

# Bridging the gender gap

## Reading and writing with boys

For students in all grades

Do boys face unique issues when it comes to literacy? Not necessarily, but some boys need special support when it comes to things like appreciating reading, writing and the expression of feelings. Here's how parents can help their sons.

### ***When it seems like...***

Boys don't see male reading models, at home or in the culture at large.

Boys don't have a network of friends telling them what books to read. Boys often don't get committed to "personal reading" opportunities in school.

Boys don't always like to, or find it hard to, express feelings and emotions. Such expressions, they may feel, go against the traditional idea of masculinity.

Boys often prefer explicit instruction and don't handle hidden assumptions well.

Boys may like quick answers. This can lead to premature conclusions, with limited evidence.

Boys may have difficulty with organization, but may respond well to visual material.

When writing stories, boys often don't elaborate. Their stories may lack a sense of motivation, mood, manner, or any morality implied by a struggle.

The role of masculinity in their lives is sometimes confusing, often defined in opposition to femininity, and at odds with literacy.

### ***You can...***

Model reading by the whole family. Make time for boys to see men in their lives reading.

Make sure there's book-talk in the home. Make a point of recommending books. Help boys find the reading that matches their interests.

Work at developing a vocabulary of "feeling words". Allow the expression of feelings to be delayed (return to things later) or deflected (through role-playing).

Be explicit about laying out processes. Show how things are done, step-by-step, in reading, writing, listening, speaking and thinking. Let them hear you thinking aloud.

Walk them through the process of gathering evidence, deferring the drive for "the answer". Compare it to detective work: uncovering the evidence, without any presumptions. Draw attention to the value of tentativeness.

Show them how to use "vital organizers" such as flow charts, webs, tree charts and other diagrams to organize their thoughts.

Ask specific questions that lead your son to elaborate. Be the curious, interested reader who wants to hear more. Eventually your son may begin to ask himself the same sort of questions when writing.

Talk with them about how men and women are portrayed in literature and the media and what the benefits and costs might be of these portrayals.