

# HOW CONSTRUCTING AND SHARING STORIES CAN HELP FOSTER NOTIONS OF POSITIVE MASCULINITY IN YEAR 10 BOYS

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## **Abstract**

My research project aimed to contribute to the emerging discussions of Positive Masculinity. Positive Masculinity is a burgeoning field aiming to build self-esteem and character in young men, allowing them to create their own healthy definitions of manhood, whilst escaping shame and limited narratives forced on to them by others.

This project invited 12 Year 10 boys to have raw and honest discussions about portrayals of men in the media and asked them to examine and challenge their own beliefs about masculinity. They then determined role models – fictional and real-life – who embodied the type of man they wanted to be and shared stories about them with boys in Year 7.

Many of the boys reported feeling a sense of relief after the project as they realised that they did not have to be a limited version of a man; they could show mercy, express affection, make mistakes, and learn how to make things right again. They also expressed a sense of purpose and responsibility to help and educate young men of the future.

## **Introduction**

Berwick Grammar School is an independent day school of 200 boys established 10 years ago in the growth corridor outside of Melbourne. The school's pastoral focus is shaped by the motto: Growing Good Men. This provides the ethos and spirit of our school, shaping our culture and community.

Working in a significant leadership role in boys' wellbeing and implementing many of the programs within the Growing Good Men Project has made me sensitive to the often negative portrayal of men in literature, society, and the media. If we want to contribute to the growing of good men, we should present young men with images of masculinity they can both relate to and be proud of.

One of our key programs is a pilot Peer Mentoring program between Year 10 and Year 7 boys. This consists mainly of reading and sporting activities as a way of breaking down barriers and

developing leadership and interpersonal skills. However, the 2018/2019 IBSC research topic of *Boys and Stories* helped me see that the culture of reading and exploring stories could be used to promote positive masculinity and have complex conversations about what it means to be a “good man.” In choosing characters they related to and identifying stories from their own lives, Year 10 boys had the opportunity to more clearly define what being a good man meant to them and to share these ideas with their Year 7 buddies. Bearing this in mind, the question behind this action research project was: How might a story-sharing program broaden and strengthen Year 10 boys’ definitions of masculinity?

These conversations are crucial in a society full of images and examples of men behaving poorly – in Australia, our sportsmen and politicians in particular exemplify many of the behaviours we would prefer to eliminate in the future. This, rightly in some cases, receives a great deal of media attention and is often the only time we have conversations with our male students about what it means to be a man.

Helping young men create and then inhabit a masculine identity that avoids disconnection and emotional toxicity should be a paramount goal of all boys’ schools. To this end, I proposed that positive stories about masculinity can function similarly to Positive Psychology and Positive Education (Seligman, 2018), in that they can develop resilience in young men to negative and toxic masculinity. While there is little research that directly addresses this, it is a reasonable “leap” to suggest that with the schools of thought above, there is worthy work to be done in this field.

## **Literature Review**

### **The Masculinity Crisis**

Although the women’s movement has gained incredible momentum, and our definitions of what it means to be a woman have never been broader, our collective societal attitudes towards men have not shifted, resulting in what Townson University Lecturer Andrew Reiner (as cited in Shortal & Pekow, 2017) calls “a masculine identity at war with itself.”

These discussions have recently gained prominence as policy makers, commentators, and academics have grappled with the issues of so-called toxic masculinity predominant amongst sections of our community. Former National Football League (NFL) footballer and motivational speaker, Joe Ehrmann (2013), suggests that we are subtly but systematically programming young men to separate their hearts from their minds. This is expressed to them through consistent messages of “Don’t show weakness. Don’t express any emotion – apart from anger. Don’t cry. Don’t be soft. Don’t be empathetic” (Barker, 2019, p.3). This is what we

tell boys it means to be a man, but it is a model of manhood that does not prepare them for the future, both professionally and personally (Barker, p.130).

