AN INVESTIGATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STUDENT READING INTEREST AND TEACHER SELECTED NOVELS

Brian Croston

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

December 2005

Committee:

Dr. Cindy Hendricks, Advisor
Dr. Timothy J. Murnen
Dr. Rachel A. Vannatta
ABSTRACT

Dr. Cindy Hendricks, Advisor

Reading is an essential tool if one is to continuously obtain knowledge throughout his or her lifespan. The ultimate goal for middle school teachers is to motivate adolescents to read more in school as well as on their own for enjoyment to become mature readers. However, adolescents today are not actively engaged in daily reading by taking advantage of the books at their disposal. The middle school reading material may not match the attitudes and interests of each adolescent.

This investigation sought to determine how genre, topic, and theme of novels assigned to urban middle school students compared with their reading interests. Students’ attitudes and interests towards reading change as children mature from their elementary school years to middle school. In the middle school curriculum, all students are required to read the same exact books, regardless of gender, or interests. In order to study these issues, the following driving questions were developed: How do the genre, topic, and theme of novels assigned to urban middle school students compare with their reading interests? Are there significant differences in choice of genre, topic, and theme among gender? Are there significant differences in choice of genre, topic, and theme among grade level?

To answer these questions, a survey was developed and given to urban middle school students asking them for their top three genres, topics, and themes. In addition, teacher-assigned texts were analyzed for genre, topic, and theme.
This study found that while the assigning of novels matches urban middle school students’ reading interests, the topics and themes of the novels assigned do not match students’ reading interests. The findings from this study align with research from Worthy et al. (1999) indicating that the topic and theme of novels assigned to urban middle school students do not match their reading interests. The assigned novels matched students’ reading interests with genre, but the matching of topics and themes seemed not to be considered. This study suggests that teachers focus more on student interest when selecting the genres and themes of assigned reading.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge my family who has supported me and my decisions throughout this graduate program. Their encouragement was fundamental to the successful completion of my education.

I want to thank my committee members for their support and professional advice. Dr. Hendricks, thank you. Your eye for detail and editing expertise was invaluable. You are truly one of the best miracle workers. Dr. Murnen, thank you for your suggestions to expand the range of students included in my research. I would have overlooked a large group of variables and missed a crucial part of my data. Dr. Vannatta, I appreciate your help on the design of the surveys and your statistical expertise. I thank everyone again for your help and support.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION</th>
<th>..........................................................</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>........................................................................</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question</td>
<td>........................................................................</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationale</td>
<td>........................................................................</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>........................................................................</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>........................................................................</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE</th>
<th>..........................................................</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Motivation</td>
<td>........................................................................</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theories of Motivation</td>
<td>........................................................................</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ Reading Interests</td>
<td>........................................................................</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ Reading Attitude</td>
<td>........................................................................</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ Reading Motivation</td>
<td>........................................................................</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of Adolescents</td>
<td>........................................................................</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>........................................................................</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER III. METHODS AND PROCEDURES</th>
<th>..........................................................</th>
<th>22</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Methods</td>
<td>........................................................................</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>........................................................................</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>........................................................................</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumentation</td>
<td>........................................................................</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Interests</td>
<td>........................................................................</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content Analysis of Book Choices</td>
<td>........................................................................</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validity and Reliability</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedures</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Result</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genre, Topic, Theme Preferences by Gender</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genre, Topic, Theme Preferences by Grade</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genre, Topic, Theme Preferences by Assigned Novels</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>41</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS</td>
<td>43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For Further Study</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>51</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX A. SURVEY</td>
<td>57</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX B. PARENT PERMISSION LETTER</td>
<td>59</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX C. SCRIPT READ BY TEACHERS</td>
<td>62</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX D. ASSIGNED NOVEL LIST</td>
<td>64</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX E. EVALUATION OF ASSIGNED NOVELS</td>
<td>71</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Reading is the method to learn anything one desires. It is an essential tool if one is to continuously increase the level of knowledge throughout his/her lifespan; however, adolescents today are not actively engaged in daily reading by taking advantage of the books at their disposal. The level of becoming a mature reader is not being obtained. Students need to read frequently to keep their minds stimulated. Studies show that being a wide and frequent reader increases a student’s reading achievement by 10-15 percentile points on standardized tests (Guthrie & Alvermann, 1999). The amount of reading that students do both inside and outside of class correlates with their reading achievement (Guthrie & Alvermann, 1999).

According to Worthy, Moorman, and Turner (1999), it appears that most adolescents in school do not read for enjoyment or even want to feed their imaginations. Most middle school students are reading just to read. They are not reading for comprehension or knowledge, but for a grade. Generally, middle school students read to complete assignments, nothing more. The assignments pertaining to reading instruction given by teachers and educators confound the problem. Most students detest what they are being assigned to read, but read it because they have to read. In turn, reading becomes more like a chore and consequently a problem is created (Worthy, et al.). Any adolescent who is not reading is a problem and concern for all teachers and educators in school systems around the world. However, researchers may be looking in the wrong place to find the answers to why adolescents are not reading. Perhaps the problem lies in the reading materials of the school systems.
Statement of the Problem

The middle school reading material may not match the attitudes and interests of adolescents. In the middle school curriculum, all students are required to read the same exact books, no matter if the adolescent student is a boy or a girl. Each and every adolescent student comes from different backgrounds, experiences, and levels of maturity. Additionally, the adolescent mind and body are going through dramatic changes, too. Being an adolescent is not easy. During the adolescent ages, boys and girls are very distinct. Having two adolescent students, of opposite gender, read the same book does not mean they will have the same opinion of the book. Some will like and others will dislike the novel. The key is to give the students the books they will enjoy reading.

Adolescent students need to be actively engaged and interested in the subject matter. When the adolescent student becomes interested, it turns into curiosity. The curiosity then develops into motivation to learn more about what is being discussed. Developing the adolescent students’ motivation is half the battle in getting them to read. Students’ reading for knowledge and comprehension of the ideas being discussed in literature is only half of reading; becoming engaged in the reading is the other half.

Engaged readers, in academic and leisure reading, not only have acquired reading skills, but use them for their own purposes in many contexts; they possess beliefs, desires, and interests that energize the hard work of becoming literate (Guthrie & Alvermann, 1999). Reading is part of every class, from elementary schools through college and then into the workforce. Reading instruction for adolescent students needs to be broad enough to intrigue them, not based solely on the opinions of teachers, principals, and state or federal educators. Reading educators, who are often divided on ways to teach reading, are unified on the need to foster students’ positive
attitudes towards reading (Verhoeven & Snow, 2001). Reading instruction should match the attitudes and interests of the adolescent students in the classrooms.

Research Question

The purpose of this study was to determine how genre, topic, and theme of novels assigned to urban middle school students compared with their reading interests. Other researchers have studied this and this particular study will build on those studies. Previous research on attitudes and interests (Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1999) examined attitudes and interests across several grade levels while this study focused on two particular grade levels.

According to Meece, Wigfield, and Eccles (1990), researchers have documented that children's and adolescents' beliefs about their ability to read relate to and predict their achievement performance in different content areas like math and reading. Even if individuals believe they are competent and efficacious at an activity and know what to do to succeed, they may not engage in it if they have no incentive for doing so. Researchers found seventh through ninth graders' ability beliefs about their reading abilities positively predicted students' expectancies for success (Meece et al.). Anderson (1982) also found that children paid more attention to interesting than non-interesting materials.

Researchers such as McKenna, Kear, and Ellsworth (1995) examined their data by ages and grades. The search from elementary school to middle school was too wide and had multitude of variables to come to a single conclusion. To focus on adolescents, this study was conducted in a middle school setting in two grades - seventh and eighth – which were further narrowed by gender and grade levels. By narrowing the investigation of interest to a single gender and a single grade level, reading interests of urban middle school adolescents can be better understood. In order to expand on the work of previous researchers, this study was developed around the
following question: How do the genre, topic, and theme of novels assigned to urban middle school students compare with their reading interests? However, in order to more fully address the issue, the following questions were also explored: Are there significant differences in choice of genre, topic, and theme among gender? Are there significant differences in choice of genre, topic, and theme among grade level?

Rationale

It is getting more difficult to encourage adolescents to read as each school day, month, and year passes. While teaching children to read is the focus of early childhood education, getting children to keep reading, and to enjoy reading, is the focus of much middle childhood education.

The International Reading Association’s (IRA, 2004) position statement on adolescent literacy says that today’s adolescents do more reading and writing tasks than at any other time in human history. They also note that students will need reading and writing to survive the vast amounts of information they will find in society. The IRA, because of the expanding literacy demands placed upon adolescents, believes that adolescents deserve:

1. Access to a wide variety of reading material that they can and want to read;
2. Teaching instruction that builds both the skill and desire to read;
3. Student assessment that shows the students their strengths as well as their needs which guides them towards growing as readers;
4. Trained teachers who model and provide detailed instruction in reading comprehension and studying strategies across the curriculum;
5. Reading specialists who assist individual students having difficulty learning how to read;
6. Teachers who are trained to understand the complexities of individual adolescent readers, respect their differences, and respond to their unique characteristics; and

7. Homes, communities and a nation that will not only support their efforts to achieve advanced levels of literacy, but also provide the very support necessary for students to succeed. (p. 1)

It is clear from the IRA, both explicitly and implicitly, that the organization is concerned about student attitudes, interests and motivation to read, teacher skills and abilities in working with adolescents, and providing the caring supporting environment needed to accomplish these tasks.

Research from Worthy, Moorman and Turner (1999) suggests that time spent reading decreases as students’ progress through school. Worthy et al. argue that one reason for the decline is the lack of engaging reading material in school libraries and school reading lists. What students want to read is not available in the school setting (Worthy et al.). This may be particularly true in urban settings, where research suggests high-interest reading material needs to be made available to foster literacy in urban middle school students (Karr & Julian, 1999). From personal experience teaching in an urban middle school, most of the students detested reading textbooks and any other literary texts, such as novels, short stories, etc. It is puzzling why students dislike these materials, but maybe they were basing their decisions on their own individual reading preferences and motivations.

Motivating adolescents to read will enhance their knowledge base and help improve their reading. If the student struggles with reading the materials, comprehension difficulties can occur for the student. According to Collins (1996), there are three major reasons for comprehension difficulties: poor motivation, lack of experience, and self-interest. Any one of these or combination of the three may result in low achieving or low performing students. Collins notes
that students who are not successful in the classroom have not had experiences with language in meaningful, social situations. Collins believes it is the job of teachers to construct situations where students can find personal reasons to make the effort to comprehend books and by doing this, reading is reinforced as a useful language operation.

Understanding the material that is being read is crucial when taking tests, reading new class schedules, and selecting the day’s lunch menu. Not all reading is the same, just as not all books are written the same. With books written differently, it is logical to read each book in another way. For example, a textbook directly tells the reader factual information whereas reading a mystery novel allows the reader to guess at a problem or sequence of events and then tells the answer. Educators need to find innovative ways to help students learn. The first place to start is reading.

Definition of Terms

The purpose of this section is to clarify terms in the research. The terms are listed in alphabetical order.

