

Using Picture Books to Provide Archetypes to Young Boys: Extending the Ideas of William Brozo

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Archetypes of masculinity found in picture books can be powerful teaching tools for young boys.

In his book *To Be a Boy, To Be a Reader: Engaging Teen and Preteen Boys in Active Literacy* William Brozo (2002) suggested that many teen and preteen boys have become mentally and academically detached from school and that as a society we are paying a price. An alarming number of boys are becoming distant from reading, being diagnosed with learning and emotional problems, and dropping out of school. Although Brozo recognized that a solution to these problems is multifaceted and complex, he also purported that literacy can be an important factor in the solution. Literacy is related to academic success, and academic success offers boys more career and life opportunities (Donahue, Voelkl, Campbell, & Mazzeo, 1999; Tyre, 2006). Literacy can offer boys more life options, but more important, it can also offer them positive images of who they are and who they can become.

To help boys in middle and high school become engaged readers and acquainted, or reacquainted, with positive images of masculinity Brozo (2002) suggested the use of literature that contains archetypes of manhood. Such an archetype is an idea or mode of thought about honorable manhood derived from experience and present in the psyche of all men (Jung, 1955). The qualities of the various archetypes are consistent from culture to culture and their stories help boys cope with the inward and outward struggles they face on their journey to manhood

(Arnold, 1995). The advantage to using literature with archetypes in the classroom is that it helps boys understand what it means to be a man as it leads them to literacy. Literature with archetypes motivates boys to read because it appeals to their psyche and connects to their lives, their interests, and their needs.

Brozo's work and experience focuses on boys in grades six through high school, and his book helped me understand the importance of using literature with archetypes to help young men find their spiritual, emotional, and literate selves. However, being a former teacher of younger boys in grades K-3, I would like to suggest that Brozo's idea of using positive archetypes be extended to those grades as well. I propose this extension because if teachers wait until the middle grades to introduce archetypes to boys, they risk losing many boys, both in terms of literacy and in terms of their beliefs. By the time boys reach sixth grade many of them are caught in a cycle of failure, and it is difficult to help them see a use for reading and find their literate selves (Arcia & Conners, 1998; Tyre, 2006).

As a teacher I often saw young boys who had already distanced themselves from learning, removed themselves from learning how to read, and convinced themselves that school was not for them. Although this behavior may seem surprising to some, it really is not as unusual as it seems. Research indicates that by the time children enter preschool, they often have gender-stereotyped and rigid notions about some activities, and reading is one of these. From a young age, many boys believe that reading is feminine and only for girls, whereas more active behaviors like playing with trucks is masculine (Berk, 2005; Pollack, 2000). If a young boy adopts this view, reading conflicts with his sense

of boyhood and he comes to have little value for it, invests little time and effort in it, and as a result, gains less experience and falls farther and farther behind (Millard, 1997; Stanovich, 1986).

Unfortunately, not investing time and energy into reading has negative consequences for many boys. Research shows that by first grade, girls are likely to be ahead of boys in reading, and they continue to make more progress in reading throughout the elementary years (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000). Due to their reading difficulties many boys experience learning problems and are placed in remedial or special education classes (Halpern, 2004). Boys often score significantly lower than girls on standardized measures of reading achievement and many boys do not seek advanced degrees (National Center for Education Statistics, 2001; Pottorff, Phelps-Zientarski, & Skovera, 1996). These facts paint a grim picture but it is important to interpret them with caution, because studies of gender sometimes fail to consider other issues like socioeconomic status, race, and ethnicity (Hyde, 2004).

Answers as to why so many young boys are becoming disenchanted with literacy are complex and likely to be symptoms of a constellation of problems that reading books with archetypes won't totally solve. However, I believe that such books are a step in the right direction. As educators we need to help boys understand that reading is just as important for them as it is for girls. Helping boys find entry points into literacy must be a priority and it must happen early, when boys first become acquainted with literacy. Young boys can and should be introduced to literature with archetypes and this can be accomplished with picture books that capture their attention, connect to their needs, and provide a vision of who they can become. The next section explains ways that teachers of boys in the early elementary grades can adapt Brozo's ideas.