Renowned psychologist Philip Zimbardo (2016) explores this identity crisis further in his book *Man Interrupted*, pointing out the irony of society calling for men to be “upstanding, proactive citizens who take responsibility for themselves, who work with others to improve their communities and nation as a whole” while “not giving the support, guidance, means, or places for these young men even to be motivated or interested in aspiring to these goals” (p. XV). Instead, notes Zimbardo, they are lost in a world where there are limited definitions of men who can only be “warriors and breadwinners” (p. XVII), even if this is just a charade. This frustration leads many men to depression, alcoholism and suicide (Barker p.15) as well as violence, online gaming, and porn addictions (Zimbardo, p. XX). This lonely existence prevents our boys from living lives of any kind of emotional sustenance, and sadly, it is often men reinforcing this message with men (Barker, p.49).

Australian author Tim Winton also uses his novels and other writings, including the 2018 article, *About the Boys: Tim Winton on How Toxic Masculinity is Shackling Men to Misogyny*, to raise concerns about the state of modern manhood and the propensity for young men to “rehearse and project” a form of manhood that “betrays their better natures,” for something “low and mean” (pp. 2-3). Winton claims this damages both the young man and the people around him. He calls for more positive rites of passage into manhood that guide boys to become the young men they should be (pp. 3-4) and for more men to consciously act as positive role models (p.6).

Without both a strategic and pragmatic approach to the growing of good men as central to boys’ education, it may be argued that many young men are living what Reichert and Hawley (2013) describe as “emotionally constricted lives” despite being in reality, “warm, vulnerable, attuned ... and receptive” (p. 5).

### **A Positive Approach**

In establishing the school of Positive Psychology, Professor Martin Seligman (2018) proposed that for humans to really thrive we need to build on our capacity for wellbeing as a preventative measure. In the autobiographical *The Hope Circuit*, Seligman likens this to changing our approach to psychology from “parking an ambulance at the bottom of a cliff to help those who fall” to “preventing the fall in the first place” (p.280). This perspective, in turn, led to the development of Positive Education, an approach to the development of student wellbeing that focuses on the development of character strengths, mindsets, and resilience—all

of which have the capacity to lead to the best conditions for learning. This approach is supported by Halstead and Taylor (2000), who propose that it is not only appropriate to “build on and supplement the values children have already begun to develop” (p. 169), but that this is one of the key roles of school. Emily FitzSimons (2017) further asks us to reject the idea that academic achievement and wellbeing are “competing agendas” (p. 54) and that, in fact, there are data to suggest that strong wellbeing programs are proving crucial to developing positive emotions, creativity, academic self-efficacy, and a genuine love of learning.

### **It’s as Simple as Telling a Story**

If History were taught in the form of stories, it would never be forgotten

– Rudyard Kipling

Stories have existed from the beginning of time. Before language, they were told in cave paintings and tribal dance, and even now many parents end their children’s day with a bedtime story, not just for entertainment, but to “put their minds at ease about unknown elements of the world” (Chaitin, 2003, p. 8. Kendall Haven (2007) explores how and why information presented to us in a story format is likely to be readily accepted. As a form, stories are infinitely flexible; stories are for young and old, can be in any language, and can convey truth and fiction. Indeed, parables and religious stories have been important in developing character and values for thousands of years, and biographical stories—especially stories of inspiration and success—have the power to make people view themselves and their capacity differently. Annie Murphy Paul (2012) reinforces the fundamental way that stories stimulate the brain, making us more capable of empathy and “better able to understand other people” (p. 3). This is why books, such as *The Diary of Anne Frank* and Elie Wiesel’s *Night*, have helped amass widespread sympathy for the Jews during World War II and how, closer to home, books such as Anh Do’s *The Happiest Refugee* work towards changing the attitudes of our island nation towards those who seek asylum. Stories, real and imagined, possess that kind of magic. In her TED Talk, Emily Esfahani Smith (2017) proposes that storytelling is one of the four pillars to happiness. This kind of storytelling she defines the examination and, at times, the reframing of our own life experiences - “creating a narrative from the events of your own life brings clarity. It helps you understand how you became you.” Additionally, if we don’t consciously tell children the “right” stories, they learn and absorb from the stories around them, especially the dominant narratives in the media. In her article *Why Stories Matter for Children’s Learning*, Peggy Albers (2016) suggests that stories have a “strong influence on children’s understanding of cultural and gender roles” (para.3). It is stories that teach children