1. Adolescent – male and female individuals who are in the process of puberty and coming into adulthood between seventh and eighth grade.
2. Genre – category of literature, such as: fiction, non-fiction, etc.
3. Middle School – grades seven and eight.
4. Theme – central or dominating idea.
5. Topic – subdivision of a theme.

Limitations

The study was limited by the sample size of students questioned during the investigation. The surveys were distributed at one urban middle school. Another limitation may be that some of
the students may not have answered the survey truthfully. It is possible they answered the survey the way they thought they should have answered.
CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There is a reading problem in middle schools: students are choosing not to read. The problem could be in the reading instruction of the teachers or in the middle school reading material, because it may not match the attitudes and the interests of the adolescents. Lack of student motivation can play a big part in not acquiring literacy skills. How do the genre, topic, and theme of novels assigned to urban middle school students compare with their reading interests? To address this question, also investigated were: Are there significant differences in choice of genre, topic, and theme among gender? Are there significant differences in choice of genre, topic, and theme among grade level?

When students become interested in what is being read, curiosity develops into motivation to read more. Instructional approaches or materials that are motivating, as well as teachers who show interest and enjoyment in the subject or activity, can sometimes lead to the development of long-term interest (Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1999). Worthy et al. state that when students are interested in what is being taught and have access to interesting materials, learning, motivation, effort, and attitudes improve. Chapter II explains motivation and explores theories related to motivation. In addition, the chapter also explores students’ reading interests, students’ reading attitude, students’ reading motivation, characteristics of adolescents, and adolescent attitudes and interests.

Definition of Motivation

According to Wigfield and Guthrie (1993), motivation can be separated into two distinct parts: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation has to do with pleasurable internal feelings or thoughts. Intrinsic motivation refers to being motivated and curious to be engaged in an activity for its own sake, rather than for reasons of reward (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Feeling proud or having
a sense of accomplishment following an “A” on a test in a difficult class is an example of extrinsic reward. Receiving the letter grade is external. Wigfield and Guthrie (1993) believe that readers' engagement in reading is greatly facilitated when they are intrinsically motivated to read and find personal meaning in the reading that they do.

With extrinsic motivation, external factors motivate the individual to do a specific task. For example, adults go to work to get a paycheck, which in turn pays the bills. A common nation-wide method used for providing motivation is rewarding students for reading, an extrinsic motivation. Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich put this principle into practice, by implementing a program called Learning by Earning. Gingrich paid students in a Washington D.C. classroom two dollars for reading a book and answering questions about it. Similar programs that offered rewards have been implemented elsewhere to motivate students to read. Book-It was one of these, sponsored by Pizza Hut. After reading a set number of books, the child was rewarded by receiving a star, and a free pizza.

Maehr (1976) defined continuing motivation as an individual’s engagement in a learned activity outside of the context in which it was learned. He argued that schools focus too much on learning in school and not enough on promoting children's continuing motivation to learn outside of the school setting. Oldfather (1992), who examined studies of children's engagement in school reading and writing activities, found that students' motivation to learn declined as they went into junior high school. Oldfather also discussed how the students' ownership of their literacy learning dropped while in middle school. Once in middle school, students' goal orientations turned more to grades and other extrinsic purposes, rather than on the intrinsic rewards associated with learning.
Lavoie (1990) states there are common myths about motivation. Some parents and teachers say, “Nothing motivates that kid” or “He’s never motivated!” These statements are not true according to Lavoie. Lavoie explains that he once worked with a child who everyday would force his fingers down his throat prior to his daily reading class. He would vomit so he was excused from class. His teacher told Lavoie that the child was not motivated to improve his reading. Lavoie believes the student was motivated, but his primary motivator was to avoid the pain and embarrassment of stumbling through reading in front of his teacher and classmates. Lavoie says it is very difficult to stay focused and motivated when one is hungry, tired, frightened, thirsty, or stressed. All of these conditions have a significant impact upon a child's ability to maintain motivation. Each individual has his or her own list of motivators. Each child has his/her own individual motivation profile at home and in the classroom (Lavoie).

Research on the importance of adolescents’ out-of-school literacy has generally focused on students who can read, but choose not to read in school. There is no reason to believe that the difference in text between in school and out-of-school reading does not also apply to unmotivated or struggling readers who are experiencing the same kinds of social, emotional, and psychological development and explorations as their peers. Educators need to identify individual student interests in school. Research on adolescents’ out-of-school literary texts suggests that to get a better idea of readers’ interests and motivations is to observe them when they have opportunities to read what is important to them.

Theories of Motivation

Fisher (2001) identifies three distinct theories of motivation: Attribution Theory, Goal Theory, and Self-Determination Theory. In the Attribution Theory, students' perceptions of their educational experiences generally influence more of their motivation. Students with a history of
failure in school have a difficult time sustaining their motivation. Students who believe failure results from factors beyond their control will have difficulty with improvement. Students who take responsibility, and see their lack of success is due to poor study habits or lack of important skills (which can be learned), will more likely put forth some effort to change their situation.

In the Goal Theory, students have different reasons or purposes for achieving. This theory is broken into task and goal orientation (Midgely, 1993). Students with a task orientation believe that the purpose of achieving is personal improvement and understanding. They focus and define success on their own progress in mastering skills and knowledge. Students with a goal orientation focus on comparing with others. Students with a task orientation seek help more, and demonstrate more positive attitude about school and themselves as learners.

The Self-Determination Theory has three categories of needs: a sense of competence, relatedness to others, and autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Middle school students want and need to be included in decision-making and to have some sense of control over their activities. The students do not want to have a dictatorship in the classroom. Matthewson (1985) stated that individuals' attitudes toward reading differ across subject areas.

Students’ Reading Interests

There are tremendous differences between students as readers in the middle grades (Collins, 1996). Personal interests play a critical role in the students’ engagement and success with reading. Middle school teachers have the ability to create classrooms that are responsive to the needs and interests of all of the students they teach. Collins discusses how the failure cycle was broken for one group of high school students by using newspapers instead of traditional reading skills material, such as worksheets, for classroom reading and writing activities. Students who had failed for years as language users experienced success as readers (Collins).
Beyard-Tyler and Sullivan (1980) conclude that to encourage reading among adolescents, the reading materials need to be interesting to the potential readers. Each day teachers make instantaneous decisions about reading materials, which are often decided on only one factor, such as length of book, type of words included, or interest connection for the student (Hiebert, 1999).

Probst (1987) argued that adolescent literature that deals with issues students will likely confront in middle school needs to be in the curriculum. Adolescent literature touches students’ lives, address issues that matter to the students, and raises questions about events that may occur in their lives. Text should be judged on the possibility that the students’ reaction with the literary book is “committed, interested, reasoned, emotional, and personal” (p. 28).

According to Worthy et al. (1999), “identifying middle school students’ current interests…can help to illuminate patterns of change over time, possible influences on preferences, and the ways in which schools are influenced by students’ preferences” (p. 12). In a study of middle school students’ reading preferences and the materials available in their school libraries and classrooms, Worthy et al. noted that when students are both interested in what is being taught and have access to materials that interest them, learning, motivation, effort, and attitudes improve. Their study examined reading preferences of sixth grade students. They found by interviewing sixth graders that they preferred scary books, comics, popular magazines, sports, and drawing books for in class. When students were asked to identify what they would read if they could read anything at all, they responded that they would read scary books, comics, sports, teen magazines, and mysteries. When students were asked to select a favorite author, the most frequently cited authors were Roald Dahl, Ann M. Martin, Shel Silverstein, William Shakespeare, Agatha Christie, Lois Lowry, Katherine Peterson, and Beverly Cleary. Other
frequent cited authors were R.L. Stine, Stephen King, Judy Blume and C. Pike (Worthy et. al, 1999).

Middle school students reported that what they liked to read outside of school, such as popular magazines, scary stories, and mysteries, are typically not available in their classrooms (Worthy et al., 1999). Worthy et al. suggest that personal interest in a subject motivates and facilitates the learner in going beyond surface level information to a deeper understanding. Worthy et al. believe in two areas of interest: situational interest which focuses on how the learning environment can capture or create interest, and instructional approaches interest which focus on the motivating materials and/or teacher which can sometimes lead to the development of long-term interest. Creating hands-on activities and doing other activities out of the ordinary, such as field trips and experiments, can help capture students’ interests. Teachers should make the books come to life in the classroom. Hyatt (2002) believes that through literature, students can call on their own experience, identify problems, view and critique character perspectives. These conditions may include social relationships, the way students interact with each other in the classroom, and characteristics of instruction as well as materials or objects that are personally interesting.

By teachers administering preference surveys and opened ended questions to students about their favorite materials and authors, generalizations can be made about middle school students. According to McKenna et al. (1995), the most preferred materials among the middle school students were scary books and stories, comics and cartoons, magazines about popular culture, and books and magazines about sports. Additional popular materials were drawing books, books and magazines about cars and trucks, series books, series books, funny books, and book discussing animals.
Ivey and Broaddus (2000) suggest that a vast range of materials should include high interest materials for engagement, such as scary stories, series books, graphic novels, joke books, magazines, and baseball cards. Easy-to-read materials consist of books with repetitive patterns, easy nonfiction series books, picture books, songs, and transitional chapter books. Ivey and Broaddus reported that sixth graders who responded in the survey selected free reading time as their favorite part of the language arts class. They believed the free time gave the students a chance to interact, think, and learn from the book.

Ivy and Broaddus (2001) argue that reading materials are not only a matter of student interest, but also a curriculum issue. In their survey of middle school readers, they found that most students mentioned award-winning contemporary realistic fiction or fantasy for school reading. In a classroom setting reading does not take individual skills into account. A teacher chooses a novel based on what is being taught. A variety of books available in the classroom library will help improve unmotivated and negative attitudes towards reading.

In April 2003, the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study reported results from 35 countries (Sainsbury, 2004). According to the study, around 70% of children said that they like to read stories, comics and magazines. Sainsbury also found that children mainly choose to read stories, comics and magazines. Younger children are more likely than the older ones to read comics, information books or poems, whereas magazines and newspapers are more popular with the middle school through high school students than elementary students. Boys are more likely to read comics, newspapers and information books whereas girls prefer stories, poems and magazines. (Sainsbury).

Cunningham (2004) believes that entering into adolescence affects students’ attitude and motivation towards reading. Cunningham examined studies with preteens, which suggest
teenagers might read more if the material fits their individual interests. Cunningham noted, "As kids enter adolescence, as they have more options what to do with their time, more control, as the peer group becomes more important, and the peer group is not a highly literate or academically oriented peer group, then engagement becomes a serious problem" (p. 2).

Students’ Reading Attitude

McKenna et al. (1995) report that trends can be found in students’ recreational and academic reading attitudes. McKenna et al. believe the overall attitude in reading, both in recreational and academic, starts out high but decreases significantly as students get older. McKenna et al. also examined grade level declines in recreational reading for students with high, average, and low ability across the grades. The average ability readers had a significant decline. The low ability readers significantly declined between second and third grade and between fourth and fifth grade. McKenna et al. noted that across the grades, a significant decrease in attitude toward academic reading for students with high, average, and low ability occurred. High, average, and low ability readers declined approximately at the same rate.