Transforming Brozo's Ideas

In *To Be a Boy, to Be a Reader: Engaging Teen and Preteen Boys in Active Literacy*, Brozo (2002) provided a list of young adult literature to use with adolescent boys and described innovative, meaningful, and engaging experiences to lead boys to literature. Teachers of boys in the early elementary grades can use many of Brozo's ideas but will need to adapt them for the

needs, interests, and developmental level of their students. Two ways to accomplish this are as follows:

1. by selecting picture books that contain archetypes, paying attention to their story and illustrations; and
2. by creating a positive classroom climate.

Selection of Picture Books: Stories

Research has indicated that by the time boys are 2½ years old they demonstrate a preference for certain types of literature (Collins-Standley, Gan, Yu, & Zillman, 1996). Young boys like to listen to exciting and scary fairy tales, whereas girls prefer to hear romantic ones. Boys acquire pleasure from stories that appeal to their active bodies and imaginative minds, and they do not particularly enjoy books that contain flowery language or books with long, complicated plots (Gurian & Ballew, 2003; Sax, 2005). Therefore, it is important that the books used with young boys have a simple story and contain an interesting archetype. Brozo (2002) recommended using boys' out-of-school interests to choose books, and this idea applies to young boys as well. Finding picture books with archetypes should not be difficult because it is likely that the public library and your own school library already have many in their collections. It is also likely that you already own several in your classroom library. Examples of picture books that can be used with young boys arranged by archetype are provided in the right column of Table 1. This list is not exhaustive by any means but has been developed to help you identify and select additional titles that address each archetype.

When choosing books to use with young boys the thing to keep in mind is that boys want to learn and understand themselves and their roles as men (Kindlon & Thompson, 2000; Pollack, 2000). Comprehending the rules of masculinity and trying to live up to them is part of every boy's search for self, and using literature that contains archetypes can help boys gain this insight (Brozo & Schmelzer, 1997). The left column of Table 1 contains the names of the 10 archetypes and a brief description of each one.

When looking for archetypes in picture books it is likely that you will notice two types. There are

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Table 1
Archetypes and Books