that boys like blue and girls like pink, and that men are the breadwinners and women the homemakers – and conversely, that if you don't like the role assigned to your gender, then something must be wrong with you. And it happens fast – studies have shown that much of this is socialized in children by the age of five.

Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) further warns us of the danger of a “single story.” In her TED Talk of the same name, Adichie proposes that we need to be exposed to many stories in order to avoid narrow definitions of people. She tells of the initial reaction of her college roommate when she found out she was from the African continent:

She had felt sorry for me even before she saw me... her default position towards me – as an African – was a form of patronising, well-meaning pity ... In this single story there was no possibility of Africans being similar to her in any way ... no possibility of a connection as human equals. (Adichie, 2009)

And while Adichie refers mainly to race in her speech, the same can perhaps be said of men. If we continue to tell each other the same stories of our expectations of, and frustrations with, men, then we too are flirting with the danger of a single story: “Show a people over and over and over again as one thing, and that is what they become” (Adichie, 2009).

The boys' set text for English, Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, provided an excellent core example for an initial discussion of positive masculinity – a text that while disturbing and sad, advocates the qualities of mateship, sacrifice, and caring for others. The characters in the text may be stripped of their hope and their futures, but never of their humanity. These kinds of fictional texts, by their very nature, inspire boys to be better than they are, to strive for a version of manhood that evokes that same level of empathy and that some power of experience.

### **Research Context**

Berwick Grammar School is a boys-only institution with a ten-year history, and with close links to a more established girls' campus in a neighboring suburb that celebrated its 90-year anniversary two years ago. It is purpose-built to meet the needs of young men in the area. The school's ethos comes from our unofficial motto of “Growing Good Men,” a concept that underpins the formal and informal work we do with students.

A formal Peer Mentoring Program being trialed in 2018 between students in Year 7 and Year 10 gave boys the option of playing sport, reading, or just talking with their peer mentees. This project aimed to use this program more formally as a platform to explore identity and

masculinity with Year 10 students, by urging them to provide good examples for their younger counterparts. At the outset of this project, there was no formal school program in place for these kinds of conversations, although they were spoken of informally in pastoral care sessions and assemblies.

In order to ethically undertake this research, permission was received from both the Principal and Head of Campus, as well as the families of all boys who wished to take part.

## **The Action**

### **Step One – Exploring Masculinity**

A pre-survey gathered initial ideas about how participants viewed what it means to be a man, and formal interviewing to expand on these ideas followed. Participants then undertook lessons to help clarify their vision of what it means to be a good man (see Appendix 1). A key resource in developing a vocabulary for this was the VIA Character Strengths, which was already embedded into their pastoral care program.

The lessons challenged the boys' existing definitions of masculinity and teased out their concerns about the portrayals of men they are presented with. Key to designing these lessons were Grenville-Cleave's (2018) 10 male strengths worth celebrating:

- Male Relational Styles
- Male Ways of Caring
- Generative Fatherhood
- Male Self-Reliance
- The Worker/Provider Tradition
- Male Courage, Daring and Risk Taking
- Group Orientation
- Humanitarian Service
- Male Use of Humour
- Male Heroism

These ideas were applied to the boys' set text, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, a semi-autobiographical novel (written as a form of literary therapy) that provides us with a wide variety of opportunities to discuss traditional models of masculinity, as well as characters who

challenge these. Boys were also presented with many other figures in popular culture to evaluate in terms of whether they modelled a masculinity they wanted to identify with.