McKenna et al. (1995) also examined students’ attitude toward recreational reading based on gender. Girls had a more positive attitude than the boys at all grade levels. Their research confirms what other studies have found: girls tend to like reading more than boys. With respect to students’ attitude toward academic reading based on gender, McKenna et al. found that girls’ attitudes again were higher than boys, but in academic reading both declined at the same rate as they progressed through school.

According to McKenna et al. (1995), multiple generalizations can be made about students’ attitudes about recreational and academic reading. Recreational and academic readings begin at a positive position and decline as students progress through the grade levels. The
increasing negative attitudes towards reading and the gap between ability levels expand with age. Girls have a more positive attitude towards recreational and academic reading on all grade levels. A negative trend can be seen in students’ attitudes toward recreational and academic reading as they pass through school.

Mathewson (1985) believes that many of the students with negative attitudes make a conscious decision not to read. Ross (1996) argues that if reading is important, then students should see the importance of reading, by allowing them time to read in school. One of the best ways to get students to read is to give them time to read. For some students, reading outside of school is not a priority. Homework in other classes, family concerns, etc. prevent students from reading at home. Ross also states many of the students make decisions not to read because they do not see that reading away from school has value. Reading is another school chore for them to do. They associate no aesthetic pleasure with reading because they do not remember seeing a parent or guardian reading.

Beers (1998) found middle school students with negative attitudes toward reading share some characteristics. These students with negative attitudes did not place any aesthetic value on reading. Possibly the students did not have or had very few reading experiences. Students with negative attitudes towards reading often only have reading experiences in a school setting. In turn, they may view reading to be only for learning purposes. According to Beers, most commonly these students do not view themselves as readers. These students with negative attitudes need to connect with texts in a personal way. In Beers’ interviews with middle school students, she found that unmotivated and under skilled readers preferred texts with pictures, such as magazines, newspapers, and comic books. For unmotivated and struggling readers to improve, they need to read texts that can be handled independently. Beers believes that students with
negative attitudes towards reading need to move into a group of readers with whom they can discuss their readings and learn from one another.

From the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study, Sainsbury (2004) reported that most children enjoy reading, but this enjoyment declines slightly as they get older. Around 70% of children said that they like reading silently by themselves, read at home most days and do not think reading is boring. The younger age group are slightly more positive about reading than the older. Girls enjoy reading more than boys. Girls’ answers are significantly more positive than those of boys. Children’s confidence and independence as readers increase as they get older (Sainsbury).

Sainsbury (2004) also noted that changes have occurred in reading attitudes from 1998 to 2003. There were 28 schools in the survey which completed questionnaires in the summer of 1998 which allowed change over time to be measured. According to Sainsbury, children’s enjoyment of reading has significantly declined since 1998. Sainsbury found children are less likely to enjoy going to the library, and more likely to prefer watching television to reading, than they were in 1998.

Students’ Reading Motivation

Unmotivated readers report that they would read more if they had time to read and were able to read materials they prefer in school (Worthy & McKool, 1996). Using many young adult novels in the classroom unlocks that door of resistance to reading and resistance to learning, and ultimately opens a pathway to success in school, but the students disagree (Karr & Julian, 1999). Students come from every diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and the common thread that binds them together is their response to young adult literature (Karr & Julian). When students were asked where they liked to read, they replied, “Anywhere but here,” “This school needs to
get some new books that we like to read,” “These nasty old books are disgusting,” and another stated, “Reading means boring books that teachers make you read” (Karr & Julian, p. 4).

In their survey of over 1,700 sixth graders, Ivey and Broaddus (2001) reported that good reading materials were the greatest factor in students’ motivation to read in school. Texts students read in their English classrooms differed significantly from what they reported that they preferred to read. While in school, the students’ reading choices were quite slim. The majority of the in-class selection consisted of award-winning, fictional class novels, while their out of school choices included a range of genres from magazines, nonfiction, poetry, comics, and newspapers and covered a variety of topics such as World War I, marine mammals, and cooking.

According to Karr and Julian (1999), The Outsiders, Scorpions, and Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry are a few titles that are currently popular among middle school students. From a casual survey (Irwin, 2003) of several middle school classes showed Holes, Walk Two Moons, Lord of the Rings, and To Kill A Mockingbird, among others, were good indicators of what middle school students most often reached for from the bookshelf.

Characteristics of Adolescents

According to Wigfield, Eccles, Mac Iver, Reuman, and Midgley (1991), a physical and mental change occurs when one goes from elementary to middle school. In middle school, time is more structured. For example, the bell rings at the end of every class period, moving on to their next class no matter if they finished the work in the previous class. Adolescent self-image becomes more important than academic status as students move into middle schools (Wigfield, et al.).
Students in middle school have developed definite emotional and attitudinal traits. According to Thinkport (2004), these personality or character features play a crucial role in motivation, which includes:

1. **Attitudes toward reading** - Many students like to read and read at every opportunity at both school and home and some only read as required. A number of students view reading as saying all the words correctly while others dwell on the meaning and connect it to personal experiences.

2. **Self-concept** - Students vary greatly in their opinions of themselves. These images of self worth, developed in infancy, are strong and resistant to change as children get older. Self-concept plays a significant role in motivation. Students with poor self-concepts are less likely to respond to instruction are usually low risk takers. Risk taking is essential in schooling. A moderate degree of risk taking facilitates the desire to try something new. It helps each student rebound from unsuccessful attempts and influences the degree of persistence one applies to a new learning experience.

3. **Experiential** - Intermediate students vary in two types of experiences; life experiences and literary experiences. The life experiences vary because students come from diverse families. Classrooms, schools, and school systems now reflect a multicultural diversity in American education. This diversity translates into a wide range of experiential differences. Cultural and ethnic differences vary the experiences students have had with language, customs, foods, and relationships. (pp. 2-3)
According to Urdan and Klein (1998), the stereotypical image of adolescents can be described as awkward bodies that are continually changing and raging hormones. Changes brought by these hormones make adolescents become more interested in who they are than willing to accept the word of an authority figure, such as teacher or parent. Urdan and Klein noted that adolescents become more interested in themselves and their social world. Adolescents are fully aware of similarities and differences between them and their peers and become focused on their strengths as well as their weaknesses. Being seen as not able to do a task as well as others affects the teen’s confidence, which the lack in confidence can affect academic performance negatively.

Additional evidence of unique traits and characteristics of adolescents comes from data from the 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2002). For example, in eighth grade, at a time when students are expected to acquire information through the reading of textbooks and other materials, 32% of boys and 19% of girls cannot read at the basic level. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (2002), only 29% of eighth graders participating in the NAEP assessment scored at the proficient level in reading. Only 31% of eighth graders taking the NAEP test did not read at grade level. Seven percent of the eighth grade classes of 1988 were dropouts. This is, they were not enrolled in high school and had not completed high school. By 1992, 12% were dropouts.

Studies of the 1992 National Assessment of Educational Progress data show that among students in high performing schools, their positive attitudes toward achievement are consistent from the fourth to the eighth to the twelfth grades. National Assessment of Educational Progress (2002) found that among students in schools that scored in the bottom one-third on the NAEP tests, between the fourth and eighth grades there is a dramatic decline in their attitudes toward
achievement. While 27% of these students had positive attitudes toward achievement in the fourth grade, by the eighth grade only about seven percent retained these attitudes (NAEP, 2002).

Summary

Reading is a crucial part of daily life. Our society is based on the ability to read and write. Without these basic skills, no one will fit comfortably into today’s society. Adolescents need to learn these pivotal skills. As teachers and educators, it is our job and concern to help all students take part in becoming an active reader. Research from McKenna et al. (1995), as well as Worthy et al. (1999), suggests that adolescents will read if the reading material is interesting and motivating. Getting students intrinsically motivated about reading will help them find personal meaning in the text (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1993). Finding personal meaning in the text will turn into interest in the topic, thus encouraging students to read more about the topic or related topics.

Research (Beers, 1998) has shown that the adolescents’ views of reading change when they move from elementary school to middle school and, with these changes, their attitude towards reading crumbles. Students with negative attitudes towards reading began to view reading as a chore and something that should only be done for school learning purposes. With negative attitudes towards reading growing throughout the transfer between elementary, middle, and high schools, educators need to use and try different types of reading materials to avoid this downward spiral of non-readers.
CHAPTER III. METHODS AND PROCEDURES

While teaching children to read is the focus of early childhood education, getting children to keep reading, and to enjoy reading, is the focus of much middle childhood education. Worthy et al. (1999) suggest that time spent reading decreases as students’ progress through school. They also argue that one reason for the decline is the lack of engaging reading material in school libraries and school reading lists. According to Worthy et al. what students want to read is not available in the school setting. This may be particularly true in urban settings, where research suggests high-interest reading material needs to be made available to foster literacy in urban middle school students (Karr & Julian, 1999).

If we accept current research that suggests that it becomes more difficult to get students to read as they move through the grades, it seems logical and prudent to determine what students want to read, which may provide teachers and librarians with some direction when it comes to selecting books for students. First, the teachers and librarians need to know what students like to read. In order to find out the students reading interests, this study was developed around the following question: How do the genre, topic, and theme of novels assigned to urban middle school students compare with their reading interests? However, in order to more fully address the issue, the following questions were also explored: Are there significant differences in choice of genre, topic, and theme among gender? Are there significant differences in choice of genre, topic, and theme among grade level?

Methods

Research Design

This investigation involved survey research. The data collected were quantitative in nature. The survey involved an in-depth analysis of urban middle school students’ interests based
on genre, topic, and theme. The survey (see Appendix A) was developed by compiling a list of genres, topics, and themes based on the works of Cullinan and Galda (2002) and Tunnel and Jacobs (2000). A single survey was administered to middle school students. The survey consisted of questions regarding the students’ reading interests in genres, topic and themes. Students were also asked to explain their book choices allowing for a qualitative analysis as well.

A second part of the research design involved a content analysis of novels selected by urban middle school teachers and placed on a list of appropriate novels for reading in the middle school. Once the survey was completed and the novels were analyzed based on genre, topic, and theme, comparative analyses were conducted to answer the research question.

Participants

The participants in this investigation were students attending an urban public middle school. The middle school was located in northeastern Ohio and consisted of approximately 480 seventh and eighth grade students in 16 classrooms. This urban public middle school was selected due to its close proximity to Bowling Green State University and researcher familiarity with the school. The middle school has a low socio-economic status; 12.2% of the students receive reduced lunches and 59.8% receive free lunches. Diversity exists amongst the student population: 68% White, 30% African American, 1% Hispanic, and 1% American Indian (School Tree, 2005). The male to female ratio is even with 50.4% male and 43% female. All students who were present during the administration of the survey and who had signed permission forms were encouraged to participate. The survey did not discriminate based on reading ability.

Of the 480 consent letters sent home, only 155 were returned. Out of the 155 students eligible to participate in the study, only 132 students were administered the survey. A total of
132 students participated in this study. Out of the 132, there were a total of 69 female and 63 male. Between the two grades, there were 64 seventh graders and 68 eighth graders.

