THE IMPACT OF PHYSICAL FEATURES ON THE BOOK SELECTION PROCESS
OF FOURTH AND EIGHTH GRADERS

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Reading education is a fundamental aspect of literacy development, however, it is often times difficult to discover what truly motivates children to read. This study was created as a way of trying to further identify the motivation behind students’ book preferences when given the opportunity to self-select. Several studies have been previously conducted that examine similar motivational factors, such as author, genre, and topic. This study delved deeper into the physical characteristics of books that motivate students after their reading interests have been considered. Twenty-nine fourth grade students and sixty-three eighth grade students were asked to take a brief questionnaire that discussed the physical factors that most impact their selection. Following the questionnaire, five were selected from each grade level to take part in a short interview session that was created to gain further insight into their reasons and methods for selecting books.

The results from the questionnaires were then analyzed and tallied onto a spreadsheet to look for the patterns and themes. The interview sessions were transcribed and used to support reasoning for choosing a particular factor. The majority of the fourth grade students were influenced by the front cover, while eighth grade students were found to be most influenced by the back-of-the-book summary found on books. However, the researcher concluded that the same top three factors were considered by both fourth and eighth grade students.
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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Librarians, teachers, and parents wonder why children today are unmotivated to read; children seem to have lost interest in books, for technology has taken over. It is apparent that children growing up in the age of the 21st century are “increasingly visual, and the youngest generations have little patience with anything that is not as clear and sharp as high-definition television” (Lohmiller, 2008, p. 14). As technology advances rapidly and vast improvements are made to what already exists, children delve into this digital world because they are extremely curious and it is innovative and engaging. For some, books can’t even begin to compete with the latest technologies available to children, such as the Kindle by Amazon. The question lies within what literature is available to the children, and whether it is aesthetically pleasing enough for a child to want to read.

One way to motivate students and give them the opportunity to take ownership of their learning is to allow them to self-select books to read for pleasure. Because no two students are alike, the idea of having students self-select the books they read for recreation is an integral piece in motivating them and initiating the first step towards becoming lifelong readers. Kragler (2000) concurs by acknowledging the fact that, “Self-selection allows students more latitude to be deeply involved with the learning process, thus fostering an interest in, as well as developing an ownership of, the reading process” (Kragler, p. 1).

Librarians, teachers, and parents across America are the individuals responsible for the selection of books to which students have access, but who is to say that these educated people know what their students are interested in reading? Several identified factors that influence a child’s selection process are genre, topic, author, illustrations, title, and difficulty level (Gray, 2009; Monson, n.d.; Ollmann, 1993; Reuter, 2007; Ross & Chelton, 2001; Stieve & Schoen,
2006; Swartz & Hendricks, 2000; Wutz & Wedrick, 2005). The Quick Picks Committee (2009) states that, in reference to the Top Ten Quick Picks list of 2006, the list can “be a guide for professionals to determine what reluctant readers are apt to read” (p. 9).

As teachers review such lists, to see what young readers are interested in reading, they often overlook a major factor in the book selection process, which are the physical characteristics of the books. Looking at the content of the book is simply not enough to interest a student if the physical features are not also appealing in some way. To help educators in the process of selecting the right books for their students, they will often conduct interest surveys or motivational profiles at the beginning of the year. What these surveys and profiles fail to include are the physical features, such as title, front cover illustration, book length, chapter length, print size, and more. Once the data have been gathered about their students, they begin to accumulate what they believe are the appropriate resources for their classrooms. However, a book may have the necessary content that the student is interested in reading, but the appeal also needs to be taken into consideration because it is just as influential as what is behind the cover. The challenge today “is to learn about students’ interests and to make available the kinds of books they will choose to read on their own so that they do not become alliterate” (Monson, n.d., p. 1). With that said, the purpose of this study was to investigate what physical characteristics of a book influence middle school students in their selection of literature.

Statement of the Problem

Numerous studies have been conducted examining what students are interested in reading in terms of content, but little research has been done on the physical features that enhance their decision. Reuter (2007) states, “In the past three decades, only three major empirical studies in library and information science have focused on the selection of books for pleasure reading” (p.
1745). When educators and parents choose books for their students/children, they often overlook the idea that the books must not only meet the interests of the students, but must also appeal to the students, visually. The question is, when students are presented several books on a topic of their interest, then how do they decide which book they will choose to read? What external factors come into play? It is important for teachers and parents to be aware of how their student/child selects a book after the child’s favorite interests, authors, topics, and genres have been identified.