The boys then began to define their own vision of masculinity, and chose stories, both fictional and autobiographical, to reflect this and to help them see their own potential.

### **Step Two – Storytelling**

Students explored the power of storytelling and effective storytelling before spending time workshopping their fictional and real-life stories of good men and sharing them with each other. They then presented them to their Peer Mentee in small groups, so that even the storytellers could benefit from hearing another boy's story and the way he delivered it.

### **Step Three – Reflection**

Throughout the learning and practising process, students completed regular exit slips to provide feedback on their learning. After the act of storytelling, the participants also undertook a more structured, summative reflection on the process in the form of surveying and interviewing.

## **Data Collection**

Qualitative data were the most appropriate type of evidence in this project, as it is a project that explores how multiple realities of masculinity are constructed by different individuals' opportunities to express themselves, and then use this expression to come to terms with the complex feelings they possess about what it means to be a man.

The three key methods utilized to collect data were:

- surveying
- exit tickets
- interviews

Initial surveys and interviews took place before much of the action of the project and looked at determining current ideas and concerns about manhood. This provided an interesting baseline of data to work with and, at times, re-shaped the planned delivery and content of the lessons around masculinity.

Interviews at the end of the project were used to determine whether or not these definitions had changed, shifted, or broadened.

Before each interview, the selected participants were presented with an interview guide, so that there was transparency and trust around the kinds of questions posed. However, participants were also informed that the interviews were semi-structured, allowing me to ask follow-up or probing questions if an interesting opportunity arose (Mertler, 2017). Interviews were both filmed and transcribed.

Additionally, exit tickets were used after each teaching session. This was an interesting way to track boys' thinking and allowed me to see on a daily basis how the participants were responding to the questions and problems posed.

I also kept notes of observations as a researcher. I noted Mertler's (2017) definition of effective observations involving carefully watching and systematically recording what I saw with the participants. I adopted his suggested method of notetaking involving two columns: one for actual observations and a second for preliminary interpretations. This allowed me to begin to process the data as soon as I observed it, allowing me to note for example, the differences in the engagement levels of my co-researchers (i.e. students participating in the action research) and those outside of this cohort who were simply involved in the Peer Mentoring process.

The stories the students produced were also used as a form of data. These stories were compared to the views of the participants as expressed in surveys, exit tickets, and interviews, thus allowing me to triangulate results. Student voice, student work and researcher observations over several weeks provided a capacity to triangulate data for "quality and accuracy" (Mertler, 2017 p. 42). Regular meetings with my mentor provided the voice of a critical friend and an unbiased perspective on the work and the research at hand.

### **Data Analysis**

Interviews transcripts were analysed for themes and patterns. I was particularly interested in the boys' definition of masculinity and "good men," in addition to how they felt men were portrayed in mainstream media. Comparisons were made between pre- and post-definitions of masculinity. The post-action set of questions also probed as to whether the nature of the storytelling project helped them to develop their understanding of the research topic.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The names used below are pseudonyms and are designed to protect the identities of the boys involved in this project.

## Myths of Manhood

The initial surveys provided some relevant data on the boys' current perceptions of the social constraints on men, which did not shift throughout the project. They did not change in their view of how men were portrayed in a variety of media, although the participants became much more confident about discussing these as the project continued. This was clearly evident in comparing the pre-interview and post-interview transcripts, as well as in my observations of, and participation in, their dialogue in classes.

