



Hal's Reading Diary 197

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Hal's Reading Diary Roger Mills thinks Hal may yet be a reader

11-year-old Hal may be a reader after all! His father, psychodynamic counsellor **Roger Mills** explains.

My adorable son has an extraordinary gift for confounding expectations. In the last diary I was pretty clear that Hal was not a reader, nor likely to become one any time soon. And then, contrary creature that he is, the next thing that happens is that he gets really into a book.

Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* books are responsible for this little revolution. At the end of the summer holidays Hal saw the *The Hunger Games* film, which covers the first of the three books in the series, and was powerfully hooked. He then started to read the second book of the trilogy and, wonder of wonders, for a good couple of weeks he was reading with gusto, and without any cajoling from us. On one occasion, when Hal was running late for school, I found him sitting on his bed head buried in his book. This unprecedented sight completely disarmed the verbal salvo I had been about to launch. How could I possibly lay into Hal for being late when he was doing precisely the thing I've been urging him to do for years?

Hal's preoccupation with [The Hunger Games](#) [3] is easy to understand. The story is gripping, set in a dystopian USA of the future where a disenfranchised serf population in the 'districts' is pitted against an oppressive ruling state. Every year the district people have to provide contestants for the Hunger Games, a fight to the death which is part Roman gladiatorial, part X factor. The engine for the drama is the gathering force of a revolution led by the book's heroine Katniss Everdeen who manages to subvert the Hunger Games and galvanise the district folk in the process.

Hal ploughed through *Hunger Games* book two with real enthusiasm for a few weeks. He looked like anyone hooked on a book, finding odd bits of time in the day to slip away and read some more, reading on beyond when we wanted his light to be out because it was too exciting to stop. But then as he neared the end of the book his tempo slowed. This was difficult to understand. The book doesn't get dull towards the end but Hal, quite suddenly, went from ardent reading to leaving the book at school 'by mistake'. And all with only a couple of chapters to go.

What had happened? Perhaps the answer here is that Hal's behaviour is typical of how he is with many of his enthusiasms. He is very much a boy for fads. Over the last year he has had intense, but transient passions for rugby, doing card tricks, riding a scooter, jogging, and now silk-screen printing. The usual pattern is that for one or two months Hal will be obsessed with the new interest, talk about it all the time, want to do it all the time. And then, often quite abruptly, the obsession fades and something else takes its place. Hal's reading of *The Hunger Games* books seems to fit this pattern.

But I'm not despairing. In dribs and drabs over the year I have been reading the first of the *Artemis Fowl* books to Hal. Last night I read a bit and then wanted to go for my supper so I made a suggestion. Why didn't he carry on reading the book on his own since he was finding it so exciting? Hal picked it up without a murmur and started to read. In the past there would have been protests 'I don't want to', 'I'm too tired' would have been typical. So there is something new

here. What The Hunger Games experience has done, I think, is give Hal the confidence that he can have an enjoyable experience reading on his own. It isn't too difficult. He doesn't go so slowly that he will get bored. Hal may not have become a bookworm but he has learnt that he can read to himself.

The Hunger Games (978 1 4071 0908 4) by Suzanne Collins is published by Scholastic at £7.99. [Artemis Fowl](#) [4] (978 0 1413 3909 2) by Eoin Colfer is published by Puffin at £6.99.

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