

## What about the Cinderfellas?

### Opportunities to Promote Literacy to Teenage Boys Using Fairy Tales

by Ray MacLeod

There is a wide variety of research in the library and educational communities on the fact that reading levels drop significantly with boys in their teenage years. This could be due to biological factors, but certainly there are social stigmas surrounding reading at this age as well. Reading is not considered “cool” or variant forms of media take the place of print materials (video games, movies, television). Sean Cavazos-Kottke (2005) argues that: “The problem... is not so much that many boys quit reading altogether, but rather that they engage in literacy practices that many teachers and classrooms are reluctant to embrace” (pg. 181).

Showcasing and promoting materials to teenage boys is essential but the teens themselves must find their own motivation to pick up the materials. And the issue of getting boys to read is not as black and white as many recent articles have claimed. Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey (2012) claim that “...getting boys to read is not simply a matter of locating texts with a male protagonist in an action-oriented setting or stocking libraries with graphic novels” (pg. 587). Encouraging young boys to read fairy tales or anything will require the use of creative thinking and new techniques in order to generate interest. Here are some ways to encourage teen boys to pick up titles on fairy tales at the school or public library:

+ Acquire *unique, interesting* titles on fairy tales or new fairy tale adaptations and *actively* promote them. This measure seems obvious, but if done smartly will increase literacy and use of the library collection.

+ *Find out* what boys are interested in. *Poll* them. Talk to them in school and public libraries. Tie in programming with classes at local middle and high schools.

+ *Ask* questions and *encourage* discussion both in the classroom and in programs at the public library.

+ Get the *creative* juices flowing! Encourage submissions of art, writing, or music in person or a public library website related to what they are reading.

+ Be *aware* of reluctant readers and those with learning disabilities. Provide a wide range of materials for every reading level. Promote materials with a visual component to suit different learning styles.

+ Be on the *cusp* of trends. If a new movie, television show, or video game about a fairy tale is being released, tie this in with your collections and programming in some way! Each time a fairy tale is re-adapted in mainstream media, library materials and programs **MUST** be promoted. These will be *missed opportunities!*



The following are a few examples of excellent gender-neutral materials that may appeal to teen boys in your classroom or library:

**Calamity Jack – by Dean Hale & Shannon Hale (Nathan Hale – Illustrator) (2010).**

This graphic novel draws from the original Jack and the Beanstalk story and also Rapunzel. It will appeal to a younger teen audience (13-15) and contains thrilling adventure and beautiful illustrations (Fleishhacker, 2013, para. 9).

**Fables, Vol. 1: Legends In Exile – by Bill Willingham (Lan Medina, Stevie Leialoha, Craig Hamilton, James Jean – Illustrators) (2002).**

*Fables* is the first part of a long running graphic novel series where fairy tale characters are re-imagined in amazing new roles. This will appeal to an older youth audience (15+).

**Dust City – by Robert Paul Weston (2010).**

*Dust City* is a fractured fairy tale in which humans, human sized animals, and other creatures are fighting to get dust. Readers will follow the story of Henry who must fight against mobsters and other criminals in order to right a wrong committed against his father (suitable for an older youth audience) (Fleishhacker, 2013, para. 10).

These are just some of the ways to encourage literacy among boys whether in the classroom or in a school or public library. Getting teenage boys to read is often a difficult task, but attracting lifelong learners and readers is one of the ultimate missions and greatest accomplishments in this profession.

Connecting teen boys to fairy tales is a worthwhile pursuit because fairy tales are always being re-adapted, re-worked, and re-imagined in print and multimedia. They are even featured in video games which is pertinent because video games are incredibly popular among teenage boys. The savvy librarian or educator pays attention to what is going on in popular culture and applies it to lesson plans, programming, and the acquisition of collections. Clearly, fairy tales are popular at the moment and always appear to have a cultural cache. There are many opportunities for teen boys to enjoy reading and learning through serendipitous discovery of fairy tales. Don't miss out by not promoting these materials!

### References

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