In the initial interviews, **all** of the boys commented on living in a society full of bad news stories about men; what Oliver explained as, "all the things they've done wrong." Owen, a Junior Mayor of his local council with a great deal of community engagement, agreed: "I've seen great men and women doing such wonderful things, however the news just wants to portray the bad things." Jacob shared his feelings about this clearly – "it makes me feel wronged." Elvir felt young men were being called upon to "redeem [themselves] for what [they] may have done in the past or what our ancestors or leaders in the past have done." Some noted difficulties with the masculine ideal they felt was presented to them. Calvin felt he was often being told to "be like a man" and "not show emotion." Hashani agreed vulnerability was shunned, discussing constant "social pressure" to "man up." He used the example: "If you cut your finger, even if you're bleeding, you're expected not to cry." Mitchell was more positive, comparing the opportunities he had now to "have different futures and pathways" than in his grandfather's time.

Over the several weeks of this project it was apparent that the boys' definitions of what it meant to be a man broadened considerably. Initially, many boys showed they still recognised that there was a strong stereotype even in their own thinking. Zamir responded with "the first thing that pops into my head is like a big muscly guy. But if I think about it more, it's more like a respectful sort of person." Eric followed a similar train of thought: "a big hulking man with a lot of muscles... but he shouldn't be the manly man we think of ... we should think of the more respectful protective kind of man."

My journal tracked the boys' engagement with these ideas and developing a language to discuss it. The 24 VIA Character Strengths helped to provide part of this, with the group suggesting the most important characteristics for men to be defined as "good" being bravery, honesty, judgement, gratitude, and self-regulation. In addition, they added the traditionally Australian quality of mateship and the practice of mentoring, which they had been

undertaking for the first time this year. These are very different qualities to the “muscle-men” first noted by Zamir and Eric.

The shared sessions and group discussions led to some genuine debate around the definition of masculinity in ways that arose from the boys’ own queries and questions. My journal entries noted that they were very aware of the problematic nature of the term “masculine” and I noted the boys actively and critically interrogated the examples I provided them, and their own growing definitions.

In the final interviews, even boys with initially fairly positive definitions of masculinity discussed changes and growth in their definition, which resulted in more thoughtful discussions of what it means to be a man. Some realised their initial definitions had been formed on what Oliver succinctly clarified as what they “didn’t do” rather than what they “did.”

Identifying real-life role models was perhaps the most powerful element in redefining their masculine ideal, as they were encouraged to closely examine the actions of the men in their lives. In doing so, the boys found that the men they admired were vastly different to the stereotypes that initially dominated their thinking. These real-life examples consisted of close family members such as fathers, brothers and uncles, or a coach or mentor. Eric chose his father, who “shows his emotions ... I’ve seen my dad cry a few times, which I think is something not a lot of people see.” Elvir chose Jeffrey, a mentor from his gym: “He goes out of his way to help others... one example of this was there was a crash or an incident that happened in Dandenong. He ... went out of his way to call the police, defuse the situation and make sure everybody was ok.”

### **Freedom of Perfectionism**

Nearly half of the participants reported that the greatest challenge of the project was in identifying male role models – particularly the fictional male role models - who embodied their developing definitions of what it means to be a good man. Initial discussions ranged from superheroes to pop culture figures, such as Mike from the television show, *Suits*.

While I noted in my journal that our shared sessions using the set text, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, helped the boys to identify the character Kat as a useful role model, they struggled to move outside of this and think independently. This led me to infer:

- The boys were unused to discussions of positive masculinity and thus struggled to engage, particularly given that many might find these kinds of discussions “scary” in front of their peers.
- Male role models with the kinds of qualities they wanted to represent THEM must be carefully considered
- They had come to see that narrow definitions are problematic – even Marvel heroes like Captain America had occasionally displayed traits that were less than ideal.

All students were, however, were able to identify at least one positive male role model.

A powerful and unexpected recognition came through the discussions of fictional male role models. As heroes presented in texts often have a storyline of redemption, we began to debate whether good role models were unimpeachably moral characters, or whether we could define goodness or worthiness in ways that allowed for men to make mistakes, but rise from the ashes a better, stronger person.