**Instrumentation**

The Reading Preference Survey (RPS) started off with directions on how to take their and what it was supposed to do. The RPS included a list of most frequently cited genres, topics, and themes (Cullinan & Galda, 2002; Tunnel & Jacobs, 2000). The RPS took no longer than ten minutes to complete. This allowed an analysis of genres, topics, and themes preferred by the students.

The first section asked the students’ genre preference: fiction, non-fiction (biography-autobiography, fantasy, folklore, historical fiction, poetry, plays, and science fiction). In parentheses, students were reminded that fiction is not real and non-fiction focuses on what is real: fiction which is a made up story and non-fiction a true story or factual information. This was designed to ensure that students’ selections were based on their likes, rather than on not knowing the definitions of fiction and non-fiction. There were nine possible choices and the students were able to put an “X” by three of their preferred genres. This section took roughly around three minutes or less.

In the second section, the students selected their three favorite topics. The topics included: adventure, animals, horror, humor, mystery, realistic fiction, sports, war, and western. Out of the nine choices in this section the students once again had to pick three of their topics. This section took roughly around three minutes or less.

For the third part of the survey, students identified their three favorite themes. Students were reminded that theme was the topic of discussion. The themes were: city/country life, growing up, competition, courage, death, family, friendship, love, life situations, parents, peer
pressure, relationships, and school. This section was the largest of the three, thirteen items were listed in the last portion of the RPS. Once again the students had to mark three of their top three themes. This segment took longer to complete than the previous two sections, the time to finish was around four minutes or less.

Student interests.

The surveys provided information regarding types of reading material urban middle school students were interested in reading. The data identified what genre, topics and themes the students liked to read at that particular grade. The data provided information regarding which books were students’ favorites from among those they have read in school. Qualitative data allowed for a comparative analysis as to why the student chose particular books as their favorites. Demographic data collected permitted an analysis based on gender and grade differences.

Content analysis of book choices.

The middle school teachers in seventh grade and eighth grade provided a list of 24 novels. Each grade provided 12 novels that they assigned to their students. Each book was read to determine the genre, topic and theme and verified through www.amazon.com and www.waldenbooks.com. This information was recorded. Data from each book were then put into a table and analyzed (see Appendix E for an analysis of the books).

The middle school teachers in seventh grade and eighth grade provided a list of 24 novels (see Appendix D). Each grade provided 12 novels that they assigned to their students. Each of the novels was read by the researcher to determine the genre, topic, and theme of each book (see Appendix E for an analysis of the books).
The books were initially read and classified the novels’ genre, topic, and theme. Completing each book a short summary was written. After the researcher has read and compared the teacher assigned novels, they were then looked up on the internet at www.amazon.com and www.waldenbooks.com. The summaries from the websites were then compared with the researcher’s summaries. The information from the websites was then integrated into the previous written summaries (See Appendix E). The websites also corroborated the genre, topic, and theme choice made by the researcher. The websites functioned as inter-rater reliability.

*Validity and Reliability*

The first step in completing this research project was to develop the Reading Preference Survey (see Appendix A). The RPS was then reviewed and critiqued by two panels of experts. The first panel of three members reviewed the survey for grammatical, mechanical, and technical errors. The focus of this review was to ensure that the survey was understandable and included a variety of genres, types and themes of novels. The second panel reviewed the format and organization, ensuring that the survey designed would answer the research questions. Changes were made in the survey based on feedback received. Having two panels review the RPS and make changes made the survey valid. With a valid survey, the RPS becomes more reliable when distributed to the students. The students did not have trouble understanding the RPS. The survey was administered and taken easily and promptly.

*Procedures*

Once the survey was finalized (see Appendix A), it, along with the proposed study, was submitted to the Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB) for approval. Upon receipt of approval by the HSRB, several visits were made to the school to explain the project to the students and teachers. A permission slip (see Appendix B) was given to each student to take home for their
parent or guardian to sign. The permission slip allowed the students to take the survey. Once a common date was agreed upon with the teachers, the surveys were taken to the school to be administered. The researcher was not present for the administration of the RPS. The survey was administered to all students who wanted and were approved to participate.

The classroom teacher administered the surveys through the language arts classes since all students were required to take language arts. To minimize the probability of a student taking the survey twice the language arts classes were the only classes to receive the survey. A script was written that outlined what would be said in the room before the survey was administered (see Appendix C). The students were able to withdraw from completing the survey at anytime without fear of penalty. After the surveys were completed, the students and teachers were thanked. Students were permitted to ask questions before, during, and after the administration of the surveys.

Once the completed surveys were returned, they were initially divided according to grade. With the grades separated the data was then split into sub categories of male and female. Once in the proper gender categories, the males and females were put in chronological according to the age. After making the categories of the surveys, they were placed into a data table and analyzed. The information from the surveys and assigned novels was then analyzed by gender, grade, age, genre, topic, and theme.

**Data Analysis**

The surveys were tallied, grouped, and compared using chi square statistics. Chi square was used by gender and grade level differences, then comparing each to genre, topic, and theme. The survey was grouped and compared in three categories: grade (seventh or eighth), gender (male or female), and novel interests versus assigned novels. From the surveys, descriptive
statistics, such as percents and frequencies, data allowed an analysis of students’ preferences of favorite genres, topics, and themes that appear in novels. The data were also compared to the reading lists from which the students were able to select materials to read. The data were analyzed by using chi square ($\alpha < .05$) to determine if there were statistical differences between gender, grade levels, and student responses. Each individual answer on the survey was marked as a 1 or 0 according to the participants’ choices. Chi square helped address the following questions: Are there significant differences in choice of genre, topic, and theme among gender? Are there significant differences in choice of genre, topic, and theme among grade level?

Summary

Existing research indicates that the genre, topic, and theme of novels assigned to urban middle school students do not match their reading interests (Worthy et al., 1999). This investigation of students’ reading interests focused on administering a survey to 132 students who were enrolled in an urban, public, middle school. Once the surveys were developed, they were administered to middle school students. After the data were collected, it was analyzed by gender and by grade and compared with a middle school reading list to determine whether students’ interests match with the selections offered by the school. The data collected assisted in identifying what middle school students were interested in reading.
CHAPTER IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine middle school students’ reading interests of novels. The novels were broken into three distinct categories: genre, topics, and themes. A letter of consent was sent home for 480 middle school students in 16 different classrooms at a northeast Ohio middle school. Of the 480 consent letters sent home, 155 were returned. Out of the 155 students eligible to participate in the survey, only 132 students were given the survey. The research question answered by this investigation was: How do the genre, topic, and theme of novels assigned to urban middle school students compare with their reading interests? To address this question, also investigated were: Are there significant differences in choice of genre, topic, and theme among gender? Are there significant differences in choice of genre, topic, and theme among grade level?

Results

The data were grouped and compared in three categories: grade (seventh or eighth), gender (male or female), and novel interests versus assigned novels list (see Appendix D) obtained from the middle school. The data were analyzed by using chi square (\( \alpha < .05 \)). Each individual answer on the survey was marked as a 1 or 0 according to the participants’ choices.

A total of 132 students participated in this study: 69 female and 63 male. Between the two grades, there were 64 seventh graders and 68 eighth graders. The genres, topics, and themes least liked by the students were determined by the combined total of male and female students. If the genre, topic, or theme was picked 15 times or less it was marked as least preferred. The chi square test with a \( \alpha < .05 \) was utilized to ensure a probability of 5% or less for significance due to error.
Genre, Topic, and Theme Preferences by Gender

In the area of genre, significant differences existed between male and female preferences for genre (see Table 1). Male preferences were significantly higher than female for fiction, historical fiction, and science fiction ($\alpha < .05$). The differences in preference for poetry and plays were significant, with the females preferring that genre more so than the males. There were no significant differences in genre preferences for nonfiction, biography/autobiography, fantasy, and folklore. Using the criteria of 15 responses for least liked, both males and females did not like folklore. The females did not care for biography/autobiography, historical fiction or science fiction, while the males did not care for poetry and plays (see Table 1).

In the area of topics, there were significant differences in male and female preferences with humor, mystery, sports, and war stories (see Table 1). The preferences for sports and war stories among males were significantly higher than for females ($\alpha < .05$). Females’ preferences for humor and mystery were significantly different than those of their male counterparts. For least liked books, females did not seem to like war stories, while the least liked topics for stories among males and females was animal stories, realistic fiction and westerns.

In the area of themes, significant differences exist among the males and females (see Table 1). Middle school males prefer the themes of city/country life, growing up, competition, courage, death, and school ($\alpha < .05$), which are statistically different from females’ preferences of these themes. Similarly, there is a significant difference in the middle school females’ preferences for stories about friendship and love. Using the cut-off criteria of 15 or more responses made not preferred genre, topic, or theme, females did not like stories about growing up, competition.
Table 1

Genre, Topic, and Theme Preferences by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fiction</td>
<td>35 (51%)</td>
<td>45 (71%)</td>
<td>5.91*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Fiction</td>
<td>33 (48%)</td>
<td>28 (44%)</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bio/Autobiography</td>
<td>15 (22%)</td>
<td>17 (27%)</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fantasy</td>
<td>37 (54%)</td>
<td>33 (52%)</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folklore</td>
<td>6 (9%)</td>
<td>8 (13%)</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Fiction</td>
<td>9 (13%)</td>
<td>23 (37%)</td>
<td>9.87*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetry</td>
<td>41 (59%)</td>
<td>9 (14%)</td>
<td>28.5*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plays</td>
<td>22 (32%)</td>
<td>7 (11%)</td>
<td>8.29*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science Fiction</td>
<td>9 (13%)</td>
<td>19 (30%)</td>
<td>5.77*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adventures</td>
<td>29 (42%)</td>
<td>35 (56%)</td>
<td>2.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animals</td>
<td>15 (22%)</td>
<td>7 (11%)</td>
<td>2.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horror</td>
<td>35 (51%)</td>
<td>25 (40%)</td>
<td>1.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humor</td>
<td>41 (59%)</td>
<td>27 (43%)</td>
<td>3.62*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mystery</td>
<td>51 (74%)</td>
<td>24 (38%)</td>
<td>17.22*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realistic Fiction</td>
<td>12 (17%)</td>
<td>6 (10%)</td>
<td>1.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>17 (24%)</td>
<td>37 (59%)</td>
<td>15.83*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 1 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>City/Country Life</td>
<td>3 (4%)</td>
<td>12 (19%)</td>
<td>7.07*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growing Up</td>
<td>14 (20%)</td>
<td>21 (33%)</td>
<td>2.88*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>12 (17%)</td>
<td>26 (41%)</td>
<td>9.16*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courage</td>
<td>12 (17%)</td>
<td>21 (33%)</td>
<td>4.46*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death</td>
<td>20 (29%)</td>
<td>29 (46%)</td>
<td>4.1*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>10 (14%)</td>
<td>8 (13%)</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendship</td>
<td>29 (42%)</td>
<td>15 (24%)</td>
<td>4.92*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>43 (62%)</td>
<td>14 (22%)</td>
<td>21.58*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Situations</td>
<td>25 (36%)</td>
<td>16 (25%)</td>
<td>1.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>4 (6%)</td>
<td>2 (3%)</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Pressure</td>
<td>6 (9%)</td>
<td>7 (11%)</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>22 (32%)</td>
<td>8 (13%)</td>
<td>6.9*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>4 (6%)</td>
<td>10 (16%)</td>
<td>3.53*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $\alpha < .05$.

