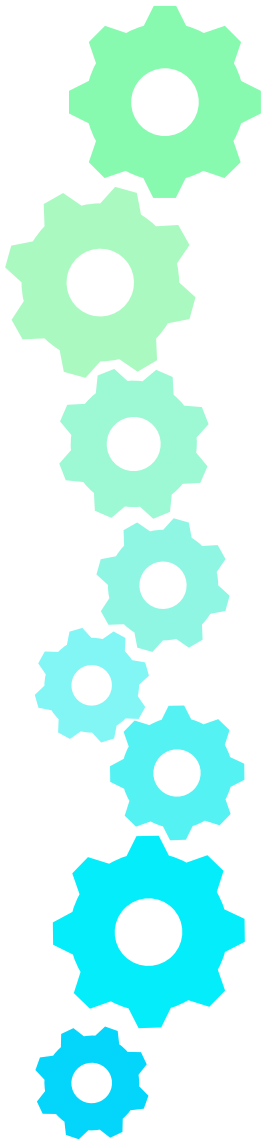


# BOYS AND LITERACY

~ Bruce Pirie, teacher, author explains ~

Bruce Pirie is an Ontario teacher and the author of the book, *Teenage Boys and High School English*. His observations about boys and literacy are aimed at helping teachers understand what it is like to be a teenage boy today, but are also of interest to literacy workers or any parent of a boy in school.



~ The role of masculinity in boys' lives is sometimes confusing, sometimes counter-productive, often defined in opposition to femininity and at odds with literacy: Address how men and women are portrayed in literature and in the media and what might be the benefits and costs of these portrayals.

~ The expression of feelings is a potential land mine. Traditional masculinity suppresses many feelings, but the "new man" is supposed to be sensitive. Being put on the spot may freeze some boys. Create ways for the expression of feelings to be delayed (analysis first, feelings later for homework) or deflected (through drama and role playing).

~ Boys' preferred reading is often not the school's choice: Teachers should include personal reading time and projects. Boys may need a lot of support to take responsibility for choosing material.

~ Boys don't have a network of friends telling them what books to read. Teachers should build sharing and book talks into the personal reading program.

~ Boys like to see themselves as problem solvers and may prefer unambiguous right or wrong solutions: Use analogies of detective work, scientific discovery.

~ Boys like to understand complex systems: Help them to appreciate cultural objects (books, etc.) as elements in complex systems.

~ Boys like physical activity: Teachers should use drama as a route into understanding literature and expressing feelings.

~ Boys may have difficulty with verbal organization, but respond well to spatially-organized material. Teachers should use visual organizers as part of idea development.

Abridged from a document, "Boys and Literacy: Some Principles to Keep in Mind," which is adapted by Bruce Pirie from his book, *Teenage Boys and High School English*, Heinemann, 2002. The book is available at [www.amazon.ca](http://www.amazon.ca)

