

# Engaging Boys...

Yes...It is Possible!!



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## Quick Stats on Boys

1. Boys make up \_\_\_ % of all special education students in America.
2. For the first time in our country's history, women are earning more what than men? \_\_\_\_\_ (*The Atlantic's* Hanna Rosin, 2010 "*The End of Men,*")
3. Boys are \_\_\_% more likely to flunk and drop out of school than girls. (National Center for Education Statistics)
4. \_\_\_% of Valedictorians are now female. (Masterminds & Wingmen, 2013)
5. For every 8 qualified female applicants for college, there are only \_\_\_ qualified males.
6. The number of students suspended in **one** year could fill the stadium seats for \_\_\_ Super Bowl games. (RethinkingDiscipline Summit on Discipline, White House, 2015)
7. \_\_\_% of teachers are women in the United States. (National Center for Education Information, 2011)

## "5 Whats" Assignment Sheet

(This strategy is great for boys, but girls benefit from it as well. Helps boys focus in on what needs to be done in a simple, to the point manner.)

1. What has to be done? (No more than 3 bullet points)
2. What are examples of successful projects/assignments. (Be able to show examples)
3. What is the timeline for completion?
4. What "mastery checks" will be required? Example of a mastery check:
  - a. Show outline to teacher by Friday.

- b. Show teacher introductory paragraph before starting body paragraphs.
5. What happens once assignment is completed?
  - a. If successful, you may play video games, board games, etc.
  - b. If not successful, you will use time to make corrections.

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### **The Brain—His and Hers**

*Researchers have identified more than 100 structural differences between the male and female brain. These differences are both genetic and socialized and include some of the following:*

- *Verbal/spatial differences.* Boys' brains generally have more cortical areas dedicated to spatial-mechanical functioning than girls' brains do, whereas girls' brains generally have greater cortical emphasis on verbal-emotive processing (Blum, 1997). Girls use more words on average than boys do, and they tend to think more verbally.
- *P cells and M cells.* The male visual system (optical and neural) relies more heavily on type M ganglion cells, which detect movement. Girls generally have more type P ganglion cells, which are sensitive to color variety and other fine sensory activity (Sax, 2005). As a result, boys tend to rely more on pictures and moving objects when they write, whereas girls tend to excel in using words that reference color and other fine sensory information.
- *Frontal lobe development.* A girl's prefrontal cortex is generally more active than a boy's, and her frontal lobe generally develops at an earlier age (Rich, 2000). These are the decision-making areas of the brain (as well as the reading/writing/word production areas). These factors can lead to girls being less impulsive than boys are. Girls are usually better able to sit still and read, able to read and write earlier, and better at literacy in general. When teachers are unaware of these brain differences, they may misdiagnose normal boys as having learning disabilities and conduct disorders.

- *Neural rest states.* Boys' brains go into what neurologists call a rest state many times each day. You'll notice this when you look at who's drifting off, zoning out, or sleeping through class. You'll also notice that some boys will try to avoid these rest states by engaging in such activities as tapping their pencils or hitting a classmate with a spitball. For some boys—especially those with behavioral issues—these self-stimulating and disruptive behaviors are symptomatic of emotional or psychological problems. But for many boys these disruptions simply reflect male brains trying to stay awake in a classroom that is not well suited for their kind of learning. Single Photon Emission Computed Tomography (SPECT) scans have enabled us to better understand the rest states of male and female brains (Gurian & Stevens, 2005). When the male's brain gets bored, some of his brain functioning shuts down. There is a drift into a brain state that negates learning and performance. When the female brain gets bored, however, more of her brain functioning stays active. Even when she's bored, a girl is more likely to retain the ability to take notes, write words down, and listen carefully.
- *Cross talk between hemispheres.* Structural differences in girls' brains generate more cross talk between hemispheres, leading to better multitasking. Boys' brains, on the other hand, tend to lateralize and compartmentalize brain activity (Rich, 2000). Thus, girls tend to pay attention to more information on more subjects at any given time, whereas boys tend to heap a lot of information into a single-task focus. They concentrate best, in general, when they follow steps A to Z without distraction. Boys also take more time than girls to transition between tasks (Havers, 1995). They tend to become more irritable (and to underperform in learning and classroom behavior) when teachers move them continually between tasks. Multitasking is, of course, crucial to life performance, but boys are better served by balancing multitasking with project-driven and depth-driven learning.
- *Natural aggression.* For a number of neural and chemical reasons, boys are more naturally aggressive and competitive than girls are (Gurian, 1996). Girls generally gravitate less toward competitive learning and relationships characterized by *aggression nurturance* (the hitting and playful “dissing” that boys continually engage in to support one another). The bonding chemical oxytocin greatly affects this male/female difference. With less oxytocin in the male neural and physiological system, boys tend toward greater impulsivity, more aggression, and less reliance on *bonding malleability* (Taylor, 2002).

They have less desire than girls to comply to please others, including teachers.

—Kelley King and Michael Gurian

### **Strategies to Engage Boys**

1. Competition (Against time, against peers, against authority)
  - a. Vocabulary games (Quizlet)...time
  - b. Add Rock, Paper, Scissors as part of review....peers
  - c. Stump the Chump... authority
2. Gamification: Have boys make game to learn information...game created must include: Movement, Time, Score, Some Type of Challenge, Include Information Learned in Class.
3. Slo-Mo: Take concept learned in class and act it out with a partner in slow motion.
4. Board Games: Make board games and add movement, such as jumping jacks/sit ups.
5. Storyboards: Make storyboard retelling story THEN write about it.
6. 5/30: When giving instructions teacher talks for 5 minutes, students work for 30 minutes. Do not even allow for questions within the 5 minutes, instead walk around and answer individual questions.
7. Silent Sequencing: Students draw picture of one aspect of instruction or topic...then students must put in order without talking.

### **Recommended Reading:**

If You Can't Manage Them, You Can't Teach Them!, by Kim Campbell with Dr. Kay Wahl, Worldbook

Why Gender Matters, by Dr. Leonard Sax

Boys Adrift, by Dr. Leonard Sax

Ten Best Teaching Practices: How Brain Research, Learning Styles, and Standards Define Teaching Competencies, by Donna E. Walker Tileston

Teaching to Gender Differences; Boys Will Be Boys and Girls Will Be Girls, by Dr. Bill McBride

Helping Boys Learn (Teachers Edition), Edmond J. Dixon

Masterminds and Wingmen, Rosalind Wiseman, 2014