Note: Students were asked to select three topics so the percents are greater than 100%.
and courage. Males disliked books about love and relationships. Both males and females did not like stories about family, parents, peer pressure, and school.

**Genre, Topic, and Theme Preferences by Grade**

In the area of genre, seventh grade and eighth grade middle school students have differences that are statistically significantly in terms of preference (see Table 2). Significant differences exist between seventh grade students and eighth grade students with respect to non-fiction (preferred by eighth grade students), fantasy (preferred by seventh grade students), and science fiction, (preferred by eighth grade students). Using the criteria for least liked book, seventh grade students did not prefer biography/autobiography, historical fiction, or science fiction. The eighth grade students did not prefer plays, and neither the seventh grade nor the eighth grade preferred folklore.

In the area of topics, only two significant differences existed: the eighth grade preferred humor, while the seventh grade preferred mystery stories. In the area of likes, seventh grade did not like war stories; however, animals, realistic fiction, and westerns were identified as least favorite books selected by seventh and eighth grade students.

Examining the data regarding theme revels that there were no statistically significant differences between the seventh grade students and the eighth grade students. On the least-liked list, seventh grade students did not indicate a preference for books about growing up, courage, and relationships. Together, students indicated they did not like books about family, parents, peer pressure, or school.
Table 2

Genre, Topic, and Theme Preferences by Grade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>7th Grade</th>
<th>8th Grade</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N=64</td>
<td>N=68</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiction</td>
<td>37 (58%)</td>
<td>43 (63%)</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Fiction</td>
<td>23 (36%)</td>
<td>38 (56%)</td>
<td>5.28*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bio/Autobiography</td>
<td>15 (23%)</td>
<td>17 (25%)</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fantasy</td>
<td>40 (63%)</td>
<td>30 (44%)</td>
<td>4.47*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folklore</td>
<td>9 (14%)</td>
<td>5 (8%)</td>
<td>1.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Fiction</td>
<td>15 (23%)</td>
<td>17 (25%)</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetry</td>
<td>27 (42%)</td>
<td>23 (34%)</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plays</td>
<td>17 (27%)</td>
<td>12 (18%)</td>
<td>1.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science Fiction</td>
<td>9 (14%)</td>
<td>19 (28%)</td>
<td>3.80*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>7th Grade</th>
<th>8th Grade</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N=64</td>
<td>N=68</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventures</td>
<td>34 (53%)</td>
<td>30 (44%)</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animals</td>
<td>12 (19%)</td>
<td>10 (15%)</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horror</td>
<td>27 (42%)</td>
<td>33 (49%)</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humor</td>
<td>28 (44%)</td>
<td>40 (59%)</td>
<td>3*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mystery</td>
<td>43 (67%)</td>
<td>32 (47%)</td>
<td>5.44*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realistic Fiction</td>
<td>8 (13%)</td>
<td>10 (15%)</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>24 (38%)</td>
<td>30 (44%)</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 (continued)
Genre, Topic, and Theme Preferences by Grade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>7th Grade</th>
<th>8th Grade</th>
<th>( \chi^2 )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>City/Country Life</td>
<td>8 (13%)</td>
<td>7 (10%)</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growing Up</td>
<td>14 (22%)</td>
<td>21 (31%)</td>
<td>1.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>18 (28%)</td>
<td>20 (29%)</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courage</td>
<td>15 (23%)</td>
<td>18 (26%)</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death</td>
<td>25 (39%)</td>
<td>24 (35%)</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>9 (14%)</td>
<td>9 (13%)</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendship</td>
<td>22 (34%)</td>
<td>22 (32%)</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>27 (42%)</td>
<td>30 (44%)</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Situations</td>
<td>20 (32%)</td>
<td>21 (31%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>4 (6%)</td>
<td>2 (3%)</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Pressure</td>
<td>8 (13%)</td>
<td>5 (7%)</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>14 (22%)</td>
<td>16 (24%)</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>8 (13%)</td>
<td>6 (9%)</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* \( \alpha < .05 \).

Note: Students were asked to select three topics so the percents are greater than 100%.
Even if the seventh grade and eighth grade middle school students do not have a significant
difference in terms of preference, the grades largely prefer themes of growing up, death,
friendship, love, and life situations.

*Genre, Topic, and Theme Preferences by Assigned Novels*

In the seventh grade, fiction was the most often assigned book, with historical fiction
coming in a distant second (see Table 3). For the seventh grade, only fiction, fantasy and
historical fiction were assigned to students to read (see Table 3). The topic of assigned novels for
seventh grade is more diverse (see Table 3). The most frequently occurring topic for seventh
grade novels was adventure and realistic fiction. The seventh grade included all topics except
horror and western. The theme of assigned novels is quite diverse in the seventh grade (see Table
3). The favored theme by the seventh grade was life situations. The themes for seventh grade are
relatively spread out across the assigned novels.

In the eighth grade, fiction was the most frequently assigned genre (see Table 3). For the
eighth grade, the genre list includes fiction, biography/autobiography, fantasy, historical fiction,
and science fiction. The topic of assigned novels for eighth grade is spread throughout the books
(see Table 4). The most occurring topic for eighth grade novels was adventure and realistic
fiction. The eighth grade topic of western was the only one not found in the assigned novels (see
Table 4). The theme of assigned novels is quite diverse in the eighth grade (see Table 4). The
preferred theme of assigned texts in the eighth grade was life situations and family. The theme of
the eighth grade assigned novels concentrate around family, friendship, and life situations.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fiction</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Fiction</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bio/Autobiography</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fantasy</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folklore</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Fiction</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetry</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plays</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science Fiction</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventures</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animals</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horror</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humor</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mystery</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realistic Fiction</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 (continued)

Seventh Grade Genre, Topic, and Theme of Assigned Books

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>City/Country Life</th>
<th>Growing Up</th>
<th>Competition</th>
<th>Courage</th>
<th>Death</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Friendship</th>
<th>Love</th>
<th>Life Situations</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Peer Pressure</th>
<th>Relationships</th>
<th>School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Table 4

Eighth Grade Genre, Topic, and Theme of Assigned Books

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Genre</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiction</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Fiction</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bio/Autobiography</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fantasy</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folklore</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Fiction</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetry</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plays</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science Fiction</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Topic** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Adventures | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Animals | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Horror | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Humor | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Mystery | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 3 |
| Realistic Fiction | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Sports | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| War | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Western | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
Table 4 (continued)

Eighth Grade Genre, Topic, and Theme of Assigned Books

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>City/Country Life</th>
<th>Growing Up</th>
<th>Competition</th>
<th>Courage</th>
<th>Death</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Friendship</th>
<th>Love</th>
<th>Life Situations</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Peer Pressure</th>
<th>Relationships</th>
<th>School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0</td>
<td>0 0 0 1 0 0</td>
<td>1 0 0 0 0 0</td>
<td>1 1 0 0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0 0 1 1</td>
<td>1 1 1 1 1 1</td>
<td>0 1 0</td>
<td>0 1 1 1 5</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0 0</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0 0 0</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 1 1 3</td>
<td>0 0 1 0 0 0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

This investigation focused on the following research questions: How do the genre, topic, and theme of novels assigned to urban middle school students compare with their reading interests? However, the following questions were addressed: Are there significant differences in choice of genre, topic, and theme among gender? Are there significant differences in choice of genre, topic, and theme among grade level? From the results of the survey and an analysis of the content of the assigned novels, the genre matches the reported interests of males and females as well as seventh and eighth grade students. Genre, topic, and theme of novels assigned to urban middle school students do not match with their reading interests.

In the category of genre, females preferred fantasy (63%) and fiction (58%) while males preferred fiction (63%) and nonfiction (56%). The seventh grade students preferred fantasy (63%) and fiction (58%), while the eighth grade preferred fiction (63%) and nonfiction (56%). The books selected by the teachers for seventh grade and eighth grade were primarily fiction. Thus, there appears to be a match between student choice and teacher choice in the area of genre.

Examining whether student choice of topic matches with the assigned readings provides additional insight as to the book choices of middle school readers. Females preferred mystery (74%), humor (59%), and horror (51%), while their male counterparts preferred books that addressed the topics of sports (59%), adventures (56%), and war (41%). The analysis of the topic by grade level showed that seventh grade students prefer mystery (67%) stories and adventure stories (53%), while eighth grade students preferred humor (59%), and horror (49%). The match between student choice and the teacher-assigned novels shows that teachers choose adventure novels, followed by realistic fiction for both grade levels. While the seventh grade students
apparently get second choice with teacher assigned novels, the eighth grade does not get their first, second, or third choice (mystery, 47%).

Finally, in the category of theme, females preferred love (62%), and friendship (42%), while the males preferred death (46%) and competition (41%). The seventh grade students preferred books about love (42%) and death (39%), while the eighth grade students preferred books about love (44%), death (35%), and growing up (31%). The teacher assigned novels focused on life situations, city/county life and courage for seventh grade while the eighth grade focused on family, friendships, and life situations. It appears that in the area of theme, there is not much of a match between what is assigned for students to read and their preferences for reading material.

The genre, topic, and theme of novels assigned to urban middle school students vary in terms of the match between student interest and teacher assigned novels. The greatest match comes with genre, followed by topic, and then by theme. A connection can be made between what students want to read and what teachers assign them to read when it comes to genre. The relationship between what students like and what is being assigned weakens with topic and theme.
CHAPTER V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Reading is an essential tool if one is to continuously obtain knowledge throughout his/her lifespan. Knowing the students’ reading interests will help prepare lessons and teaching strategies for present and future educators. From this study, educators can take a better look into middle school students’ reading interests and better align reading assignments. How does genre, topic, and theme of novels assigned to urban middle school students compare with their reading interests?

Summary

The main question behind the survey and thesis was: How do the genre, topic, and theme of novels assigned to urban middle school students compare with their reading interests? It would benefit all educators if information about what the urban middle school students’ prefer to read could be collected.

Scholars are finding that reading has become more of a task than a way to expand imaginations among middle school students. Educators are finding it difficult to get students to read their text books and even chapter books that relate to topics in which they are studying. Middle school students lack the necessary motivation to read, and both intrinsic and extrinsic forms of motivation are not fully addressing this issue. The extrinsic rewards for reading are not long lasting enough and students reach a point where they no longer care about these extrinsic results. Also, extrinsic motivation still does not accomplish the ultimate goal of students learning to enjoy reading. Wigfield and Guthrie (1993) believe that readers' engagement in reading is greatly facilitated when they are intrinsically motivated to read and find personal meaning in the reading that they do. Therefore educator’s ultimate goal is to help achieve intrinsic rewards for students.
The best way to find a variety of books that students might be interested in and motivated to read is to discover the differences among the students. Most importantly when educators are judging which books a middle school student would be interested in, they must take into consideration the reactions of the student. Five reactions that these students may have include “committed, interested, reasoned, emotional, and personal” (Probst, 1987, p. 28). Without taking these reactions into consideration, students may easily be turned away from reading even more so than they already are. As educators we should take time to acknowledge the students’ thoughts of the novels.

