that will attract public attention. Good Luck!

The brochure should include the following:

1. \_\_\_ a tri-fold design (use all 6 sides)
2. \_\_\_ a "catchy" title
3. \_\_\_ colorful pictures of the exhibit
4. \_\_\_ captions under each picture
5. \_\_\_ 12 interesting facts about the subject being exhibited
6. \_\_\_ use of persuasive language
7. \_\_\_ use of descriptive language
8. \_\_\_ use of visuals like charts, maps or diagrams
9. \_\_\_ professional design
10. \_\_\_ museum name, address, contact number and name of curator
11. \_\_\_ good grammar/spelling



**Timeline Project:** You are a historian hired to research a notable event in history. Your task is to create a timeline of the event using visuals, interesting stories and facts. The project also requires your expert opinion on how the event was influential. Good luck!

The timeline should include the following:

1. \_\_\_ a title that creatively portrays the event in history
2. \_\_\_ a creative design (be original and create an atypical timeline)
3. \_\_\_ 12 + events (include the important events from the beginning to the end)
4. \_\_\_ dates
5. \_\_\_ captions
6. \_\_\_ pictures depicting the events
7. \_\_\_ stories or interesting facts to accompany each event
8. \_\_\_ one paragraph explaining how the major event was influential (good or bad)
9. \_\_\_ timeline is easy to follow
10. \_\_\_ timeline is a good size (bigger than the size of a piece of computer paper)
11. \_\_\_ good grammar/spelling



## Methods of Collecting Data:

I chose four methods of collecting data when conducting my teacher research.

Methods	Rationale
Field Data	I wanted to see if my male students' reluctance to read dissipated after being immersed in a heavy regime of the right kind of reading.
Surveys	I wanted to get a before and after picture of my male students' reading interests.
Interviews	I wanted to understand why my male students were so reluctant to read.
Student Work	I wanted to see if the projects acted as a "carrot" to motivate my male students to read and if the projects reflected an understanding of what was read.

## Findings:

### Field Data:

The method of data collection that I found the most difficult to engage in was field data. I always started with good intentions; I walked around with clipboard in hand, my eyes and ears drinking in SSR<sup>2</sup> in action. Then the disruptions began (*What does this word mean? or I found a typo!*) and it was so very easy to forget to jot something down. Despite my lack of skill with this form of data collection, I managed to collect some rich data.

My first finding revealed through field data was that the classroom atmosphere seemed to calm down and the students in general seemed to be more receptive to reading. There were fewer groans when I announced that it was SSR<sup>2</sup> time, the students retrieved their books quickly from the cupboard in the back, and overall, there were a smaller number of requests to leave the room. I heard once that it takes twenty-one days to make a habit, and I truly felt my students were heading in that direction. The following were some comments that seemed to signify a change in their reading attitudes:

- "Is today an SSR<sup>2</sup> day?"
- "I have to finish this book. I'm way too into it!"

- “When I read a good book, I see the pictures in my head.”
- “I didn’t know I could read books about things I really like.”
- “Can I present my project to the class?”
- “Look at this book my Mom bought me. I don’t know why... I hate reading.”

All of the comments were positive and seemed to suggest that their reading attitudes were shifting and becoming more accepting. The last comment could be perceived as negative, but the boy’s tone of voice was cheerful and somewhat bragging. He then immediately plopped down and began reading.

Through my field data, I observed that many of the boys were reading books about sports icons, famous musicians, and military personnel. One boy in particular read a series of books on terrorists, and made a point to tell me that he wasn’t studying to be a terrorist, but that he found it all so interesting.

Another boy fixated on musicians and couldn’t stop talking about the bad choices many of them made. With his mother’s permission, I just gave him my own copy of Who Killed Kurt Cobain: The Mysterious Death of an Icon by Ian Halperin and Max Wallace. His face broke out in smiles when I told him he could keep it for as long as he wanted...even forever. It was in these small exchanges that I felt that SSR<sup>2</sup> had truly made a difference.

The nonfiction unit was not successful for all my students. I have a student whose first love of reading was fantasy and he always walked around with a couple of Christopher Paolini’s Eragon books balancing precariously on his textbooks and notebooks. When he found out about the nonfiction book unit, he asked if he could continue to read his Eragon book. I wanted him to broaden his horizons a little, so I asked him to do the nonfiction unit. He hated reading about the life of Ben Franklin, although he personally chose the book, and then did a half-hearted attempt on the project. An alternative that I did not consider at the time, but has since occurred to me is to download some articles on Christopher Paolini’s life or find a book that has been written about him. This boy would have been intrigued and he would not have felt like he was abandoning his first love.