Archetype and description	Picture books
Healer is spiritual, mystical, and capable of bringing wholeness to those who are suffering. He cures not only physical ails but spiritual and emotional ones as well.	<i>Pink and Say</i> (Polacco, 1995) <i>Mrs. Katz and Tush</i> (Polacco, 1992) <i>Knots on a Counting Rope</i> (Martin & Archambault, 1987)
King embodies male greatness with his generosity, dignity, and composure. He is trustworthy and wise and engenders greatness in others.	<i>Mr. Lincoln's Way</i> (Polacco, 2001) <i>Owen</i> (Henkes, 1993) <i>Skippyjon Jones</i> (Schachner, 2003)
Lover recognizes his primal energy, passions, and appetite but in a caring and giving way. His compassion and sensitivity to others is displayed with empathy and care.	<i>Chester's Way</i> (Henkes, 1988) <i>Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge</i> (Fox, 1985) <i>Tough Boris</i> (Fox, 1994) <i>My Ol' Man</i> (Polacco, 1996) <i>Frederick</i> (Lionni, 1967)
Magician is intuitive and clever. He has tremendous intuition and psychic potential within.	<i>Willy the Wizard</i> (Browne, 2003) <i>Willy and Hugh</i> (Browne, 2003)
Patriarch is a father and mentor. He represents the masculine form of care, nobility, and self-sacrifice. His energy provides emotional stability, sturdiness, and world-wisdom.	<i>A Picture Book of George Washington</i> (Adler, 1989) <i>Thank You, Mr. Falker</i> (Polacco, 1998)
Pilgrim is filled with hope and faith. He searches and wanders to improve life. His life is focused on responsibility, care, nobility, and self-sacrifice.	<i>Ronald Morgan Goes to Bat</i> (Giff, 1990) <i>David Gets in Trouble</i> (Shannon, 2002) <i>David Goes to School</i> (Shannon, 1999) <i>The Sissy Duckling</i> (Fierstein, 2002)
Prophet predicts the future and speaks for a cause or concern. He stands up to falsehoods and tells truths with full commitment even if it means sacrificing his life.	<i>The Three Questions</i> (Muth, 2002) <i>Young Martin Luther King Jr.</i> (Mattern, 1992) <i>The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush</i> (dePaola, 1988)
Trickster is irreverent, satirical, and fun. He pokes fun of pomposity and self-righteousness that we can fall prey to if we fail to recognize our humanness. The Trickster is the masculine spirit of fun.	<i>Quick as a Cricket</i> (Wood, 1982) <i>Stone Soup</i> (Mc Govern, 1986) <i>Arthur's First Sleepover</i> (Brown, 1996)
Warrior is brave, tutorial, and honorable. His masculinity is based on self-control and moral courage. He never acts out of revenge but takes responsibility for his actions and upholds ethical codes of honor, restraint, and humility.	<i>Hooway for Wodney Wat</i> (Lester, 1999) <i>Leo the Late Bloomer</i> (Kraus, 1971) <i>William's Doll</i> (Zolotow & duBois, 1985) <i>Willy the Wimp</i> (Browne, 1995)
Wildman is lusty, unpredictable, and independent. He respects, honors, and connects with nature.	<i>Mike Fink</i> (Kellog, 1992). <i>The Wild Boy</i> (Gerstein, 1998) <i>I Can Hear the Sun</i> (Polacco, 1999)

traditional archetypes, or grown men facing challenges and doing noble deeds. For example, Mr. Falker (*Thank you, Mr. Falker*, Polacco, 1998) is an adult who displays characteristics of the Patriarch. He is a mentor to Trisha and his care and nobility saves her from bullies and a life without reading. Due to the fact that many picture books are written for younger children, you will also notice that some of them contain what I call archetypes in the making. These are

young, male characters facing an important challenge and making an honorable choice. For example, even though he is young, Elmer (*The Sissy Duckling*, Fierstein, 2002) displays many of the characteristics of the Pilgrim. He marches to a different drummer and is sent away because his choices do not conform to typical male stereotypes. Elmer stretches traditional gender boundaries and his behaviors make the other ducks, and his own father, very uncomfortable. As a

result, Elmer is labeled a sissy and banished to a solitary life. Having to go it alone, Elmer finds comfort in himself and sets up a cozy home. Elmer has a chance to prove he is honorable when he saves his father from a gunshot wound. Were it not for Elmer's Pilgrim spirit, his wandering in search of a better life, and his self-sacrifice, his father would not have survived.

Books like *The Sissy Duckling* (Fierstein, 2002) help boys understand that there are many ways to manhood and that some paths look very different from traditional ones. As educators we have the opportunity to influence children's perceptions of gender stereotypes. Unfortunately, gender is not a clear-cut issue, and there are no simple solutions to the various choices and conflicting messages that today's boys face. However, as teachers, we can confront our own biases and stereotypes and make sure that we choose stories that portray archetypes in traditional and nontraditional roles, with common and varying lifestyles, and those archetypes like Elmer, who chose a different path.