When students were asked which topics they enjoyed reading about outside of school, many students stated they that enjoy reading popular magazines, scary stories, mysteries and a few other topics. Maehr (1976) defined continuing motivation as an individual’s engagement in a learned activity outside of the context in which it was learned. He argued that schools focus too much on learning in school and not enough on promoting children's continuing motivation to learn outside of the school setting. There needs to be a wide range of options when it comes to picking required reading for urban middle school students. The middle school students also mentioned that they enjoy reading comics. So, educators could easily find comics that relate to topics that they are teaching students at the time for the students who enjoy comics, or mystery books that relates to the topic that is being taught for those students who enjoy mysteries. The more options a student has when picking books relating to the topics being taught at school the more likely they will enjoy reading.

Reading is critical and it will be very difficult for a student to be able to succeed to their fullest potential if they do not enjoy reading. It should be required for teachers to survey their students at the beginning of the school year to find out what they enjoy reading, and then adapt
to the students’ needs to provide them with motivating reading options. No class is the same nor is every teaching style. Without giving middle students options and adapting to students needs we are not being true educators.

The survey was designed to uncover urban middle students’ reading preferences. The students were asked to choose their top three genres, topics, and themes. The data was collected and analyzed. The survey was grouped and compared in three categories: grade (seventh or eighth), gender (male or female), and novel interests versus assigned novels. The main genres of assigned books were fiction and historical fiction, topic was adventure and realistic fiction, and theme showed family and life situations holding the majority. The students enjoyed the genres of fiction, non-fiction, and fantasy, topic consisted of adventure, horror, and humor, and theme comprised of death, friendship, love, and life situations.

Results of such a survey will differ from each state, district, county, and school, because responses depend on the number of participants taking the survey. Results will also vary if the school is urban or rural, how much money is given to the school, and the socioeconomic status around the school? These are the tip of the iceberg aspects that deal with trying to find out what type of reading material students like to read. Every school has its own diverse community. Taking that into account only an assumption can be made about other schools results taking the survey.

Conclusions

On a positive side, the assigned novels match urban middle school reading interests in terms of genre, but the topic and theme of novels assigned do not match urban middle school students’ reading interests. The research from Worthy et al. (1999) indicates that the topic and theme of novels assigned to urban middle school students do not match their reading interests.
This study replicated those findings. The assigned novels matched students’ reading interests with genre, but then the matching of topics and themes seemed not to be considered. Teachers may only be choosing novels by genre only and not considering topic or theme.

Beyard-Tyler and Sullivan (1980) conclude that to encourage reading among adolescents, the reading materials need to be interesting to the potential readers. According to Worthy et al. (1999), “identifying middle school students’ current interests…can help to illuminate patterns of change over time, possible influences on preferences, and the ways in which schools are influenced by students’ preferences” (p. 12). This study supports the argument that educators need to take a deeper look into the novels they choose for their students. Any literature can be broken down into more specific categories such as topic and theme. Identifying the students’ current interests further into topic and theme will help educators select more appropriate literature for their classroom.

In a study of middle school students’ reading preferences and the materials available in their school libraries and classrooms, Worthy et al. (1999) noted that when students both are interested in what is being taught and have access to materials that interest them, learning, motivation, effort, and attitudes improve. Not engaging students with proper reading material is a key concern for all. Data produced by this study supports the idea of choosing more appropriate topics and themes need to be chosen. The topic and theme of the assigned novels conflict with the interests of the urban middle students. Knowing the assigned reading material in topic and theme does not match students’ reading interests is a positive step in the correct direction. The study helped specify a portion of the problem of getting students to read more and most of all be excited about reading. Conclusions can be drawn from this survey which can help teachers, educators, and school administrators around the world.
From the gathered data the most preferred genres, topics, and themes of middle school students can be found. The gender and grade category was an important factor to the conclusion of whether or not the genre, topic, and theme of novels assigned to urban middle school students matched their reading interest. The most preferred genres, topics, and themes of middle school students will be found by taking the most preferred by gender and grade categories. The top genres are fiction, non-fiction, fantasy, and poetry. Topics include mystery, humor, and sports. Theme consists of love and competition.

The genre, topic, and theme of novels affect student reading interests, attitude, and motivation. Giving students limited choices of reading material dampens students’ motivation and desire to be in school and to read, and in turn fuels the ongoing reading problem in middle schools. Lavoie (1990) states that each individual has his or her own list of motivators and has his/her own individual motivation profile at home and in the classroom. Many middle school students are choosing not to read because they encounter disengaging or disinteresting material in the classroom setting. The study helped shed light on solutions for this problem. Educators need to ask questions and find information about their students interests in all aspects of life and use those life experiences to draw them into the literary world. Teachers must take a deeper look into the literary works they are giving their students. Classifying the students’ preferences in the topic and theme of literature will help middle school students become more interested and motivated to read. Having a classroom full of eager students who want to read will make the process of teaching easier.

Adolescent middle school students’ characteristics differ from one pupil to the next. With the one student different from the next, it does not make sense to give the same reading context to all of them. Students in middle school have developed explicit individual emotional and
attitudinal traits. A student should not have to read a book which is forced upon them. The teacher’s job is to make the literature fun and help the students develop a sense of eagerness to read the literature to find out what it is about. Students should also read some classics in school. The key to having a successful reading curriculum is having variety. Teachers, educators, and school administrators around the world need to identify, accept, and embrace the diversity in their classrooms, thus providing their students with the richest literary environment possible.

Recommendations

Research from Worthy, Moorman and Turner (1999) suggests what students want to read is not available in the school setting. Data retrieved from this study supports their research. While genre seems aligned, topic and theme do not align with the urban middle school students’ reading interests. Solutions are possible to remedy this problem of finding urban middle school students’ reading interests.

Adolescent students need to be actively engaged and interested in the subject matter. Students need to read frequently to keep their minds stimulated. Engaged readers, in academic and leisure reading, not only have acquired reading skills, but use them for their own purposes in many contexts; they possess beliefs, desires, and interests that energize the hard work of becoming literate (Guthrie & Alvermann, 1999). Since each and every adolescent student comes from different backgrounds, experiences, and levels of maturity, teachers should ask students what they want to read. As educators and teachers it is our job to provide the students with the richest literary content as possible. With all literature, literary texts need to be analyzed from top to bottom, inside and out. The literature should be classified as specifically as possible to help match middle school students reading interests. This study provided educators and teachers even more crucial information to help the students and themselves read more than ever and
become more active in the classroom literary content. A few small acts can help all teachers and educators appropriately choose literature for urban middle school students.

Teachers need to get to know the class and the community by using some simple strategies such as giving a reading interest inventory in order to get an idea of how the class perceives literature and reading, or asking the students what their favorite types of book are based on the genre, topic, and theme of books. Knowing the class and community will give basis of what kind of literature that would work best for that individual class. Obtaining a list of preferences of reading interests will help with ideas of picking reading material. In turn it will make the teaching process little less difficult. Making a single step easier will make the teaching process smoother.

The literature in each classroom will be different. Before picking a book for a class to teach, teachers should rate the book’s positives and negative aspects. At all times, the teacher must have the class that is going to reading it in the back of their mind. Think of the reading levels of the class, the overall class interest, etc. Identify the texts genre, topic, and theme. For example, the morning class has students which are mainstreamed and the afternoon class is an enriched or higher level class. The same text will not necessarily work for every class. Every individual is different hence producing a diverse classroom for each classroom one teaches. Choose a book which accommodates that particular classroom and not the grade as a whole.

Use thematic teaching and vary the types of presentation of the literature. Thematic teaching broadens the students’ horizons by expanding horizontally into other types of books such as comics, magazines, picture books, short stories, etc. With thematic teaching the teacher can expand the choice of reading material to the students. Expanding the literature selection will allow teachers to let the students select a type of reading they enjoy. The teacher can pick out a
selected few types of literature and then let the students choose which literary text they want. This way it gives some teacher guidance but at the same time let the students have a choice in what they read.

For classroom teachers, college professors, librarians and all educators must remember there are other types of reading material besides fiction or historical fiction. Literature comprises a multiple genres, topics, themes, and many other categories. Give the class a chance to select the type of reading material they enjoy to read. Keep novels, comic books, magazines, etc. around the students. The more the students are exposed to literature the more likely they are to pick it up and read it.

For Further Study

The value of this study is immeasurable, but improvements can be made throughout the study. The survey could be more detailed by adding additional list of possible interests for each category could be given. Finding more information about the types of attitudes towards reading and adding a section of what the students’ attitude towards reading at the time of the survey would be beneficial. With more choices in each category the results would be more precise. Looking at informational background of the school and students could help narrow down preferred choices of genres, topics, and themes. Although the school had over 500 students the sample size was relatively small. The low number of completed surveys may have affected or skewed the results. A larger sample of participants could be assembled by going to multiple middle schools instead of just one. Also by going to more than one school, the individual schools could be compared to each other. The definition of middle school also could be broadened to include sixth grade if desired. The expansion of the definition of middle school so would also increase the sample size.
Summary

Learning is a constant and on-going process for teachers and students everyday. Teachers and students work side by side each other everyday and learn from each other. Through each experience comes knowledge and bias. School is a place of continuous experiences and education. As each day passes students gain wisdom.

Educators and schools need to use methods which emphasize students’ own interests. The method should be student centered, the teacher be a facilitator of learning, and have a close interaction with the students. Students should be given confidence that success can be achieved. Every ounce of encouragement helps the students and classroom environment. Everyone enjoys a pat on the back for a job well done. The confidence and encouragement then turns into initiative. The initiative makes the student want to become a better person and student. To become a mature student and citizen, the course material needs to be challenging and life oriented. Being able to identify what interests them makes school more fun for the student to attend and thus complete course work. The students’ willingness to learn as much as they can from the material is a positive outcome. The student will have the ability to reflect, explain, and summarize their chosen material. Hyatt (2002) believes that through literature, students can call on their own experience, identify problems, view and critique character perspectives. As a task is repeated more often, the participant becomes better at that particular task. Practice makes perfect in everything. Reading should become a daily exercise of the classroom of the choice of the students. Ross (1996) argues that if reading is important, then students should see the importance of reading, by allowing them time to read in school. The selection of books teachers, educators, librarians, and scholars is critical to a student’s success. In their survey of over 1,700 sixth
graders, Ivey and Broaddus (2001) reported that good reading materials were the greatest factor in students’ motivation to read in school.

Students will be changing with every classroom, every school, every year. Nothing is a given in teaching and dealing with adolescent middle school students, especially when comes to preferences of reading materials. As teachers and educators, we need to look for what motivates students to read and promote positive student attitudes towards reading. The solution for teachers and educators is to keep a positive classroom environment.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A.

