

Books as Mentors: Positive Role Models for our Struggling Boys

“Adolescence--is it the first time in life we discover that we have something terrible to hide from those who love us?”

--John Irving



Boys Facts

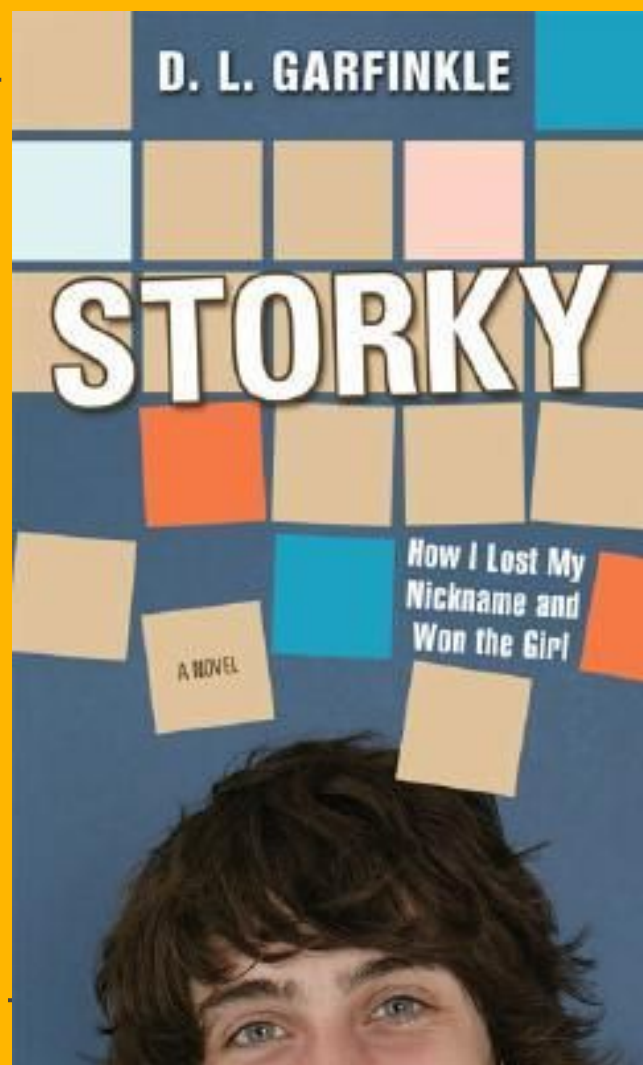


If you are a boy in this country right now, you are:

- twice as likely as a girl to be diagnosed with an attention-deficit or learning disorder (CDC)
- 5 times as likely to commit suicide as girls of the same age (CDC)
- twice as likely to abuse alcohol
- more than sixteen times as likely to go to prison

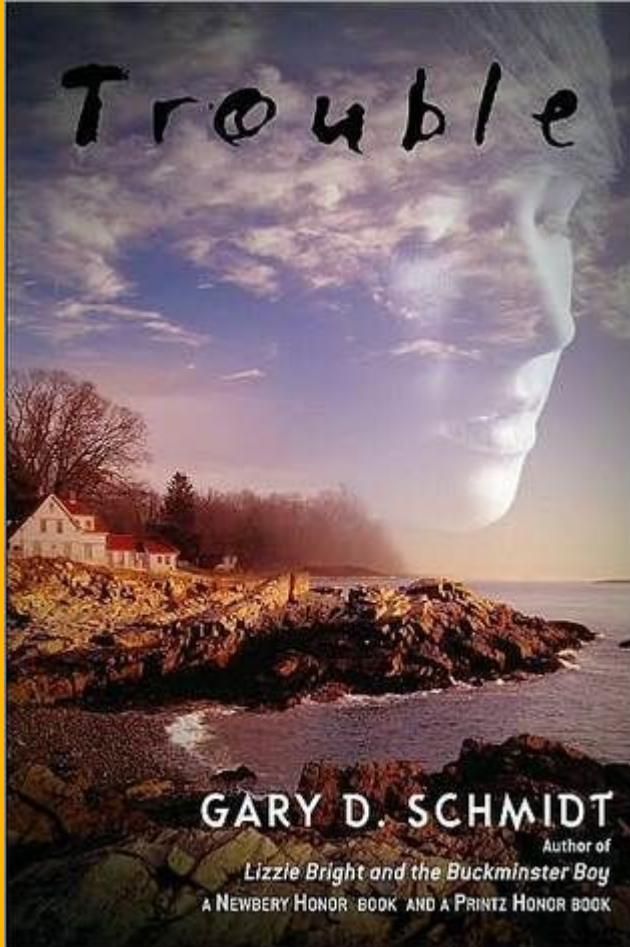
The journal of Michael "Storky" Pomerantz tells the tumultuous tale of life as a high-schooler—complete with the fact that the love of his life is dating a high school football player. As he chronicles the highs—and, of course, the most embarrassing lows—of his freshman year in high school, Storky paints an amusing and oftentimes hilarious portrait of an average teenager. But Michael is a not-so-ordinary kid, with a wit and charm that is atypical of average teens, and you will soon be cheering for him.

