

## AIMS Mini-Grant Application

Kennedy Junior High School  
Star Team  
2929 Green Trails Drive  
Lisle, IL 60532

Lead Teacher: John Klein-Collins

### Guys Read

Jon Zcieszka, editor of the book *Guys Read*, found through his research and observations that a boy's interest in reading can be increased when he is given the freedom to choose what he wants to read, he is aided in increasing the variety of genres from which he reads, and he is allowed to investigate what other guys like to read. Many of Zcieszka's assertions are supported by my classroom anecdotal evidence, as well as the research of those prominent in the field of young adult literacy. It is my intention to start a "Guys Read" reading club at Kennedy Junior High School in Naperville because I have witnessed, firsthand, the declining reading rates among boys, and I know that a different path must be taken with boys or else they will simply fall too far behind.

Jane McFann's article "Boys and Books," published in the August 2005 edition of *Reading Today*, an International Reading Association publication, gets to the heart of the matter by amalgamating the views of many prominent literacy researchers, who believe that programs for boys must be developed to address many of their learning differences, including:

- Boys are more inclined to read informational texts, magazines, and newspaper articles.
- Boys are more inclined to read graphic novels and comic books.
- Boys tend to resist reading stories about girls, whereas girls do not tend to resist reading stories about boys.
- Boys like to read about hobbies, sports, and things they might do or be interested in doing.
- Boys like to collect things and tend to like to collect series of books.
- Boys read less fiction than girls.
- Boys tend to enjoy escapism and humor, and some boys are passionate about science fiction or fantasy.

Unless we are taking classes, we adults tend to choose reading material that intersects with our varied interests. Why don't we allow students to do the same? I plan to incorporate the research-driven points listed above in the initial "Guys Read" reading group. Bi-weekly meetings will be held not only to discuss each selection but to talk about future titles worth considering. Choice, not only for struggling readers, I strongly believe, is an important aspect of reading because it forces the reader to be responsible for what he chooses to read.

During our twice-monthly meetings, we will discuss the progress of each member, clarify any misconceptions, chart a course for future reading material, and connect what we have read with our own experiences. We'll also discuss barriers to reading for boys and how we might overcome these. In a nutshell, we'll discuss whatever the boys happen to be reading. We'll talk about how realistic plots seem, what we've read and how it has changed our perspective, and whether something we've read might propel us to other reading material in order to clarify a point, learn more about a topic, or expand our knowledge of the original topic. These strategies, along with my acting as the "male role model reader" will help in turning around a trend that will affect boys for the rest of their lives.

The "work" that will be undertaken in "Guys Read" will need to seem like anything but work. My desire is to follow the current research, which stipulates that boys will take an interest in reading only if they perceive a productive outcome. The boys in the group will have an opportunity to select reading material that they feel will lead to productive activities. I intend to be a coach, cheerleader, and support system for boys who have not yet found their way in the world of reading. This grant could be the seed money that changes the futures of quite a few young men.

Since boys tend to gravitate toward reading with the express intent of turning what they've read into productive endeavors, I plan one of these productive outcomes, quite possibly turning the group into a reading adventures format. In essence, we'll read magazines, newspapers, and other print materials that will allow students to transfer what they have learned into practice. This, I believe, will be an exciting draw for many who are unsure of whether to join the group.

### **Duration of the project:**

The project "Guys Read," will be open-ended, with meetings being held one every two weeks to discuss the reading material that we have agreed upon. Current research points out that reading clubs for boys work better when held off campus. If possible, and contingent upon parent permission, meetings will occur outside of school. The Naperville Public Library and the Lisle Public Library are potential meeting sites.

### **Intended Benefit and Needs:**

The goal is to recruit at-risk, struggling, and proficient male readers who are interested in participating in a group such as this and use their positive experiences in the group to catapult a movement within Kennedy Junior High School that creates an attractive alternative to the typical classroom give and take of reading instruction. Kennedy has writing groups and reading groups stocked with over-achieving students who already read and write at an advanced level. Although this group will not prohibit any boy from joining, my intent is to address the needs of at-risk readers, an ever-increasing

subgroup. At-risk readers truly need a place to call their own, a safe place where they will feel encouraged to take risks and progress toward being better overall readers.

### **Budget Explanation:**

\$300 will be used to purchase novels, periodicals, and other reading material that will appeal to the boys participating in the program. According to Zdzieszka, any titles from the Alex Ryder series by Anthony Horowitz will work well, as will *Son of the Mob* by Gordon Korman, *Fighting Ruben Wolfe* by Markus Zusak, and non-fiction in the form of magazines and periodicals that will capture the boys' interests are all strong possibilities. Much of what we order will depend on each boy's interests.

### **Project monitoring and Evaluation:**

Library records from grades six and seven are available through our LRC. By comparing each student's yearly LRC activity with their activity after induction into "Guys Read," we will be able to determine whether we have experienced an increase in reading levels, indicating success. Additionally, a preference survey will be undertaken prior to the group's first assigned reading. At the end of the year, a similar preference survey will be administered to determine the changes that have occurred in each student's reading preferences. According to research, the preference survey can be as open-ended as the prompt, "When I think about reading I..." Additionally the number of new members attracted, hopefully, will place us in the position of having to find alternative funding sources. If word of mouth brings us more students and I need to find other funding sources, I will have been successful with this initial venture.