In many ways this was transformative for the boys and was mentioned often in their final reflection. Eric’s most powerful takeaway was that “good men” can make mistakes and that actions in their past don’t necessarily determine if they are a good man. He cited one of the boy’s chosen fictional characters for inspiring this – Sherlock Holmes. We debated this example in the classroom before Zamir settled on him as a role model. By the end of the project, he was able to elucidate that the core of his appeal was that “although he wasn’t perfect, he was still able to help others ... I think a really important thing is not allowing your own limitations to stop you from being a good man ... we’re never going to be perfect ... but we shouldn’t let that limit us.” Hashani agreed that this example had been a powerful part of changing his attitudes, stating his definition of a good man now included to “strive to be better.”

Many boys felt that storytelling and narrative arcs like this were powerful and many of the stories they shared with the younger boys portrayed the desire for redemption as a heroic masculine trait. They also independently initiated discussions of redemption and making mistakes both in our learning sessions and in their final interviews.

### **The Power and Pressure of Storytelling**

At the end of the process, each of the boys who were a part of the action and engaged in deep reflection and conversations felt they had taken part in something powerful and would like to

do so again. But it took a while to get there. Initially, my journal notes indicated that some the boys struggled with the idea of seeing themselves as “good men” or role models:

Boys are very uncomfortable today... vulnerable? Having trouble expressing empathy? Only in this group setting? ... They suggested that when they were in Year 7 they weren't thinking about questions like how to be a good man...

In addition, the act of storytelling caused no small level of anxiety. While storytelling proved a powerful medium, many found it an uncomfortable one. In a session earmarked to practise stories together before telling their Year 7 Peer Mentee, all but three of the Exit Slips collected indicated that the boys did not feel ready to move forward.

However, by the end of the project, the majority of the participants described telling the actual story to their peer mentee as the best part of the project. When the stories were successful, the boys felt accomplishment and purpose. Eric reported thinking – “I did it!”, while Owen felt he had made a difference: “If they get these traits early into their minds, they're going to grow up to be really great men.” It is Scott perhaps who best answered the research question, when he noted that, “as much as they're learning from us, we are learning as well.” Some boys added that listening to their peers tell their stories was beneficial too – as reflected by the impact of Zamir's story on Sherlock Holmes.

A core group of boys also reported feeling empowered as agents of change. Eric proposed “breaking a cycle” by striving to be better men and role models for their sons. Zamir talked about the importance of the Growing Good Men project in the school as a way for boys to “portray themselves more positively,” and at the end of the project concluded, “it's sort of our responsibility and sort of like the next generation to show others what good men are and what we can be and what we can achieve.” Further, Owen felt the best part was the discussions about the qualities of good men, and the chance to reflect to yourself: “Do I represent that? Do I have that?” Mitchell felt he was “a better man after the program” and that it was “cool that I could actually share it with someone, and someone that would listen and understand.”

### **Conclusion**

I was deeply moved by the changes I saw in the boys who agreed to participate in this project – which was about a third of their cohort. They began by shyly, but earnestly and honestly, expressing sadness and frustration around how men are portrayed. Then, I watched them grow in confidence as they came to see themselves as a part of the solution – as the good men

the school asks them to be. They were proud of their contribution to this project. They had purpose – they wanted to show younger boys how they could be good men too.

It is clear to me that promoting positive masculine role models, having concrete discussions about masculinity, and participating in storytelling is a deeply powerful way to engage boys in self-reflection about the men they are becoming. The challenge I believe now is to help them transfer this knowledge from the purely academic to the practical, helping them make use of it to enrich their lives. We, as educators, also need to ensure this set of conversations does not happen in isolation, but becomes part of a finely-crafted positive masculinity program across all year levels and in all aspects of school life.