The aforementioned incident reminded me of a message I received from the book, “Reading Don’t Fix No Chevys” Literacy in the Lives of Young Men by Michael Smith and Jeffrey Wilhelm. The authors caution that it is important to look for patterns in behavior, but avoid making generalizations at the expense of the individual. I still feel as if the nonfiction unit was a great idea, but when my reluctant student approached me, I didn’t listen to him and therefore, stripped him of his individuality. In this case, it could have been avoided.

**Student Surveys:**

Every September, I would conduct reading surveys to assess the reading interests of my clientele. I was disappointed when I perused the results and discovered that my male students in my low-level classes did not read for pleasure. The results were as follows:

September Survey (14 boys polled)
<p><b>Do you read for pleasure?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 0 said yes</li> <li>- 7 said sometimes</li> <li>- 7 said no</li> </ul>
<p><b>What do you prefer to read?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 2 chose books</li> <li>- 9 chose magazines</li> <li>- 1 chose newspapers</li> <li>- 2 chose more than one</li> </ul>
<p><b>Do you like fiction or nonfiction?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 5 chose fiction</li> <li>- 7 chose nonfiction</li> <li>- 1 chose both/ 1 chose none</li> </ul>
<p><b>Most-liked fiction:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Horror, Adventure and Mystery</li> </ul>

September’s reading survey also informed me that my male students preferred magazines over books, nonfiction over fiction, and the genres of horror, adventure and mystery over all others. At this point in the year, I did not know my students so this information was helpful in initiating conversations about reading.

The reading interest survey that I administered in April was truly inspiring. I felt as if the responses were indicative of a change, however slight, in reading interests and attitudes. The results were as follows:

April Survey (15 boys polled)
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Do you read for pleasure?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 3 said yes</li> <li>- 8 said sometimes</li> <li>- 4 said no</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>What do you prefer to read?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 3 chose books</li> <li>- 4 chose magazines</li> <li>- 1 chose newspapers</li> <li>- 7 chose more than one</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Do you like fiction or nonfiction?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 6 chose fiction</li> <li>- 7 chose nonfiction</li> <li>- 2 chose both</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Most-liked fiction:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Horror, Adventure Mystery and Sport</li> </ul>

April's reading survey informed me that fewer boys were resistant to reading. I felt as if my persistence and their persistence had finally paid off. Their preferences changed slightly to include all types of reading which seemed to indicate a greater acceptance for reading in its various forms. This survey suggests that maybe the walls that these young men had erected against reading were slowly coming down. In the future, I plan on always conducting two surveys to see if any progress has been made. Future surveys will include the mention of comic books and graphic novels so that I can assess my students' positions on these genres as well.

### **Interviews:**

In April I conducted interviews with more than half of the boys in the study group. I asked the following questions and have included a sampling of some of the responses:

1. **What is the best part of English class?**
  - *Given a choice to read different books*
  - *Vocabulary*
  - *Everything*
  - *Reading*
  - *Being with friends*
2. **What was the most favorite thing you've done this year?**
  - *Projects (specifically newspaper, collage, dossier and brochure)*
  - *I don't know*
  - *Touching Spirit Bear with Mr. Wilcox*

3. What do you think of SSR<sup>2</sup>?

- *Fun*
- *I like it*
- *Okay... I can't find a book*
- *It helps*
- *I like that I can pick out my own book*
- *I can actually learn*
- *Good*

4. What is the hardest part of reading for you?

- *I don't know*
- *Not understanding words*
- *Takes a long time*
- *Finding a good book...keeping interest*
- *Finding my reading level*
- *Big books*

5. How do you feel when you are really into a book?

- *I want to read more*
- *Good...because I really don't read*
- *I am "in the book" like the main character*
- *I read a lot*
- *I can finish it*
- *I want to finish it, not give up*
- *I can picture the book in my mind*
- *I will read it every day.*

6. Will you voluntarily read at home?

- *Four said yes*
- *Five said sometimes*
- *Two said no*

7. Do your parents read at home?

- *9 said yes*
- *2 said no*

8. What book would you recommend to someone who doesn't like to read?

- *Any sports book*
- *Anything about music*
- *Locked in Time by Lois Duncan*
- *Jackie and Me by Dan Gutman*
- *Bang! by Sharon G Flake, Dominic Hoffman*
- *Blood Trail by Michael Sullivan*
- *Drive-By by Lynne Ewing*
- *Tears of a Tiger by Sharon M. Draper*
- *Ghost Hunting by Jason Hawes, Grant Wilson, Michael Jan Friedman, Atlantic Paranormal Society*

9. In our classroom library, what would you like to see more books of?

- *books about:*
  - *musicians*
  - *sports*
  - *the military*
- *mysteries*

10. Do you have any suggestions for making SSR<sup>2</sup> better?

- *Let us to partner read the same book*
- *Supply food*
- *Make it three days instead of two*
- *Keep it as it is*