Research Question

To address the self-selection process, this study was designed to determine the physical characteristics of books that most impact students’ book selection process in grades four and eight. The following research question grounded this study: When students are given the opportunity to self-select a book to read for recreation, what physical features of the book predominantly motivate the student to want to read it?

Rationale

As identified in previous sections, the book selection process of students is highly motivational in terms of their reading and success for the future. It is important to discover how students choose their books so that educators, parents, and book publishers can gain a better understanding of what students are interested in, to provide them with the literature that is appealing and motivating. Exploring the book selection process will help answer the question that several educators and parents have, “What motivates students to read?”
Definition of Terms

The following list of terms will be used throughout the study. Definitions are provided to clarify any unfamiliar terms.


2. Reading motivation: “individual’s goals and beliefs with regard to reading...[which] influences the individual’s activities, interactions, and learning with text” (Guthrie & Wigfield, 1999, p. 199)

3. Self-selection: allowing children to choose their own books to read (Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006).

4. Mixed-method research design: a research study that uses both qualitative and quantitative data to provide a “better understanding of a research problem than one type of data in isolation” (Mertler, 2009, p. 11).

5. Qualitative research methodologies: “those research methodologies that require the collection and analysis of narrative data” (Mertler, 2009, p. 247).

6. Quantitative research methodologies: “those methodologies that require the collection of and analysis of numerical data” (Mertler, 2009, p. 247).

7. Semi-structured interview: “interview where the researcher asks several “base” questions but also has the option of following up a given response with alternative, optional questions that may or may not be used by the researcher, depending on the situation” (Mertler, 2009, p. 248).
Limitations

This study was designed to investigate the book selection process of middle school students, grades four and eight. The participants involved in the study were taken from two suburban schools in Northwest Ohio. At each school, students from both fourth and eighth grade were questioned on the physical features of a book that most impacted their selection. By using questionnaires, the participants were not able to provide a rich description for reasoning, where an interview would be more beneficial. Out of the students selected for the survey, the classroom teachers randomly chose 10 for individual interview sessions that will discuss their selections in more depth. The interviewee was required to give the researcher some knowledge about his or her interests and favorite types of books so that the researcher could gather books based on these needs.

Once the students’ interests were taken into consideration, the interviewee chose a book provided by the researcher to discuss the physical features that impacted their choice. The researcher believes that student’s choices are extremely dependent on physical factors, just as much as internal components of books. The students’ answers during the interview may have reflected their reading confidence, socioeconomic status, background experiences, or motivation.

The nature of this research was grounded by the convenience sample of students as participants. The researcher was limited in deciding the participants, as well as the book selection process the participants utilized.
CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

It has been a goal of many educators to find the key that intrinsically motivates students to read. Every teacher wants his or her students to have a desire to read and learn and develop the ability to internalize strategies and concepts learned at school. With that said, this study’s focus will give educators, librarians, and parents the knowledge needed to move one step closer to finding the key that truly motivates students to read. This study examined the physical characteristics of books that motivate students to select a book to read. More specifically, this study was designed to answer the following research question: When students are given the opportunity to self-select a book to read for recreation, what physical features of the book predominantly motivate the student to want to read it?

Chapter II will address the theories and history behind motivation in general, and delve further into motivation in the classroom and in literacy instruction. Additionally, it will provide factual information on studies conducted by researchers who have already examined characteristics of books and the factors that motivate children to select a book for independent reading. More specifically, the physical features of books that influence students’ book selection processes will be further explored to understand how they play a part in the process.

Theories and History of Motivation

Dating back to 1943, Abraham Maslow first published the article, *A Theory of Human Motivation*, which introduced the theory that people have a set of personal needs they satisfy in the context of their work. He outlined a hierarchy of five sets of needs, beginning with the most basic survival needs to the highest psychological needs. Physiological needs are at the bottom of the hierarchy, topped by the needs of safety, love and belongingness, esteem, and lastly, self-actualization. In his theory, he also postulated that there is a general pattern in the sequence in
which people recognize and satisfy their needs. Maslow further argued that once the “needs are relatively well gratified, there then emerges a new set of needs,” which fall higher on the hierarchy (Maslow, 1943, p. 375).

Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs also play an integral part in the educational world, in terms of motivating children to achieve their fullest potential. For a child to be successful in school, the most essential needs must be met first. A child who comes to school hungry or in fear of his/her safety will not be able to progress and obtain “feelings of self-confidence, worth, strength, capability and adequacy of being useful and necessary in the world” (p. 382). Once these needs are met, Maslow’s self-esteem needs will emerge and the child will be able to focus his or her strength on being a meaningful member of the classroom who feels confident in his or her capabilities. It is more probable that the child will be motivated to engage in activities and do well, based on his/her positive view of self.

Maslow’s theory has been widely considered the standard for evaluating childhood motivation since its introduction in 1943. The innate ability of the model to predict and explain a child’s reticence to expand his/her knowledge base or take initiative in the classroom has been an indispensable tool for educators, administrators, and parents alike. The model fails, however, to examine the motivations of well adjusted youth when they are probing deeper into academic endeavors. The current cultural climate has required educators and researchers to examine not only the prerequisite needs of young learners, but also the internal motivations for each stage in the hierarchy.

Two extremely common terms later associated with motivation are intrinsic and extrinsic. According to Fawson and Moore (1999), intrinsic motivation can be defined as “the participation in, and competent completion of, tasks as the desired end,” while extrinsic “orientation is
demonstrated when students’ purpose for participation in a given activity is to receive some type of external reward,” such as candy, prizes, or recognition (p. 326). In 2000, Ryan and Deci further explored the theory of motivation. They stated that, “Perhaps no single phenomenon reflects the positive potential of human nature as much as intrinsic motivation” (Ryan & Deci, p. 70). Furthermore, they recognize the construct of intrinsic motivation as an essential piece in the cognitive and social development, as well as a vital element and primary source of enjoyment throughout life (Ryan & Deci). Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations have different influences on individuals. Intrinsic motivation appears to be imperative when pursuing internalized goals and interests for a lifetime (Metsala, 1996). In contrast, extrinsic motivation induces immediate effort and attention, but only lasts short-term. This statement is substantiated by Edmunds and Bauserman (2006), who found that, “extrinsic rewards were not effective at producing lasting change” (p. 414). New rewards must keep being created by an external source for motivation to continue (Metsala). Motivation is a powerful notion and it frequently makes a difference between temporary and superficial learning and learning that is internalized and permanent (Oldfather, 1993).

Maslow’s theory of motivation (1943), along with the research pertaining to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, have been found to correlate with other aspects of people’s lives. For example, motivation is an essential component when it comes to education. The pursuit and analysis of motivational research is nearly as essential to a body of educators as research identifying the most effective ways of conveying information. An educator may have the most sophisticated teaching techniques available, yet with no means to motivate students, his/her efforts will be entirely wasted.
Motivation to Read

Historically, few studies have been conducted to investigate the role of motivation in reading (Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006). Dating back from 1985 to 1992, about nine studies have been administered per year that report the findings on the role of motivation and literacy development (Gambrell, 1996). Recently, the question of how to motivate students in the classroom has been the basis of several research studies. Because of the lack of motivation found in the student body, teachers have identified this topic as being “the root of many of the problems” that they are facing (Edmunds & Bauserman, p. 414). Thus, there has been a noticeable increase in scrutiny relating to the issues that are affecting literacy development of young readers (Gambrell, 1996; Guthrie & Wigfield, 1997).

To begin to understand the reasons why students are unmotivated, Eccles’ “expectancy-value” theory may provide a rationale for the growing number of unmotivated students found within a classroom. In his theory, which advanced in 1983, he identified motivation as being strongly influenced by one’s expectation of success or failure with a task (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzoni, 1996). In addition, the value of the task must also be relatively attractive and enticing to the student. A student, who feels competent in his or her reading capabilities and believes reading is valuable and important, will exert more energy into reading related activities due to positive feelings of self-concept (Gambrell et al.). The work of Eccles has grounded the theories of other motivational researchers, such as Ford (1992) and Winne (1985). Ford’s (1992) “motivational systems theory maintains that people will attempt to attain goals they value and perceive as achievable,” while Winne (1985) puts forward the idea of an “idealized reader” as one who feels proficient and sets reading as being of personal value and importance (as cited in Gambrell et al., p. 519).
Much of the research in the 1990s is an outgrowth of the cognitive aspects of reading that were studied in the 1980s. Today’s research on motivation focuses on a “more comprehensive and balanced view of reading that includes an emphasis on motivation and social interaction, as well as cognition and knowledge acquisition” (Gambrell, 1996, p. 15). Gambrell introduced her theory of an engaged reader, which described the reader as being “motivated, knowledgeable, strategic, and socially interactive” (p. 16). What she explains in her theory is that a motivated reader chooses to read for a variety of purposes, whether to gain knowledge or to read for recreational purposes. The engaged reader is also knowledgeable in a sense that he or she is able to use information gathered from personal experiences and apply it to construct new meanings from texts. When she discussed the strategic component of an engaged reader, she explained that the reader employs a wide array of “cognitive strategies to decode, interpret, comprehend, monitor, and regulate the reading process so that goals and purposes of reading are satisfied” (Gambrell, p. 16). Finally, the engaged reader is socially interactive. This ultimately means that the reader shares and communicates with others throughout the learning process to construct and extend the meaning of text (Gambrell). For readers to be engaged in the classroom, it must be complete with a teacher who is a reading model, provides interesting or relevant books, opportunities for choice, social interaction with others, and incentives that reflect the value of reading (Gambrell).