THEMES: divorce, fitting in, first crush



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"Henry Smith's father told him that if you build your house far enough away from Trouble, then Trouble will never find you."

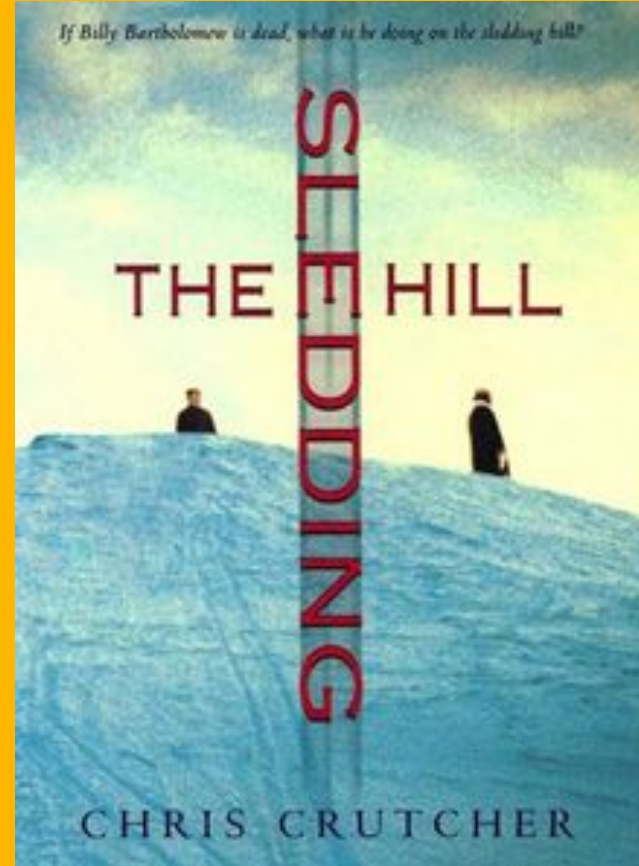
But Trouble comes careening down the road one night in the form of a pickup truck that strikes Henry's older brother, Franklin. In the truck is Chay Chouan, a young Cambodian from Franklin's preparatory school, and the accident sparks racial tensions in the school—and in the town where Henry's family has lived for generations. Caught between anger and grief, Henry sets out to do the only thing he can think of: climb Mt. Katahdin, the highest mountain in Maine, which he and Franklin were going to climb together. The journey, both exhilarating and dangerous, turns into an odyssey of discovery about himself, his family, and why one can never escape from Trouble.

