

## **WRITING FICTION FOR BOYS**

Thirty years of teaching have taught me that many boys and girls are reaching puberty while still in primary school. It is then a boy’s attention span will drop, and his interests become vastly different to a girl’s. I know that adolescent boys find it hard to sit still long enough to work their way through longish fiction. I know from experience how difficult it is to maintain interest in a novel from one lesson to the next when there might be several days between classes. I suspect that these days the emphasis in schools isn’t on reading only for pleasure.

So one answer I found was to have a novella emerge as an ebook, and hope that this new technology would interest reluctant readers. Briefly: “In **Easternport Bay**, teenagers Jarred, Nick and Kim are on vacation when they hear that a hotel planned for Easternport Bay might endanger the bay’s fragile mangrove swamps. As well, drugs are being shipped in. When Nick’s older brother is unjustly accused, the three set out to find the real villains.” My rationale for this novel was that youngsters would enjoy reading about a gang committed to solving crimes, righting wrongs and telling jokes.

Three books written specifically for boys have been published by Macmillan Education:

1. **Cowpat\$**, 12 year old Red has two major loves: milk-cow Daisy, and developing his artistic skills. However Geribilt Farm is going downhill and Red has no money to buy painting equipment. Also, the bank is about to foreclose, his dad needs an expensive operation, and neither brother Luke

nor sister Tara can find jobs. Then out of the blue a mysterious Stranger offers Red hundreds of dollars in exchange for Daisy's cow-pats.<sup>2</sup>

2. **Starship Q** The setting is a far-flung future. Iyaki and Aari, two alien lads join forces with Jackson, a human boy, to overcome their mutual distrust as they share jokes, stories and troubles. Only then do they manage to quell a mutiny on Star-ship 'Q'. As Iyaki and Jackson get to know and like each other, this story is told from both points of view."

3. **Trapeze**. When life is tough for Ritchie, he find consolation when the bumps and lumps that appear in his ceiling turn into something far more interesting.

My other solution was to construct a short story collection - a genre that has in recent years gone out of fashion - using only teenage boys as protagonists. Thus I set about putting together ten stories of varying length - 1000 to 10,000 words - that I called **Killer Virus**. Each story involved a boy in some interesting and relevant experience. I knew a number of pubescent boys who could provide me with excellent role models. Though these boys still had girl-soft skin, they spiked their hair with green and purple jell and wore t-shirts bearing rude messages and baggy pants. Pubescence being the time when the social group is everything, all were fixed in their determination to meld with their peers and reject adult ideas and control. I understood how they felt. Writers often have latent alter-egos, and under my grandmotherly exterior, an army of angry adolescents was just itching to get out.

Because many boys enjoy anything to do with science fiction, fantasy and the absurd, several stories explore the unexpected. ‘Alley-Cat’, set in a far-flung future, examines the love between an unusual animal and his homeless young owner. In ‘Foto-Copier’, young Foto is swallowed by the school’s up-market photo-copier with unexpected results. Obnoxious Sam in ‘Virus-Killer’ deserves what happens to him when his computer develops a mind of its own.

I was particularly interested in writing about those issues that concern young readers. As keeping up with the group is so important, when Finn in ‘Party-Plan’ wants to throw himself a birthday party, he must look for ways and means to pay for it. ‘Everything You Every Wanted’ is exactly what happens to one lucky boy. ‘The Glitterland Tapes’ is the longest story; while Edward’s father is overseas on business, Edward is sent to live with an aunt he hardly knows. In his new school he is tormented by the local bullies and must learn ways of standing up to them.

Though many of these stories use mature concepts, where ever possible they employ simple sentences, syntax and vocabulary. The pacing tends to be fast, descriptive passages kept to a minimum. Above all, I try to apply my own golden rule: “Show, Don’t Tell.”

I hope that this collection will lead to thoughtful class discussion, research and creative writing. With this in mind, and knowing how busy teachers are, I have provided a separate book of teacher and students notes. As well, there is a ‘student activity sheet’ that can be photocopied. Notes for the ebooks can be found on my website [www.goldiealexander.com](http://www.goldiealexander.com) Each story leads on

to extended reading, and suggests appropriate use of resources and preparation. This includes non-writing activities, writing exercises and suggests topics for discussion and debate.

In this collection I wanted students to sit up, to think, and to feel. I wanted these stories, no matter how exotic their setting, to reflect contemporary attitudes and conflicts. Though most of these stories are centered around a male protagonist on the edge of adolescence, I believe that their predicaments are central to both genders.

**1. KILLER VIRUS. PHOENIX EDUCATION. 2002. 1 876580 36 4  
\$16.95**

**2. KILLER VIRUS NOTES FOR TEACHERS, 2002 1 876580 40 2  
\$18.95.**

**[www.phoenixeduc.com](http://www.phoenixeduc.com)**

**3. EASTERNPORT BAY. ebook 2002 ISBN 1 74064 055**

**4. COWPAT\$ Macmillan Education Breakers 3. 2003**

**5. STARSHIP Q Macmillan Education Breakers 3. 2003**

**6. TRAPEZE Macmillan Education Trekkers 2005**