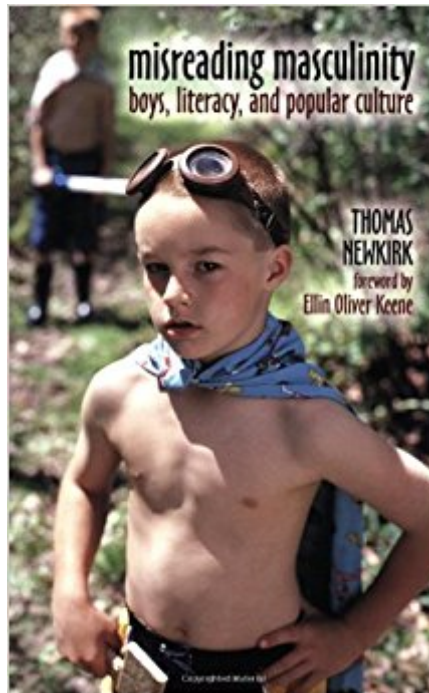




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# Misreading Masculinity: Boys, Literacy, And Popular Culture



## Synopsis

Post-Columbine has been a time when the issues of popular culture and the behavior of boys have generated more heat than light. This complex, contested intersection has led to censorship and worse-alarm, irrationality, and a failure to examine our ways of teaching, particularly teaching literacy to boys. In this book Tom Newkirk takes an up-close and personal look at elementary boys and their relationship to sports, movies, video games, and other venues of popular culture. Unlike the alarmists, he sees these media not as enemies of literacy, but as resources for literacy.

Through a series of extraordinary interviews, Newkirk listens to young boys, and girls, who describe the pleasure they take in popular culture. They explain the ways in which they use visual narratives in their writing. They even defend their use of violence in their work. Newkirk disproves the simplistic stereotype of boys who are primed to imitate the violence they see. He shows that, rather than mimic, boys most often transform, recombine, and participate in story lines, and resist, mock, and discern the unreality of icons of popular culture. Using a mixture of memoir, research project, cultural analysis, and critique of published findings, Newkirk encourages schools to ask questions about what counts as literacy in boys and what doesn't, to allow in their literacy programs boys' diverse tastes, values, and learning styles. In other words, if we want boys to join "the literacy club," then we have to invite them in with genres of their own choosing.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 8 - 13 years

Grade Level: 3 - 8

## Customer Reviews

[Tom Newkirk] systematically asks us to rethink our beliefs, our choices, our interactions--not just with boys but with all children.

Thomas Newkirk is the author of numerous Heinemann titles, including *Minds Made for Stories*, *The Art of Slow Reading*, *The Performance of Self in Student Writing* (winner of the NCTE's David H. Russell Award), and *Misreading Masculinity*. For almost three decades, Tom taught writing at the University of New Hampshire where he founded the New Hampshire Literacy Institutes, a summer program for teachers. In addition to working as a teacher, writer, and editor, he has served as the chair of his local school board.

Parents and others will find it interesting too. This is a fascinating look into the implicit anti non-middle-class-girl bias in our schools! One of the ways to keep kids engaged is to make sure the curriculum doesn't assume a life experience foreign to them. Just as we wouldn't teach math using only sports analogies -- pre-Title IX this used to be an obvious case of pro-boy bias -- we shouldn't teach English using a reading list that alienates boys. Also the companion book should be "Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys."

A wonderful book about the differences in boys' literacy learning styles. Refreshing, non-female perspective about literacy, the use of violence in writing and the disconnect between teachers' expectations and boys' interests. I borrowed this book from the library, but loved it so much that I bought my own copy to write in. The highest of praise!

Lots of ideas to ponder over teaching boys.

Excellent insight into the way boys process information and learn. I recommend this book to any teacher, parent, or person who works with young boys. Really liked the content of this book.

Interesting book, very dated pop culture references.

Thomas Newkirk provides educators with answers and ideas to the ongoing concern we may have concerning our male students and their love for popular culture but also their dislike for literacy. In "Misreading Masculinity," he encourages us not to compare boys and girls but to discover and value

their differences. Newkirk uses in-depth interviews with students to hear about their reading/writing preferences first hand. Throughout the book, Newkirk discusses the differences more closely and provides suggestions for closing the gender gap. What would it take for us to "join the game" that boys find so exciting? Are we aware of the positive role that action media can play in the impression males have on literacy? Newkirk encourages us to think outside of the box because in the end, gender, culture, race, age and their environment play a large role in their literacy preferences. Overall, the message Newkirk presents will hopefully be a start for all teachers to reach out to their male students and understand their love for popular culture. "The trap, perhaps, one we cannot fully escape from, is to turn differences into deficits. It is difficult to step outside our own skin, outside our sense of the 'normal' or 'expected' or 'good'."(p.13)

Author Thomas Newkirk offers insight into what turns boys on and off to literacy. Through his interviews, short stories, reviewed research, and personal accounts, he paints a picture that cannot be ignored. Throughout his book, Newkirk challenges literacy standards and literacy standards bearers to look at the choices and genres boys, in particular, are choosing when they read and write, and not to make assumptions about what boys enjoy. Newkirk also encourages us to confront cultural anxieties towards socialization of boys, and not to "misread their masculinity". Lastly, through his book, Newkirk insists that we ask questions. We should question ourselves and our choices, our practice, our standards, and our interactions with boys in order to assist them in opening up the world of literacy that they have been denied full access to for a long time.

Misreading Masculinity is a must read for teachers, especially those concerned about their male students and their writing. He raises critical issues about violence in writing and reminds us that it isn't all bad. To our males students, it is actually beneficial as they use it in their writing for suspense, it encourages interactions (even friendships), and helps them express interest in girls. He also encourages us to try and understand the differences between boys and girls and not to compare them. Newkirk provides suggestions and ideas that can help all teachers reach their male students.

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