Selection of Picture Books: Illustrations

Although careful selection of the story is key to providing insight to the hearts and minds of archetypes, another important aspect to consider when choosing picture books is the illustrations they contain. Illustrations reveal characters' facial expressions and body language and the ability to read these visual cues is important for interpersonal development. Unfortunately, this is often not an easy skill for some boys to develop, and boys who lack it have interpersonal difficulties and are judged to lack empathy (Gurian & Ballew, 2003; Pollack, 2000). One way to help boys learn to read visual cues is to encourage them to examine the body language and facial expressions of characters for details, emotions, and information. This is called visual literacy—learning from pictures as well as from print. Visual literacy helps boys move beyond the concrete, literal interpretation of what they see to deeper understanding of the complexities that exist (Evans, 1998). For example, David (e.g., *David Goes to School*, Shannon, 1999; *David Gets in Trouble*, Shannon, 2002) is a lively character who expresses his emotions in his facial expressions and his body language. The illustrations in Shannon's books encourage visual literacy because they are interesting, colorful, and lively. Teachers can take advantage of

this by asking and encouraging boys to read the illustrations as well as the print (Falk, 2005). This skill can then be transferred to real life by asking boys to read their classmates' feelings based on what they see.

Creating a Positive Classroom Climate

Picture books are of little use if boys cannot openly express their feelings and ideas. The classroom climate in which picture books with archetypes are used should feel safe to each boy and should be a place where each child's opinion is heard and respected. Read-aloud sessions and book talks are good places to begin to establish this climate. Stereotypical views of manhood are often revealed in boys' discourse, and listening to what boys say is important. The key is listening, not lecturing or dictating ideas. Hearing various points of view and learning about different lifestyles helps us, as teachers, understand the boy's point of view.

Another important idea to keep in mind is that even though the environment is safe, some boys will have difficulty openly expressing their opinions and talking about how they feel. One way to help boys with this difficulty is to use journals in a boy-centered way. This means accepting brief entries, as well as drawings, and accepting entries that focus on imagination and action even if they contain violent ideas. Let boys express themselves in journals and provide feedback. One idea for feedback is to refer to the stories and actions of the archetypes to lead boys away from violence and toward the actions of noble men.

Set up a separate reading and writing corner just for boys. Make this a place where boys have access to books that interest them, picture books with positive male archetypes and writing tools they can use to express their creativity. Be sure this is a comfortable and inviting place where boys can come together to lounge, to think, and to talk about things that interest them. Make it their spot in the classroom where they can celebrate themselves as readers, writers, and as boys. Of course, a similar corner should also be established for girls—a spot where they, like the boys, can come together to read, write, and express who they are as girls. Make sure this corner has books of interest to girls and books with female archetypes and females in nontraditional roles. Adapting Brozo's ideas by carefully selecting picture books that contain archetypes and creating a positive classroom climate can help boys and girls find their way into literacy. In the next section I explain how I put these ideas into action.

Into the Classroom

Boys in elementary school can and should be introduced to archetypes. I say this because today's boys face academic, social, and emotional challenges never before encountered. I learned about these challenges as I pursued a graduate degree and took reading, child development, and psychology courses. I also saw these challenges firsthand, when I worked as a teacher of young boys. Before I came to my current position at the university I worked for eight years as a K–3 teacher at inner city public schools located in poor neighborhoods and for one year at the secondary level teaching English to struggling readers. Working with boys of varying ages, ethnicities, socioeconomic status, and cultures helped me gain insight on their literacy passions and disenchantments and their beliefs and misconceptions about manhood. The boys I came to know over the years were a diverse and dynamic group. Some of them were on grade level in reading but most were struggling and far below. Several were labeled as learning disabled or as having attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, and a few lived in situations no child should ever have to endure. Although the findings and situations I reveal in the two case studies I present are not based on an empirical study, they, like Brozo's work, are a reactive approach based upon my experience and interaction with boys.

To explain how teachers can use picture books with archetypes in the classroom, I present the following two scenarios based on my experience with these books and boys. I chose these particular instances because they provide insight on two very different personalities and two very different needs. One boy is aggressive and the other very timid and withdrawn. Their stories illustrate the spectrum of boys who can be helped with picture books that contain archetypes. Each situation is represented and constructed from notes I kept over the course of two years. All names are pseudonyms.

