

# Taekwon-Do in literature

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How written works may affect peoples' choice of art.

For years since I started doing Tae kwon do I have spent many hours reading fictional works by a variety of authors involving martial arts.

Over time it became apparent that of the literature that was available to children and young adults on the topic of tae kwon do was limited to say the least. Of the stories about martial arts that are available, most (not quite all), have been written by people who were not tae kwon do stylists. The indirect effect of this is that when children are growing up and reading books, at an age that things like the martial arts captures their imagination they are reading about karate and other common martial arts.

Having done no serious study on the matter I couldn't say whether or not youth reading has any effect on the numbers of people that join tae kwon do. I have however formulated the opinion that, as children grow up and get interested in martial arts, they will want to do whatever captures their imagination. In short if they are reading about karate then it will not be tae kwon do that they ask their parents to let them try.

For children and young adults what they can read about can be a big attraction. If they identify with a story, or a character in a story, then they are that much more likely to be captivated. If they are captivated then they often go out of their way to find out more, be that in the form of more books in a series, or different books about the same topic.

These days the interest that children have is also often influenced by what they see on television, or in the movies. Once again, unfortunately, this seems to consist of things like kung fu and kick boxing courtesy of big stars like Jackie Chan and Jean Claude van Damme. All the while our martial art, tae kwon do, would be left to slip by the way.

However the good news is that there are books that are about tae kwon do. While there are not many I feel that those that are available largely fit the category of books that children and young adults identify with. In addition to this most of the books that I have personally read, mainly from public libraries, seem to have authors who have a fairly solid knowledge of what they are talking about. This of course makes the stories that much more believable.

As far as non-fiction works for children and young adults are concerned there are a number of them available to the public at libraries. However from what I could tell from the ones that I looked at many of them appear to be sponsored by the WTF.

This seems to hold true with anything up to and including adult non-fiction. The exception to this rule seems to be the "Beginners guide to Tae kwon do" by Paul McPhail, which seems to be the only ITF based book available to the libraries.

Parallels with real life.

Of the authors that write about tae kwon do for younger readers the writers also seem to include other aspects that are common to our martial art. The most common of these is how many people find that success in tae kwon do helps them outside training in their day to day life.

Over the years that I have been doing tae kwon do many people have told me that since they began their training they have also gained in confidence outside training. This ranges from more confidence in public speaking and performing to groups to being surer of themselves in dealing with situations that arise on a day to day basis.

This is also reflected in the books that I have read. One such book written for younger children is the story called "Beware of kissing lizard lips" by Phyllis Shalant. This is a story about a boy who gets picked on at school because he is small. In this particular book a girl in his class starts teaching him tae kwon do and he gains in self-confidence.

Self-confidence seems to be a common gain from doing tae kwon do. To revisit an earlier point it is to tae kwon do's advantage to put these gains into books that children read because if they are experiencing a similar problem then they may well start doing tae kwon do themselves.

As age increases so do the challenges that children face. Accordingly the message in the books changes. One in particular "Kick Back" by David Hill is (in my own opinion) very good. He emphasizes a range of tae kwon do's virtues as the main character deals with bullies, parents, a new girl friend; basically everything that a teenager might have to deal with in real life. In this particular case the author includes most of the tenants of tae kwon do in his character's dealing with life.

These sorts of things would be the deciding factor for those thinking of starting an art based on what they had read. To improve Tae kwon do's chances with young people wanting to start a martial art the simplest thing might be to write more tae kwon do fiction, but that's more a choice for those interested in writing. Until that happens it'll be more a case of chance as to who does what art. Much as it is now.