

# Colored Boys

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By Bernard Gassaway

As I think about public education, federal legislation, school reform, differentiated instruction, multiple intelligences, and parental involvement, I wonder what can be done to help the colored boys: Blue Boy, Green Boy, Gray Boy, Purple Boy, and Black Boy. All of the traditional methods of instruction and discipline have not worked to improve their learning and behavior.

In school, Blue Boy walks the halls. Green Boy is frequently absent. Gray Boy fights all the time. Purple Boy sits in the back of the class and sleeps. Black Boy is very quiet but does no classwork. Blue Boy and Black Boy have been held back twice. They are 15. Green Boy, Gray Boy, and Purple Boy have been held back once. They are 14. All of them are currently in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Physically, they stand tall and wide among their classmates. Black Boy even has facial hair.

The colored boys are restless in class. They frequently request, in their own way, the pass to leave the room: "Teacher, I got to go to the bathroom." Rather than argue with the colored boy, the teacher quickly signals him to take the pass. As the boy leaves the room, tension follows. The teacher quietly prays that the boy stays out for the remainder of the period. Some of his classmates pray the same prayer.

Frankly, the colored boys are not wanted in their school. They do not fit in. They are square pegs trying to fit into a round hole. Teachers and administrators do not know how to deal with them. Staff can often be heard saying, "Those boys will probably end up dead or in jail." "They should be in special ed." "Where are their parents?"

Blue Boy currently lives in a foster home. Purple Boy lives with his great-grandmother. She is 53. Gray Boy lives with his mother and father. Green Boy lives with his mother. Black Boy lives with his father.

The colored boys cannot recall the last time they succeeded in school. Teachers' threats of failure fail to motivate them. For the colored boys, failure has become inconsequential, so they believe.

The colored boys are described by many as being handsome but with ugly ways. According to their teachers, "When you work with them one-on-one, they are sweet kids. When they get together, they are out of control! They cannot focus." They are famous and feared among their peers. The girls generally find them attractive; they stand out because of their colorful behavior.

Chinese fast food, boneless chicken, and pork fried rice is their favorite meal. Before they come to school, they frequently stop at the corner bodega for breakfast: a 50-cent bag of potato chips, chocolate chip cookies, plain M&Ms, and a grape soda. They refuse to eat school breakfast. That would not be cool. If they wanted school breakfast, they would have to come early. That too would not be cool.

As the colored boys get older, they are reclassified and placed in a larger cohort. Their names are replaced by labels such as at-risk, over-aged, truant, juvenile delinquent, dropout, criminal, inmate, and felon. We exclude, isolate and incarcerate them until they disappear.

I wonder what can be done to help the colored boys.