

three decades ago, they make 40 percent today and the girls compose 60 percent, while annually earning 180,000 more diplomas than boys.

### ***A change in the male mindset***

There has been another sea change in our culture and that also began in 1970—the year that marked the birth of “Monday Night Football,” the highly lucrative TV show that proved you could get men to stay awake after 8 pm if you gave them sports on a week night. You could also sell them a lot of stuff.

Soon there was ESPN, the all-sports-all-



ESPN Headquarters in Bristol, CT:  
**Are the dishes connected  
to school scores too?**

the-time network, followed by channels devoted to golf, rodeo, basketball, football, baseball, NASCAR and every other sport.

The landscape of the American male’s attention span was being dramatically altered and boys were soaking up the changes.

Meanwhile the women’s movement was growing, Mom was celebrating “take your daughter to work day.” And Dad? He was busy taking his sons to the stadium or waving the remote at a cluster of sports channels.

Is there a connection here—the decline in boys’ interest and achievement in school and the behavior of the male culture? You tell me.

Can a father play catch in the backyard after dinner and still read to the child that same evening? Can they go to a game one day and to the library the next? You betcha.

### ***Hands give way to heads***

Once upon a time a man’s ability to earn a living in America was determined by what he could do with his hands — what he could dig, or plow, or weld, or lift. Not often any more. Now it’s determined by what he can do with his head—*if* he wants a decent living wage.

As the world’s job market shrinks, our children increasingly compete with children in other nations for jobs. Back in 2003, 25,000 U.S. tax returns were processed in India, outsourced by U.S. companies who wanted them done cheaply and correctly. Within two years, that number ballooned to 400,000. India now graduates more than 70,000 accountants a year. (Try Googling “India + accountants.”)

Jack Jennings, president and CEO of the Center on Education Policy, recently observed that we cannot compete with the rest of the world if only one American gender is working and achieving. Simply put: The countries that **out-learn** us will **out-earn** us.

Dad—what have you done for your son’s head lately? Remember those sand castles? Get involved. Your son needs you. We need you. America needs *both* of you.



Most of the statistics and facts included here are footnoted in Trelease’s *Read-Aloud Handbook* (Penguin 2006). © Jim Trelease 2010. See also:  
[www.trelease-on-reading.com/brochures.html](http://www.trelease-on-reading.com/brochures.html)

# FATHERS, SONS & READING

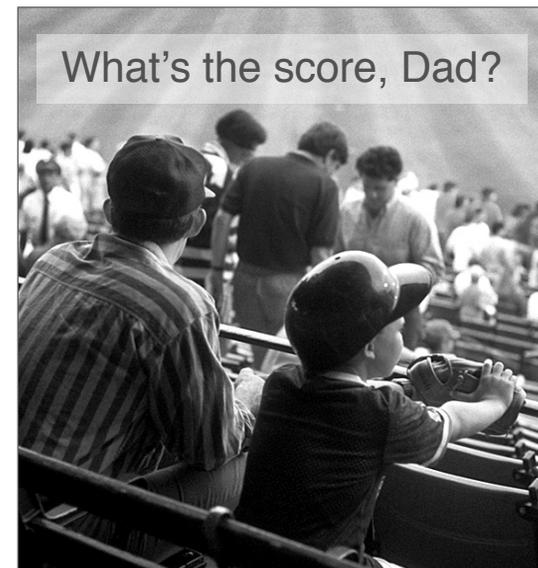
**EVER THINK ABOUT THE  
CONNECTION BETWEEN  
SAND CASTLES AND A  
BOY’S REPORT CARD?**

**THERE IS ONE.**

**BY JIM TRELEASE**

Author of The New York Times Bestseller  
*The Read-Aloud Handbook*

What’s the score, Dad?



**T**he first sand castle was pretty impressive. Watching the father and sons constructing the scene, handful by handful, I guessed the father must be an architect or engineer.

Continuing my beach walk I soon encountered another family bent over a sand castle. In fact, there were more than a dozen castles yet to be seen on my 45-minute stroll — some good, some poor, and a few spectacular.



Together they had me thinking on my walks that week: there's a common denominator among the best castles — a father (or older male) usually was involved. If dad was there, the kids worked harder and succeeded. Where the adult male was missing, so too was the achievement among the boys.

All of which connected to the research on fathers, sons, and reading. Overall, the more dad is involved, the higher the boy's scores.

### ***What do you mean by 'involved'?***

One study out of Modesto, California, showed: (1) boys who were read to by their fathers scored significantly higher in reading achievement; and (2) where fathers read recreationally themselves, their sons read more and scored higher than did boys whose fathers did little or no recreational reading. When the dads were surveyed, only 10 percent reported having fathers who read to them when they were children.

A second study was done by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (CHEEK-sent-me-HY-ee) one of today's leading experts in human be-

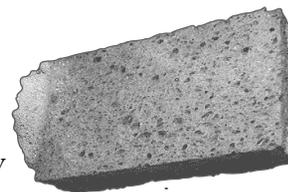
havior. That study focused on 30 men who were raised in blue-collar, working-class families, yet 15 of them became college professors and 15 remained blue-collar. If family economics and education were the same, how to explain the extreme difference in outcomes?

The researchers found four significant factors in the childhoods of those who became professors. (Incidentally, professors have a much higher life expectancy and higher income level than working class.)

- 12 of the 15 professors were read to or told stories by their parents, compared to only 4 of the blue-collar workers.
- 14 out of 15 professors came from homes where books and print were plentiful; among blue-collar workers, only 4 had books.
- 13 of the professors' mothers and 12 of the fathers were identified as frequent readers of newspapers, magazines, or books; blue-collar workers identified 6 mothers and 4 fathers.
- All of the 15 professors were encouraged to read as children, compared with only 3 of the blue-collar workers.

As much as anything else, children are little sponges, soaking up the behavior and values of the dominant people around them.

A Pennsylvania social worker once told me about a family she was working with. The mother asked if it was natural for her son to pretend to be reading to his toy trucks and cars (he was too young to actually be reading). The worker had seen children read to their dolls and siblings, but to toy cars?



She told the mother this was a new slant on reading but not to worry about it. The important thing was the boy was imitating the act of reading, a very positive behavior.

Later, as she was leaving, she observed the child's father bent over the engine of his pickup truck, a repair manual balanced on the radiator, reading aloud the instructions to himself. CLICK! It was entirely natural for the little boy to think his father was reading aloud to his truck. Monkey see, monkey do.

### ***Danger signs across the land***

Since 1970 there has been something of a sea change in the academic lives of American boys. Prior to 1970, boys dominated the school scene in academics and leadership. Not any more.

From elementary grades through college, the girls are rising (that's good) and the boys are sinking (not good). Girls dominate the ranks of school valedictorians and salutatorians, class officers, advanced placement classes, honor rolls, and graduation rates.

On the college level there has been a complete reversal of the field. Where boys made up nearly 60 percent of college students



**Where have all the boys gone?**