A Boy Who Could Be King

Even though Robert was only in third grade, I saw in him the potential to be a King. Robert was a tall, husky, boy who lived with his mother and brother. Robert had a knack for putting together complex Lego configurations and 100-piece puzzles. Unfortunately, these abilities were seldom celebrated because of his anger and aggression. Robert often took advantage of his size and power and used them to intimidate smaller boys.

Robert's interpersonal skills included physical abuse and racial slurs and harassment. Robert had the potential to be a leader but his current mode of leadership was one of intimidation, dominance, and cruelty.

In addition to interpersonal difficulties, Robert had academic ones. Even though he was only in third grade, he had already given up on learning, was a year behind his classmates in most subjects, and was doing very little to catch up. Due to his poor academic performance and his lack of social skills, Robert was teased with names like "big dummy" and "slow." Robert had both academic and social difficulties, and I realized that I needed to help him find a path to honorable boyhood and a way into literacy. To begin this journey I began reading picture books that contained the King archetype to Robert. I chose the King because in spirit he was who I believed Robert could become. The King embodies generosity, dignity, and composure, and he rules his kingdom with respect.

One book I read to Robert was *Mr. Lincoln's Way* (Polacco, 2001). I chose this book because its story and illustrations portray a King archetype in the character of Mr. Lincoln. Mr. Lincoln was an African American man who possessed many of the qualities I wanted Robert to find within himself, and who fit the King archetype because he was a leader and an honorable man. He was the principal of an elementary school, and he held high standards of conduct and scholarship for each student in his school. In the book, Mr. Lincoln helps a young, troubled boy named Gene by tapping into his knowledge and love of birds. Mr. Lincoln gives Gene the responsibility of caring for the birds in the school's atrium, and this forces Gene to put aside his racial hatred and become a leader. Mr. Lincoln's dignity, composure, and patience help Gene confront his misguided beliefs.

After we discussed the book I helped Robert understand that he had the potential to be a leader, a King like Mr. Lincoln. I ex-



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plained to Robert that the other children admired his physical skills, and on the occasions when he played cooperatively with them, they liked his personality. I gave Robert a journal and asked him to write in it whenever he felt angry or upset. I explained that I would read his journal if he wanted to share it with me. Robert reluctantly took the journal and that day began our long communication in writing. Whenever Robert wrote or drew pictures in his journal I always replied. My replies often focused on the King archetypes we had read about and I used these characters to help Robert understand the path that Kings take. For the remainder of that school year I worked one-on-one with Robert and supplied him with many books with the King archetype, some of which are listed in Table 1. Robert was motivated to read these books, and I believe that they helped him gain an entry into literacy and into himself.

Robert's reading began to show minor improvement, and he also made a few friends. However, I knew that Robert's problems had many sources, so I enrolled him in our school's social skills program and referred him for counseling. Robert needed multiple systems of support, and it is likely that each one of them contributed to the academic and social changes I began to see. The boy who left my room at the end of the year was very different from the one who came in, and I believe that picture books with positive archetypes played a major role in his transformation. I have seen a change in Robert and am hopeful that someday he will become a King and rule with greatness, generosity, dignity, and respect.

A Boy With Warrior Potential

David was a first grader with a past of abuse and neglect. Due to the abuse from his parents, Child Protective Services removed David from his parents' home and placed him with his 70-year-old, paternal Grandfather who he called Poppy. David and Poppy were an odd pair but David was attached to Poppy and Poppy loved and cared for David the best he could. Unfortunately, being a man of 70 who was experiencing failing health afforded Poppy little energy or patience for a little boy with many needs. David's language skills were moderately delayed, and he was withdrawn and fearful much of the time. David's lack of language and his chosen isolation caused him to be the victim of bigger and more aggressive boys. David would never speak up for himself or ask for assistance when someone was cruel

to him. If someone took one of his toys, David would distance himself by going to a corner and sulking or withdrawing into a fantasy world.