THEMES: transcending family

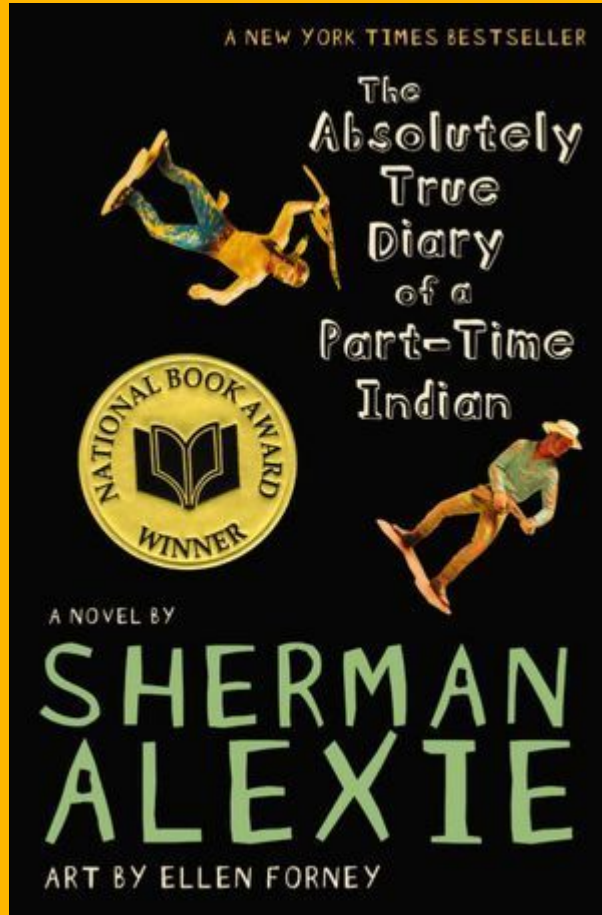
Eddie hasn't had an easy year.

First his father dies. Then his best friend Billy accidentally kicks a stack of Sheetrock over on himself, breaking his neck and effectively hitting tilt on his Earthgame. Eddie and Billy were inseparable. Still are. Billy isn't going to let a little thing like death stop him from hanging in there with his friend. And when Eddie faces an epic struggle with the powers that be, Billy will remain right there beside him.

THEMES: loss (death), self-confidence



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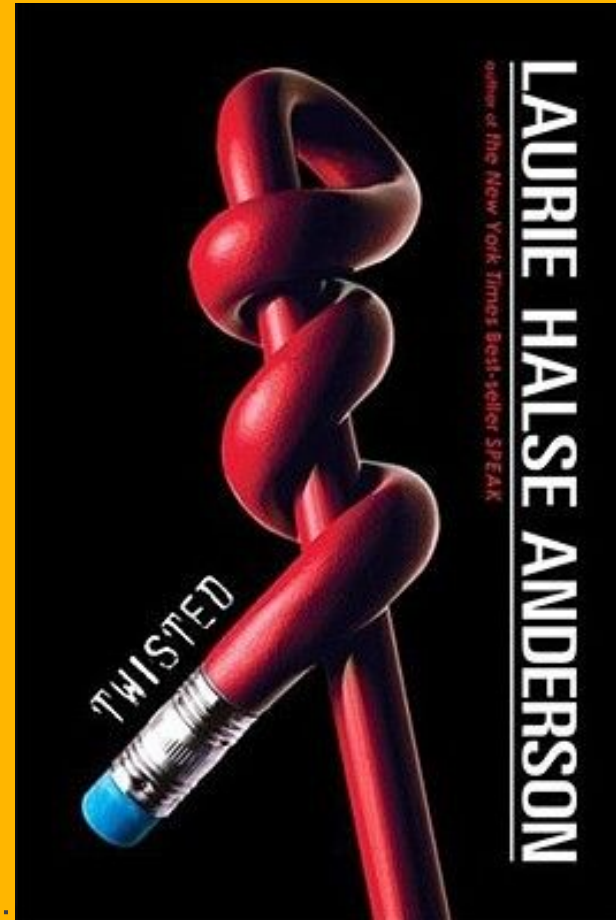
The story of Junior, a budding cartoonist growing up on the Spokane Indian Reservation. Determined to take his future into his own hands, Junior leaves his troubled school on the rez to attend an all-white farm town high school where the only other Indian is the school mascot.

Heartbreaking, funny, and beautifully written, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, which is based on the author's own experiences, coupled with poignant drawings by Ellen Forney that reflect the character's art, chronicles the contemporary adolescence of one Native American boy as he attempts to break away from the life he was destined to live.