In conjunction with other researchers, Gambrell’s (1996) interest in motivation led her to extend the tools used to measure children’s motivation to read. The Motivation to Read Profile was created by Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, and Mazzoni (1996) in hopes of providing teachers “with an efficient and reliable way to quantitatively and qualitatively assess reading motivation by evaluating students’ self-concept as readers and the value they place on reading” (p. 519). The
questions asked of the students address the complex issues of motivation and allow teachers to consider their views on the importance of reading and also the students’ views of themselves as readers.

Self-Selection and Choice

A body of research has been built since the mid 1950s indicating a break from educational convention. Willard Olson’s theory of child development (1959) has perhaps the most concise statement from this growing field: that children are “self seeking, self-selecting and self pacing organisms” (p. 402). The overwhelming consensus of this research stresses the importance of self-selection as a prime factor in the value of reading education. A child’s ability to effectively choose his/her own reading materials has been proven to positively affect reading vocabulary, reading comprehension, and total reading capabilities (Jenkins, 1957, p. 89). Moreover, readers who are able to select a book of their own choosing tend to read a great deal, thus improving their overall fluency skills as well (Hickman, 1977).

Olson’s research (1959) on youth reading specifically reveals the flexibility and overall capability of children’s mental capacity to choose and evaluate their own reading materials. Given the opportunity, “children will seek and select from the environment experiences that are consistent with their developmental levels” (Kragler, 2000, para. 3). Children will inherently seek out appropriate texts, providing a challenging experience and creating a sense of ownership over their education. Furthermore, Schiefele’s study (1991) showed that “students who were allowed and encouraged to choose their own reading material expended more effort in learning and understanding the material” (p. 320).

An immediate connection can be drawn with Maslow’s hierarchy, as the act of self-selection is inherently an act of self-actualization, further enforcing the emerging field of self-
selected reading as vitally important to increasing educational quality. Swartz and Hendricks (2000) would agree that, “schools should foster environments that promote learning through self-selection, particularly when it comes to learning to read” (p. 608). This also entails providing access to an array of narrative and expository texts on several topics, levels, and genres to capture and pique the interests of all students (Cole, 2002). Students often are expected to “know how to read a wide range of texts, yet in school they are likely limited to teacher-selected class novels (usually award-winning fiction) and textbooks” (Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1999, p. 22). A literate-rich environment should be found not only in school libraries but also in classroom collections and the home environment to outline the importance of literacy development in children’s lives.

Olson’s research (1959) is predated by and corroborates with Marian Jenkins’ (1957) comparative study on self-selective classrooms. Her study, which consisted of a control group taught through conventional reading methods and the direction of the teacher, was compared to an experimental group in which students were able to self-select their own literature to promote literacy growth. The findings from this study noted, “25% of the control group had total reading gains of more than 1.6 years, while 46% of the experimental group scored within this range” (Jenkins, p. 89). The experimental group also surpassed the scores of the control group in the areas of vocabulary and comprehension (Jenkins). The early study of the self-selection method, conducted by Jenkins, enlightened educators and researchers. Researchers began exploring this method after recognizing that conventional strategies may not always have the best interest of the child in mind. In addition, educators began experimenting in their own classrooms to see if they could produce results similar to those of Jenkins (Smith & Becher, 1960).
The same year that Jenkins’s (1957) study was conducted, to show the effects of self-selection on total reading achievement, a similar study was implemented to see if an individualized reading program would not only improve students’ total reading, but also motivate children to instill a lifelong desire for reading and learning. To prepare for the study, Smith and Becher (1960) first administered standardized tests and interest inventories to gain knowledge about the students’ ability levels as well as their interests. These ability levels and interests were taken into consideration as resources and materials were gathered for the teachers to use in their classrooms for the study.