David loved a book titled *Willy the Wimp* (Browne, 1995). David always chose this book during free reading time, and he would sit in class and carefully look at the pictures it contained. Whenever I could I read the story to David, and he and I spent many days discussing Willy's plight. In these sessions David always acted very different from his usual meek demeanor. David would tell me he was going to be like Willy someday. He was going to be a body builder and be big and strong. I knew David was facing many challenges in his life and that he needed to find the Warrior inside. The Warrior archetype does not back down from confrontations but faces them with inner strength and honor. The Warrior's masculinity is based on self-control and moral courage. He never acts out of revenge but takes responsibility for his actions and upholds ethical codes of honor, restraint, and humility. These were just the qualities that David needed to find within himself.

To help David begin his journey to becoming a Warrior, I read another book by Anthony Browne titled *Willy and Hugh* (2003) aloud to the class. After our first reading I reread the story page by page. I had the students, including David, look carefully at the illustrations, guess the feelings of the characters, and act them out. As they performed, we talked about bullies, victims, and friendship. The students were quick to note that Willy was getting bullied until Hugh stood up for him, and they also perceived that even though Willy was small he was able to help Hugh. After this read-aloud I placed *Willy and Hugh* (Browne, 2003) in the book corner along with several other books about Warriors. David continued to examine *Willy the Wimp* (Browne, 1995) during free reading time, and he broadened his choices to other books on Warriors. These books seemed to grab David's attention and, even though it was a struggle, he put much effort into trying to decode their words. I read and reread books with Warrior archetypes to David, and one day his Warrior spirit emerged. When a larger boy claimed one of his markers, David came to me and told me what had occurred. It is difficult to confirm that reading about Warrior archetypes helped David do this, but in my observations it was a change, and a big one, for such a quiet and withdrawn little boy. These examples are two of many I had as a teacher of young boys.

The Other Archetypes

As a teacher who worked in public education I came to know many boys who needed to understand what archetypes could teach them. The two cases provided are a small sample of the positive experiences I had using picture books with archetypes. However, be aware that the King and the Warrior are but 2 of 10 archetypes you can use to meet the needs of boys in your classroom. The Pilgrim's faith, hope, and spiritual wanderings can be used to help boys who have become emotionally numb, spiritually starved, and mentally idle become acquainted with the wanderer inside. Boys who do not have a positive role model in their lives can benefit from the Patriarch's ethic of care, nobility, and sacrifice so they will know what honorable fatherhood is like. The Magician's psychic resources and intuition can be used to evoke a sense of wonder in boys who have lost sight of the magic in the world. The Wildman's love and respect for the earth can be used with boys who have lost their connections to the earth, its creatures, and things that are real. The Wildman can help boys reconnect to the earth, the sky, the wind, and rain and in doing so become savers of the earth. The Healer's mystical rituals can be used to teach boys with physical, spiritual, and emotional wounds how to sooth and care for themselves. The Prophet's clairvoyance and truthfulness can show boys how to stand up for their convictions, commit to worthy causes, and speak for others who are in need. The Trickster's humor and satirical nature can be used to help boys who take themselves too seriously learn how to laugh at the world. The Lover's gifts of giving, care, and intimacy can be used with boys who have lost connection and compassion for others. The Lover can help boys understand that empathy, care, and love are not feminine characteristics but are qualities in the hearts and souls of real men.

Seeing the Archetype in Each Boy

Extending Brozo's (2002) ideas with picture books allowed me to touch the lives of many young boys, and although reading books with archetypes might not solve all the challenges that today's boys face, I believe it is a step in the right direction. The classroom climate and books we offer to our boys should speak to their hearts and their souls and affirm that we are there to help them find their identity, be it traditional

or not. Change will only begin when we examine our ideas about masculinity and accept that there are many ways to be a man, to be courageous, to be proud (Kindlon & Thompson, 2000; Pollack, 2000). As teachers, we need to help boys find their identity and their literate self. To accomplish this goal we must see the King, Lover, Wildman, or Warrior in each boy and help each boy discover his inner archetype.

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