11. What do you think of the book, Touching Spirit Bear?

- *I can get into it*

- *Good book*
- *Like it*
- *Emotional*
- *Not a fan of it*
- *Difficult*
- *I don't like it*

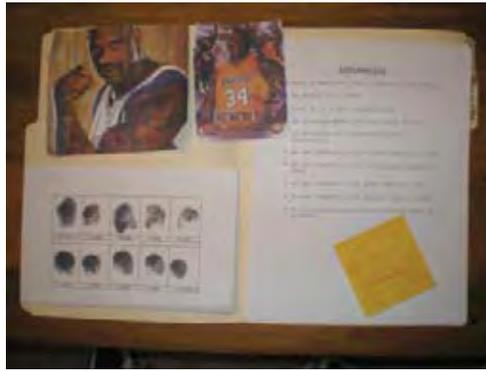
I enjoyed conducting these interviews although the best time to do this would be in the beginning of the year. The most important thing I learned from talking to my students was that “all is not lost.” I felt hopeful that this endeavor to instill a reading habit was not insurmountable. I was particularly pleased that many of my students’ parents did some form of reading at home, whether it was magazines, newspapers or online reading. It was important that their children receive the message that reading is something you do outside of school.

Another benefit of conducting these interviews was being informed of the high interest juvenile literature that will definitely hook my reluctant readers. When I do this next year, I plan on making a list of books, submitting it to my media specialist and having the books on hand. In my opinion, a lot of time is wasted trying to find the perfect book for a student; if I am prepared ahead of time with a dozen or so highly recommended books, my students will not know what hit them.

### **Student Work:**

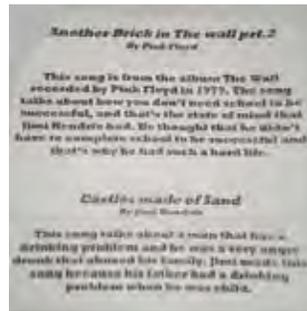
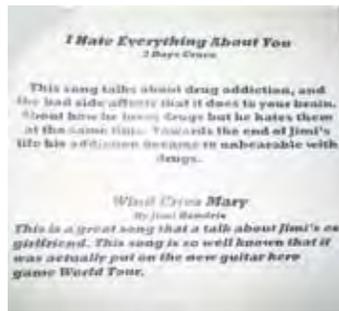
I had asked my students during the interview process what they enjoyed doing the most this year and many had mentioned the projects. The following are some pictures of student work completed by my male students: This is a timeline of the major events in baseball history. It was obvious to me that the student read the book and enjoyed it. He was meticulous when completing this project; his attention to detail suggested to me that he was proud of his achievement.





The dossier project was a popular choice amongst my students. I think it appealed to them because they could pretend to be

CIA agents and gather information about the person they were reading about. The writing was not challenging because they were allowed to bullet the information. When I graded them, it was obvious to me that my students actually read their books and in fact, enjoyed them.



The student work above was a CD project in which the student had to choose twelve songs and connect them to the book. The CD project was not one of the choices for the nonfiction book report, but the student was excited about this particular project and was granted permission. He also came in and played a few songs on his base guitar. His obvious

enjoyment suggested to me that he was engaged in the book.



The last project that my students engaged in was the brochure project. This was also a popular choice because it involved few words and incorporated visuals. Many of the projects, including this one, appealed to the multiple intelligences. Most of my students completed a project at the end of the unit. I believe a motivating factor was that these projects were

not boring. In general, I was very pleased with the student work that was generated by this nonfiction book unit.



## My Conclusions:

The teacher research project that I embarked upon has been a rewarding experience. Because of this educational journey, I am inspired to continue my research. There have been many books published on the topic of male literacy, and I plan on doing some more in-depth reading. One highly recommended book, The Book Whisperer: Awakening the Inner Reader in Every Child, by Donalyn Miller is on the top of my reading list. Although it does not focus primarily on one gender, the title suggests that all students have the potential of becoming lifelong readers.

The most uplifting aspect of my teacher research project is the feeling of hope that I experienced because of my findings. There are many aspects in my students' lives that can negatively influence their education, and that I have no control over. Through this study, I realize that I can make a difference in

their “reading lives” as long as I am willing to persevere. Some actions that I will definitely take to make my SSR<sup>2</sup> program more successful in the future are as follows:

- Get to know my students.
- Be familiar with the books that my students may like.
- Add more high-interest books for boys to the classroom library.
- Continue to provide students time to read in school.
- Allow students to make their own choices about what they want to read
- Accept that students will challenge me, but remain persistent.

Each and every year contains its own unique challenges. I have learned to pose questions and conduct teacher research, either informally or formally, because I know that my teaching can always improve. I feel empowered by the ever-present opportunities to learn from my own teaching.

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