The individualized reading program got under way once all the materials were gathered. Students began selecting their own books and at two-week intervals, the books were exchanged or renewed. As reading progressed, teachers began to give help to the students when needed. The teachers found these individual conferences to be beneficial because they were discovering new areas in which the child could use more instruction. Because teachers were hosting individual conferences with students, Smith and Becher (1960) reported, “Another outcome was an improved teacher-pupil relationship and a more complete understanding of the child and his needs. This enabled the teacher to guide the child’s reading in such a way as to broaden his interests and challenge him to further endeavor” (p. 84). The educators in this study noticed an increased motivation to read when the students were able to select their own books and share with peers.

Gambrell (1996) found similar results when students responded that the “most interesting” books and stories read were those that they had selected for their own purposes and reasons (p. 21). In addition, the individualized reading program allowed students to share their knowledge with others through dramatization, skits, science experiments, shadow boxes, riddles,
poems and more (Smith & Becher, 1960). No longer were book reports and quizzes going to
damper the reading experience. For the first time, students were given the opportunity to use
their talents, and based on their interests, share their reading achievement with their classmates.
The overall observations from this study concluded that, “Children are eager to read if they are
provided with interesting materials on their reading level from which they can make their own
selection” (Smith & Becher, p. 88). Another positive effect of this program is that students
become acquainted with a great number and variety of quality books, due to the fact that the
books were exchanged or renewed every two weeks.

Cunningham (2005) also mentions the success of reading programs that allow students to
select their own books when she voiced her experiences with independent reading practices. She
argued, “Reading books you want to read motivates you to read more. Sharing those books once
a week with someone who ‘oohs and aahs’ about your reading choices is also a surefire
motivator” (Cunningham, p. 89). It is apparent that not only do students need the opportunity to
select their own books as a motivational factor, the social component of this type of program has
a great impact on the outcome as well. To build on this statement, the results from the 1992
National Assessment of Educational Progress indicated that “students who engaged in frequent
discussions about their reading with friends and family were more motivated and had higher
reading achievement scores than did students who did not have such interactions” (Gambrell,
1996, p. 22). The success of an individualized reading program relies mainly on a carefully
constructed curriculum and a classroom environment that provides access and availability to a
wide range of texts that are suitable to meet the students’ ability levels and interests.

Teachers may question the effectiveness of this program if they have concerns that
students are not selecting texts that are appropriate for their own ability level. Hunt (1970)
contends that if a student is intrinsically motivated to learn more about a topic, the difficulty level of the book becomes irrelevant and the student will still learn from the text. Likewise, Rasinski (1988) concurs in a statement that acknowledges how powerful internal motivation can play in students’ drive to educate themselves on new topics. According to Guthrie and Wigfield (1997), individuals have a set of “beliefs, values, needs, and goals” in terms of motivation to read (p. 5). Moreover, the closer related that literacy activities are to these beliefs, values, needs, and goals, the greater likelihood students will exert more effort and sustain interest in them no matter the level of difficulty (Pitcher et al., 2007). Rasinski also states that less than positive results “can occur when children are taken out of such an environment and placed in one in which issues of interest and motives have already been decided upon external to the child” (p. 400). Teachers can be motivators by explaining to students that they trust their decisions and know they will pick their books wisely.

All in all, what happens in schools closely affects how students perceive the idea of reading and becoming lifelong learners (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001). If educators examine their own reasons for being motivated to read, this will empower them to conduct reading instruction in a similar way. Just as choices are important to adults and provide a sense of control, teachers need to provide these same opportunities for their students. Godt (2005) suggests that educators “awake and encourage this desire to read on part of all learners, whether they are teachers or children. This means discovering each person’s individual interests and matching learners with books that will enthrall, inspire, and encourage them” (p. 61). Many experts have ideas about how to motivate students, but self-selection and the opportunity for choice has long continued to appear as an important component in recent literacy instruction.
Book Selection Strategies

If reading instruction today is going to provide the opportunity for students to self-select and choose their own literature, a number of experts would argue that students must first be taught how to select books. Because books come in all different sizes, topics, and difficulty levels, a variety of book selection strategies have been crafted and employed in the classroom to assist students when choosing a book that will best fit their needs and interests.