### **Reflection**

This project found me in a particularly interesting time of my life – one in which my health was continually challenged. However, because of the project, this time turned out to also to be one of deep passion and purpose, which assisted me to continue to make the most of this wonderful opportunity to reflect and grow as a dedicated boys' educator. I now proudly call myself this and want the insights developed from the moving discussions that occurred during this project to shape my future career. I am grateful to have had this opportunity to connect with, and understand, some fine young men, and to collaborate with some dedicated boys' educators across the globe. At each stage of the process, from brainstorming to planning, implementing, reflecting, and even the arduous tasks of writing and compiling, their support, passion and professionalism was an inspiration. In the meantime, there are profound changes in both my classroom practice and as a key person for strategic wellbeing for the boys of Berwick Grammar School.

In the classroom, I find myself using stories more and more often to educate about character and to promote the ethos of Growing Good Men. My English classes focus more on the portrayals of men and boys and explore the key ideas that stood out to these wonderful participants with more understanding and sensitivity. I encourage boys to commit to wider reading with characters who inspire them and to see stories as a way to nourish a positive masculine identity. I encourage them to write and tell stories to younger boys and see the power they have as role models to shape their lives. I feel this has made me a better teacher of boys, with a more finely tuned concept of their emotional lives and a deeper sensitivity towards what reflects, challenges and sustains these.

As a policy maker, I undertook deep reflection of our practices in discussing masculinity and critically evaluated the messages we send about manhood in our daily school practices. At our

International Women's Day assembly in March of this year, I ensured the final message to the young men before me was one of gratitude for their respect and support. Instead of focusing on the less ideal treatment of women in aspects of our society, I encouraged them to continue this respect beyond the women in front of them, and to consider the lives of women in less developed or progressive countries who need good men like them to advocate for them.

And it begins to spread, both formally and informally in our school community. Slowly but surely. In the staffroom yesterday I heard two staff talking about the dangers of focusing only on toxic masculinity. It's a start.

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## APPENDIX 1

### BRIEF OUTLINE – STORYTELLING LESSONS

Each of these brief outlines was expanded to a fully scripted and reproducible lesson with resources, to ensure the integrity of the program and to allow for future utilization and expansion.

Session One: (20 minutes)

- Outline of project and tasks
- Tease out ideas of what it means to be a man
- Look at what is missing from this definition
- Examine portrayals of men in the media
- Discuss how these examples impact on us

Session Two: (20 minutes)

- Re-introduce the VIA Character Strengths
- Debate which of these strengths we believe contribute the most to becoming a good man

Session Three: (50 Minute English Class)

- Examine more positive definitions of masculinity, using Cleave-Grenville's proposed strengths
- Apply these to students' set text, 'All Quiet on the Western Front'.
- Also look at more toxic versions of masculinity portrayed in the text

Sessions Four: (20 minutes)

- Your audience – what do Year 7s need to hear? What do you remember you needed in Year 7? What have you heard the boys express concerns about?

Session Five: (20 minutes)

- Discussion of popular texts in this tradition that may also show positive representations of masculinity (i.e. the Harry Potter series). Encourage students to select and explore one that speaks to their own concept of Growing Good Men.

Session Six: (20 minutes)

- Look at examples of good men in our lives
- Begin crafting anecdotes/stories to share these

Session Seven: (50 Minute English Class) 10 September

- Focus on what makes good storytelling, the special role stories play in our lives
- Look at the role of stories to make sense of our lives - apply this to Remarque's reason for writing 'All Quiet on the Western Front'.
- Discuss change and character development as a key feature of powerful stories.

Session Eight: (20 minutes)

- Bringing together all elements – role models, storytelling, character strengths etc

Session Nine: (20 Minutes)

- Introduce students to the concept of the three-minute thesis to open up ideas for how to tell a good story quickly.

Session Ten: (20 Minutes)

- Allow boys to pair up and practice telling their stories and give each other feedback.

Session 11: (20 Minutes)

- Use of a “nitty gritty” planning sheet to really lock down our stories

Session 12: (20 Minutes)

Students view and evaluate a videotaped practice run by one of their peers.