THEMES: social and peer pressures, fitting in

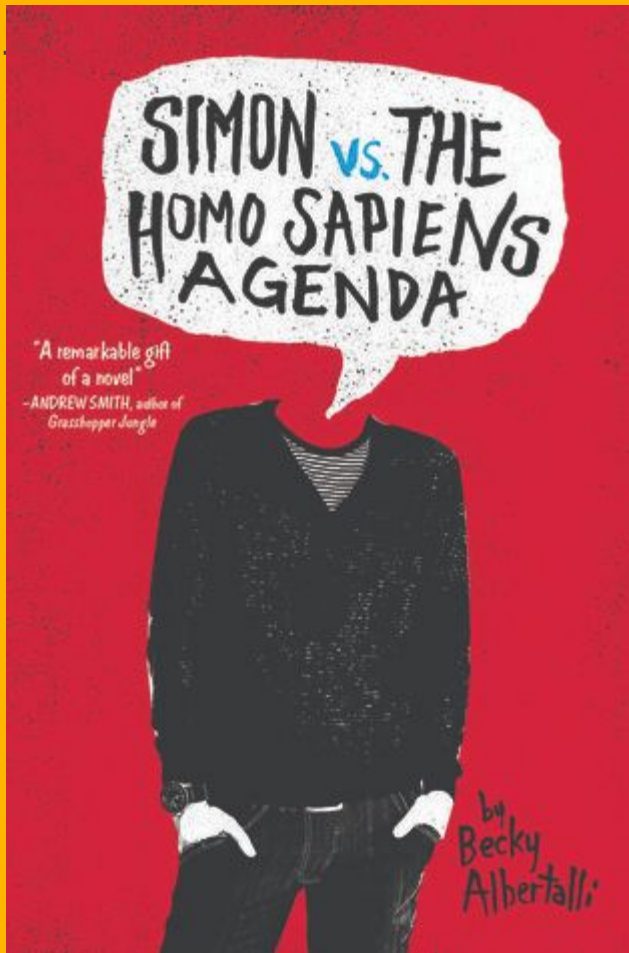
High school senior Tyler Miller used to be the kind of guy who faded into the background. But since he got busted for writing graffiti on the school, and spent the summer doing outdoor work to pay for it, he stands out like you wouldn't believe. His new physique attracts the attention of “queen bee” Bethany Milbury, who just so happens to be the daughter of his father’s boss, the sister of his biggest enemy, and Tyler’s secret crush. And that sets off a string of events and changes that have Tyler questioning his place in school, in his family, and in the world.

THEMES: fitting in, alcoholism, suicidal thoughts, peer pressure



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Sixteen-year-old and not-so-openly gay Simon Spier prefers to save his drama for the school musical. But when an email falls into the wrong hands, his secret is at risk of being thrust into the spotlight.

With some messy dynamics emerging in his once tight-knit group of friends and his email correspondence with his crush growing more flirtatious every day, Simon's junior year has suddenly gotten all kinds of complicated.

Now change-averse Simon has to find a way to step out of his comfort zone before he's pushed out--without alienating his friends or compromising himself.

THEMES: friendship, growing up and coming to terms with who you are



We don't have to feel threatened by the gains girls have made. We need to study them, to use them as a model for boys. The solution may be to grab on to that which is male and use it as a means to fix the problem rather than as a symptom of it. In the classroom, there's ample evidence that certain changes could help boys prosper. They like to do their work in bite-sized chunks. They need differing levels of activity, often tied to some element of competition or short-term goal. They tend to gravitate toward nonfiction in their reading--more facts, shorter pieces. They need physical activity, too, up to four recesses a day, to stay focused.

We also have to think about the way boys put the world together outside the classroom. In England, gaps in achievement have been attributed, in part, to what is known as laddishness. Since boys tend to run in packs, their values are defined by the boys who lead them. There's a sort of anti-establishment disaffection passed from boy to boy, a sense that school doesn't matter. Educators there used that pattern as a means to reinvent it. They used intensely focused mentorship, aimed at the pack leaders, to break down these attitudes, cracking into the structures that keep boys distant from school.

Source: <https://www.esquire.com/news-politics/news/a865/esq0706sotamboys-94/>



Where to look:

Guys Read

Jon Scieszka, a children's-book author and former elementary-school teacher, wants to make reading interesting and fun for boys. His engaging Web site recommends guy-friendly books to young readers.

guysread.com.

Raising and Educating Healthy Boys Project

The Educational Equity Center of the Academy for Educational Development created this program to study gender expectations, raise awareness among educators and parents of how they may be inadvertently limiting boys, and brainstorm solutions.

<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED500855.pdf>

Citizen Schools

Though not targeted just to boys, this organization, operating in twenty-two middle schools nationwide, seeks to engage students through the kind of experiential learning, such as apprenticeships with volunteers, that males tend to respond to.

citizenschools.org.

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