SURVEY
Reading Preferences Survey

This survey is designed to determine what middle school students are interested in reading.

Please take a few moments to complete the survey. You need not put your name, but please complete the requested information.

Gender (Circle one): Male Female Age: ______ Grade: ______

1. Put an “X” by 3 genres of reading material you prefer.

___ Fiction ___ Folklore ___ Science Fiction
___ Non-Fiction ___ Historical Fiction
___ Biography/Autobiography ___ Poetry
___ Fantasy ___ Plays

2. Put an “X” by 3 of your favorite topics of reading material.

___ Adventures ___ Mystery ___ Western
___ Animals ___ Realistic Fiction
___ Horror ___ Sports
___ Humor ___ War

3. Put an “X” by the top 3 themes you like to read about. Theme is the central idea.

___ City/Country Life ___ Family ___ Peer Pressure
___ Growing Up ___ Friendship ___ Relationships
___ Competition ___ Love ___ School
___ Courage ___ Life Situations ___ Parents
___ Death ___ Parents
APPENDIX B

PARENT PERMISSION LETTER
Dear Parent(s) or Guardian(s),

Hello, my name is Brian Croston, a graduate student from Bowling Green State University. I am currently conducting research to examine what kind of novels middle school students are interested in reading. I am requesting permission for your child to participate in this study. Taking survey will benefit your child in the aspect of it will give teachers a better understanding of what likes to be read by middle school students. Knowing the novels of middle school students they prefer will help teaching instruction.

The survey will take approximately ten minutes of your child’s class time. The survey is voluntary. Taking the survey will not impact grades or classroom standing for participants who decide to participate or not to participate in the survey. All responses will remain anonymous. No individual information will be shared; only the overall results will be reported. No one other than your child will know if he/she participated in the research study. Thank you for allowing your child to participate in this study.

If you have questions about the survey please call Brian Croston at 419-372-7674 or the HSRB at 419-372-7716 about participant rights.

Thank you,
Brian Croston

Graduate Student at Bowling Green State University

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

I give my child ___________________________ permission to take part in the research study survey. Please return to your child’s Language Art classroom teacher.

Name: _____________________________    Date: _____________
APPENDIX C

SCRIPT READ BY TEACHERS
Please read the following to the classroom:

This survey is from Brian Croston, a graduate student from Bowling Green State University. He is currently conducting research to examine what kind of novels urban middle school students are interested in reading. He would like you to complete the survey to the best of your ability. It will take approximately five to ten minutes of your time. Taking the survey will not impact grades or classroom standing for participants who decide to participate or not to participate in the survey.

The survey is voluntary. All responses will remain anonymous. No individual information will be shared; only the overall results will be reported. No one other than yourself who has completed the survey will know if you participated in the research study. Brian thanks you for participating in this study. If you have questions about the survey please call Brian Croston at 419-372-7674 or the HSRB at 419-372-7716 about your rights.

At this time please distribute the surveys to students in the classroom.

Brian Croston
Graduate Student at Bowling Green State University
APPENDIX D

ASSIGNED NOVEL LIST
7th Grade Novels (Genre, Topic, Theme)

1. Hatchet – Gary Paulsen
   Fiction
   Adventure
   Courage, Life Situations

2. Someone is Hiding on Alcatraz Island – Eve Bunting
   Fiction
   Adventure
   City Life, Courage, Life Situations

3. The View FromSaturday – E.L. Konigsburg
   Fiction
   Humor
   Competition, Friendship, School

4. Journey to Jo’Burg – Beverley Naidoo
   Fiction
   Adventure
   Country Life, Courage, Family, Love, Life Situations

5. The Lottery Rose – Irene Hunt
Fiction
Realistic Fiction
Growing Up, Life Situations, Love

6. Tuck Everlasting – Natalie Babbitt
Fiction, Fantasy
Adventure, Humor, Mystery
Growing Up, Relationships

7. Where the Red Fern Grows – Wilson Rawls
Fiction
Adventure, Animals, Realistic Fiction
Country Life, Death (the dogs), Love (Little Ann & Old Dan) the dogs

8. Bridge to Terabithia – Kathetine Peterson
Fiction
Adventure, Sports
Country Life, Competition, Death, Friendship, School

Historical Fiction
Adventure, War
Courage, Friendship
10. Scorpians – Walter Dean Myers
   Fiction
   Realistic Fiction
   Growing Up, Life Situations

11. The Face on the Milk Carton – Caroline B. Cooney
   Fiction
   Realistic Fiction
   Family, Life Situations, Parents, Relationships

12. My Brother Sam is Dead – James and Chris Collier
   Historical Fiction
   War
   Death, Family

8th Grade Novels (Genre, Topic, Theme)

1. Woodsong – Gary Paulsen
   Autobiography
   Adventure, Animals
   Courage, Competition

2. Destiny – Elizabeth Haydon
Science Fiction, Fantasy
Adventure, War
Courage, Friendship

3. Taking Sides – Gary Soto
Fiction
Sports
Competition, Life Situations, School

4. The Friends – Rosa Guy
Fiction
Realistic Fiction
Growing Up, Death, Friendship

5. No Promises in the Wind – Irene Hunt
Fiction, Historical Fiction
Adventure
Family, Love, Life Situations

6. Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry – Mildred D. Taylor
Historical Fiction
Adventure, Realistic Fiction, Family Relationships
Courage, Family, Loyalty, Love
7. The Outsiders – S.E. Hinton
   Fiction
   Realistic Fiction
   Death, Family, Friendship, Relationships

8. Devil’s Arithmetic – Jane Yolen
   Fiction
   Horror, Realistic Fiction
   Courage, Death, Family, Friendship

9. House of Dies Drear – Virginia Hamilton
   Fiction
   Mystery
   Family, Life Situations

10. Walk Two Moons – Sharon Creech
    Fiction
    Mystery
    Death, Family, Friendship, Life Situations, Love

11. Child of the Owl
    Fiction
Humor, Adventure, Mystery

Family, Life Situations, Relationships

12. Nothing But the Truth - Avi

Fiction, Documentary

Realistic Fiction

School, Relationships
APPENDIX E

EVALUATION OF ASSIGNED BOOKS
7th Grade Novels

1. Hatchet – Gary Paulsen
   
   Genre: Fiction
   
   Topic: Adventure
   
   Theme: Courage, Life Situations
   
   Summary: Thirteen-year-old Brian Robeson is on his way to visit his father when the single engine plane in which he is flying crashes. Suddenly, Brian finds himself alone in the Canadian wilderness with nothing but his clothing, a tattered windbreaker, and the hatchet his mother has given him as a present and the dreadful secret that has been tearing him apart ever since his parents' divorce. But now Brian has no time for anger, self-pity, or despair it will take all his know-how and determination, and more courage than he knew he possessed, to survive.

2. Someone is Hiding on Alcatraz Island – Eve Bunting
   
   Genre: Fiction
   
   Topic: Adventure
   
   Theme: City Life, Courage, Life Situations
   
   Summary: The Outlaws, the toughest gang in school, follow Danny Sullivan to Alcatraz Island after he unintentionally thwarts one member's attempt to mug an old woman. He didn't know the mugger is the gang leader's brother. Desperation overcomes his fear when he heads to Alcatraz Island to escape the gang's revenge and terror turns to action when he realizes they've followed him. There he finds himself and a Park Service employee trapped by the gang in an old prison cell block as they plot their revenge.

3. The View FromSaturday – E.L. Konigsburg
   
   Genre: Fiction
Topic: Humor

Theme: Competition, Friendship, School

Summary: Four students, with their own individual stories, develop a special bond and attract the attention of their teacher, a paraplegic, who chooses them to represent their sixth-grade class in the Academic Bowl competition. This is a tale about a team, a class, a school, a series of contests and, set in the midst of this, four jewel-like short stories -- one for each of the team members that ask questions and demonstrate surprising answers.

4. Journey to Jo’Burg – Beverley Naidoo

Genre: Fiction

Topic: Adventure

Theme: Country Life, Courage, Family, Love, Life Situations

Summary: When their baby sister becomes dangerously ill, thirteen-year-old Naledi and her younger brother make a journey of over 300 kilometers from their village to Johannesburg, where their mother works as a maid for a white family. The trip takes several days, carrying them into a world that is both larger than they imagined, and more restricted for blacks than they ever thought possible. Mma (mother in Tswana) is located; she goes home with them, even though her white employer threatens to hire a new maid in her absence. Mma takes Dineo to the hospital, and the baby lives. Naledi has begun her own journey: she has witnessed an innocent black youth's arrest; she met Grace, who has lost family in the struggle for freedom. And she gains a new understanding of her country. There are many viewpoints in this story: Mma is trying to survive; Grace struggles for dignity. But the author's gift is in translating violent TV images into a provocative, eloquent story about the human spirit, from its first flicker to full flame.
5. The Lottery Rose – Irene Hunt

Genre: Fiction

Topic: Realistic Fiction

Theme: Growing Up, Life Situations, Love

Summary: Abused by his mother and her boyfriend, Georgie Burgess learns to hide his hurt. When Georgie wins a small rosebush in a grocery store lottery, he gives it all the love and caring he has never had. His life begins to open up when the courts send him to a home for boys where he will be safe. Slowly, and not without pain, Georgie learns to give and to receive love.

6. Tuck Everlasting – Natalie Babbitt

Genre: Fiction, Fantasy

Topic: Adventure, Humor, Mystery

Theme: Growing Up, Relationships

Summary: When ten-year old Winnie Foster stumbles upon the Tuck family's disturbing secret she is forced to come to terms with her conflicting emotions as she feels drawn to the loving and gentle eccentric Tucks. The Tuck family is confronted with an agonizing situation when they discover that a ten-year-old girl and a malicious stranger now share their secret about a spring whose water prevents one from ever growing older.

When he discovers that her neighbors have a spring with water that prevents people from growing old, she learns a lesson in the cycle of life.

7. Where the Red Fern Grows – Wilson Rawls

Genre: Fiction

Topic: Adventure, Animals, Realistic Fiction

Theme: Country Life, Death, Love
Summary: A young boy living in the Ozarks achieves his heart's desire when he becomes the owner of two redbone hounds and teaches them to be champion hunters. Billy trains his two dogs in the dark hills and river bottoms of Cherokee country to be the finest hunting team in the valley proving loyalty and bravery in the face of danger.

8. Bridge to Terabithia – Kathetine Peterson

Genre: Fiction

Topic: Adventure, Sports

Theme: Country Life, Competition, Death, Friendship, School

Summary: The life of a ten-year-old boy in rural Virginia expands when he becomes friends with a newcomer who subsequently meets an untimely death trying to reach their hideaway, Terabithia, during a storm. All summer, Jess pushed himself to be the fastest boy in the fifth grade, and when the year's first school-yard race was run, he was going to win. But his victory was stolen by a newcomer, by a girl, one who didn't even know enough to stay on the girls' side of the playground. Then, unexpectedly, Jess finds himself sticking up for Leslie, for the girl who breaks rules and wins races. The friendship between the two grows as Jess guides the city girl through the pitfalls of life in their small, rural town, and Leslie draws him into the world of imaginations world of magic and ceremony called Terabithia. Here, Leslie and Jess rule supreme among the oaks and evergreens, safe from the bullies and ridicule of the mundane world. Safe until an unforeseen tragedy forces Jess to reign in Terabithia alone, and both worlds are forever changed. Leslie drowns trying to reach their special hideaway, Terabithia, Jesse struggles to accept the loss of his friend.

   Genre: Historical Fiction

   Topic: Adventure, War

   Theme: Courage, Friendship

Summary: When the freighter on which they are traveling is torpedoed by a German submarine during World War II, an adolescent white boy, blinded by a blow on the head, and an old black man are stranded on a tiny Caribbean island where the boy acquires a new kind of vision, courage, and love from his old companion. Philip must overcome his prejudice towards Timothy, the old black sailor who becomes the key to his survival.

10. Scorpians – Walter Dean Myers

   Genre: Fiction

   Topic: Realistic Fiction

   Theme: City Life, Death, Friendship, Life Situations, Peer Pressure, School

Summary: After reluctantly taking on the leadership of the Harlem gang, the Scorpions, Jamal finds that his enemies treat him with respect when he acquires a gun until a tragedy occurs. Jamal, who is pressured to become leader of the Scorpions gang, worries about school, family, and the rough kids on the street. When a fellow gang member gives him a gun, Jamal suddenly gains a new level of respect from his enemies. A realistic look at a boy who wants to do the right thing but gets caught up in the culture of violence.

11. The Face on the Milk Carton – Caroline B. Cooney

   Genre: Fiction

   Topic: Realistic Fiction

   Theme: Family, Life Situations, Parents, Relationships
Summary: The picture of a missing child printed on a milk carton attracts the attention of 15-year-old Jane Johnson. A glimpse of the girl's polka-dot dress causes memories to surface. It is nearly impossible for Jane to perceive her loving parents as kidnappers. Fragments of memory and evidence accumulate, and when she demands to know about her early childhood years, her parents confess what they believe to be true, that she is really their grandchild, the child of their long-missing daughter who had joined a cult. Janie wants to accept this, but she cannot forget Jennie's family and their loss. Finally, almost against her will, she seeks help and confides in her parents. Her mother insists that she call the Spring family, and the book ends as she calls them. The decisions Janie must face are painful and complex, and she experiences denial, anger, and guilt while sorting her way toward a solution. Janie's boyfriend--sensible, funny, with problems of his own is an excellent foil for her intensity. Their romance is natural and believable.

12. My Brother Sam is Dead – James and Chris Collier

   Genre: Fiction

   Topic: War

   Theme: Death, Family

Summary: Recounts the tragedy that strikes the Meeker family during the Revolution, when one son joins the rebel forces while the rest of the family tries to stay neutral in a Tory town. All his life, Tim Meeker has looked up to his brother Sam. Sam's smart and brave and is now a part of the American Revolution. Not everyone in town wants to be a part of the rebellion. Most are supporters of the British including Tim and Sam's father. With the war soon raging, Tim know he'll have to make a choice between the Revolutionaries and the Redcoats and between his brother and his father.
8th Grade Novels

1. Woodsong – Gary Paulsen
   Genre: Autobiography
   Topic: Adventure, Animals
   Theme: Courage, Competition
   Summary: For a rugged outdoor man and his family, life in northern Minnesota is a wild experience involving wolves, deer, and the sled dogs that make their way of life possible. Includes an account of the author's first Iditarod, a dogsled race across Alaska.

2. Destiny – Elizabeth Haydon
   Genre: Science Fiction, Fantasy
   Topic: Adventure, War
   Theme: Courage, Friendship
   Summary: Called across time to fulfill her destiny, the harpist Rhapsody joins with the Firbolg king Achmed and his giant companion Grunthor to attempt to fight the powerful and elusive F'dor, a demon-born danger that threatens the fabric of existence. As the three champions' path grows more perilous, they learn to use the special gifts alluded to in ancient prophecies. Haydon's conclusion to her "Rhapsody" trilogy blends Celtic lore with Asian myth to produce a world both strange and hauntingly familiar. A good choice for fantasy collections.

3. Taking Sides – Gary Soto
   Genre: Fiction
   Topic: Sports
   Theme: Competition, Life Situations, School
Summary: This touchingly realistic story explores the divided loyalties of a Hispanic basketball player who has recently moved from a poor neighborhood to a more affluent one. Initially, eighth grader Lincoln feels like a traitor when he plays ball for the predominantly white school he now attends. To make matters worse, his new coach seems to hold a grudge against both Lincoln and his former school, Franklin Junior High. As a game against Franklin approaches, tension mounts and Lincoln experiences clashes with several people, including some teammates. But he manages to have fun on the night of the big game and eventually makes peace with his friends. Once again, Soto masterfully conveys the Hispanic-American experience, and readers will respect Lincoln's values and good sportsmanship. Ultimately, the boy learns to adjust to a new situation and accept new challenges without compromising his individuality.

4. The Friends – Rosa Guy

   Genre: Fiction

   Topic: Realistic Fiction

   Theme: Growing Up, Death, Friendship

Summary: Phyllisia eventually recognizes that her own selfish pride rather than her mother's death and her father's tyrannical behavior created the gulf between her and her best friend.

5. No Promises in the Wind – Irene Hunt

   Genre: Fiction, Historical Fiction

   Topic: Adventure

   Theme: Family, Love, Life Situations

Summary: In 1932, America was in the depths of a deep depression. A job, food to fill you, a place to sleep, and shoes without holes for millions of people, these simple needs were nothing more than dreams. At 15 years of age, Josh had to make his own way through a country of angry,
frightened people. This is the story of a young man's struggle to find a life for himself in the turbulent 1930s.

6. Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry – Mildred D. Taylor

   Genre: Historical Fiction

   Topic: Adventure, Realistic Fiction, Family Relationships

   Theme: Courage, Family, Loyalty, Love

   Summary: It is the bittersweet and beautifully written story of the Logans, a poor black family struggling through poverty and racism in Depression-era Mississippi. Young Cassie Logan endures humiliation and witnesses the racism of the KKK as they embark on a cross-burning rampage, before she fully understands the importance her family attributes to having land of their own.

7. The Outsiders – S.E. Hinton

   Genre: Fiction

   Topic: Realistic Fiction

   Theme: Death, Family, Friendship, Relationships

   Summary: According to Ponyboy, there are two kinds of people in the world: greasers and socs. A soc (short for "social") has money, can get away with just about anything, and has an attitude longer than a limousine. A greaser, on the other hand, always lives on the outside and needs to watch his back. Ponyboy is a greaser, and he's always been proud of it, even willing to rumble against a gang of socs for the sake of his fellow greasers until one terrible night when his friend Johnny kills a soc. The murder gets under Ponyboy's skin, causing his world to crumble and teaching him that pain feels the same whether a soc or a greaser.

8. Devil’s Arithmetic – Jane Yolen
Genre: Fiction

Topic: Horror, Realistic Fiction

Theme: Courage, Death, Family, Friendship

Summary: Hannah resents the traditions of her Jewish heritage until time travel places her in the middle of a small Jewish village in Nazi-occupied Poland. The Holocaust was so monstrous a crime that the mind resists belief and the story must be made new for each individual. Yolen's book is about remembering. During a Passover Seder, 12-year-old Hannah finds herself transported from America in 1988 to Poland in 1942, where she assumes the life of young Chaya. Within days the Nazis take Chaya and her neighbors off to a concentration camp, mere components in the death factory. As days pass, Hannah's own memory of her past, and the prisoners' future, fades until she is Chaya completely. Chaya/Hannah's final sacrifice, and the return of memory, is her victory over the horror.

9. House of Dies Drear – Virginia Hamilton

Genre: Fiction

Topic: Mystery

Theme: Family, Life Situations

Summary: A black family tries to unravel the secrets of their new home which was once a stop on the Underground Railroad. The family of five moves into the enormous house once used as a hiding place for runaway slaves. Mysterious sounds and events as well as the discovery of secret passageways make the family believe they are in grave danger. The house held secrets, Thomas knew, even before he first saw it looming gray and massive on its ledge of rock. It had a century-old legend, two fugitive slaves had been killed by bounty hunters after leaving its passageways, and Dies Drear himself, the abolitionist who had made the house into a station on the
Underground Railroad, had been murdered there. The ghosts of the three were said to walk its rooms.

10. Walk Two Moons – Sharon Creech

Genre: Fiction

Topic: Mystery

Theme: Death, Family, Friendship, Life Situations, Love

Summary: After her mother leaves home suddenly, thirteen-year-old Sal and her grandparents take a car trip retracing her mother's route. A story within a story, Sal tells about Phoebe Winterbottom, her charismatic friend, who exaggerates, who believes she is being stalked by a "lunatic," and whose mother also has left home. Sal’s mother, Sugar, is in Idaho, and although Sugar promised to return before the tulips bloomed, she hasn't come back. Themes of love, life, death, and relationships are at the core of this story which is playful, imaginative, and satisfying.

11. Child of the Owl

Genre: Fiction

Topic: Humor, Adventure, Mystery

Theme: Family, Life Situations, Relationships

Summary: A twelve-year-old girl who knows little about her Chinese heritage is sent to live with her grandmother in San Francisco's Chinatown. Twelve-year-old Casey is waiting for the day that Barney, her father, hits it big because when that horse comes in, he tells her, it's the penthouse suite. But then he ends up in the hospital, and Casey is sent to Chinatown to live with her grandmother, Paw-Paw. Now the waiting seems longer than ever. Casey feels lost in Chinatown. She's not prepared for the Chinese school, the noisy crowds, missing her father. But Paw-Paw tells her about the mother Casey never knew, and about her family's owl charm and her
true Chinese name. And Casey at last begins to understand that this Paw-Paw's Chinatown home, her parents' home is her home, too.

12. Nothing But the Truth - Avi

   Genre: Fiction, Documentary
   Topic: Realistic Fiction
   Theme: School, Relationships

Summary: Ninth grader Philip Malloy finds himself unable to participate on the track team because of his failing grade in English. Convinced the teacher, Margaret Narwin, dislikes him, he concocts a scheme to get transferred from her homeroom: instead of standing "at respectful, silent attention" during the national anthem, Philip hums. Throughout the ensuing disciplinary problems at school, his parents take his side, ignore the fact that he is breaking a school rule, and concentrate on issues of patriotism. The conflict between Philip and his school escalates, and he quickly finds the situation out of his control; local community leaders, as well as the national news media, become involved. At this point, the novel surges forward to a heartbreaking, but totally believable, conclusion. Avi carefully sets forth the events in the story, advancing the plot through conversations between students, Philip's parents, school personnel, and community politicians, while Philip's point of view is revealed through his diary entries, and Margaret Narwin's through letters to her sister. Also enriching the narrative are copies of school memos and newspaper articles, transcripts of speeches delivered, and copies of letters received by both Philip and his teacher; each document provides another perspective on the conflict and illuminates the many themes that beg to be discussed most notably the irony of lives destroyed because of the misuse of power and the failure of people to communicate.