The first strategy, by Wutz and Wedrick (2005), promoted an acronym that teachers can use to help promote independent reading selections that are appropriate. The acronym BOOKMATCH encompasses several strategies to consider when students are choosing. The letters of the BOOKMATCH represent the following: Book length, Ordinary language, Organization, Knowledge prior to book, Manageable text, Appeal to genre, Topic appropriateness, Connection, and High interest.

Veatch (1966) recommends the Five-Finger Method, a popular strategy that teaches students to select books based on the difficulty level. Utilizing this strategy will allow a student to select a book that is at his/her independent reading level based on word-identification. In this method a student begins by reading a page orally or silently. Each time an unknown word is encountered, the student curves a finger toward the palm. If five fingers are curved toward the palm, a fist is formed. This indicates the student will be fighting with the book and an easier book should be selected. This strategy’s main focus is finding a book that will not be too difficult. After a student identifies a book that he or she is interested in reading, he or she can use this method to see if it will be a good fit (Veatch).

Along this line, the Goldilocks strategy is a book selection strategy that compares and contrasts books of three levels to help a student categorize his or her independent, instructional,
and frustration levels. In this model, Ohlhausen and Jepsen (1992) introduce “too hard” books, “just right” books, and “too easy” books, signifying the three levels of reading abilities (pp. 34-35). Together they define the “too hard” books as those that students would really like to read, but recognize are too difficult for the student’s current ability. This is a book that perhaps an older sibling would be reading, or a teacher would read aloud to the class during circle time (Ohlhausen & Jepsen). The next category of books, “just right” ones, includes the books that the student is easily capable of reading at this point in his or her reading education. The authors further describe these books by using the five-finger method, when they say that a “just right” book should contain only around one or two words per page that the reader does not know. And finally, the “too easy” books are those that are “old favorites” and enjoy reading for “independent reading times like SSR” (Ohlhausen & Jepsen, p. 35). When students find themselves needing a break from the “too hard” books, they may decide to pick up a “too easy” book when they just want a good read and an enjoyable experience (Ohlhausen & Jepsen).

Each student will have his/her own set of “too hard,” “just right,” and “too easy” books because each student reads at different levels. Also, Ohlhausen and Jepsen (1992) suggest that students should spend time in all of the categories, but the most time in the “just right” because these are the books that will help students learn the most. Furthermore, time spent in the “too easy” category will provide students with the opportunity to “gain confidence, read for enjoyment, increase rate and fluency, and ensure that newly learned strategies become automatic” (Ohlhausen & Jepsen, p. 38). With confidence comes the desire and willingness to spend more time reading, which is the goal of reading educators. Lastly, little time should be spent in the “too hard” category because it will give the reader a sense of what is out there for him or her to work towards as a goal. They also give the reader a way of knowing “if a book
becomes easier, the books isn’t changing, the reader is” (Ohlhausen & Jepsen, p. 38). What is right for one reader may be too difficult or too easy for another. As children’s literacy capabilities improve, they can move up to the next level or category of books to continue on their journey of independence. This strategy is set up in a nonthreatening way that encourages children to move up or down in categories which makes it harder for a reader to identify another student’s reading abilities.

Physical Factors that Influence the Book Selection Process

After considering the importance of motivation in the classroom and the strategies that teachers instruct students to use, it is then critical to consider the specific factors that actually motivate students to select a book and begin reading it. The factors that will be discussed below are the physical characteristics of books that are found appealing to readers, after their interests have been considered. Several studies have been conducted that evaluate the factors that impact book selection, but very few have been done specifically on the physical traits. Edmunds and Bauserman (2006), Haynes and Richgels (1992), Stieve and Schoen (2006), Swartz and Hendricks (2000) are just a few of the studies that examine the factors that motivate students in their book selection process in the more recent years. Collectively, the findings from these studies have identified personal interest, author, genre and title as having a significant impact on students’ selection of literature. If students’ interests, authors, genres and so on have been identified, then how else do students select their books? This portion of the review of literature will discuss how physical features of books are often overlooked when parents, teachers, and librarians choose books for children. They tend to read children’s choice lists found in “Reading Today, The Reading Teacher, and Language Arts,” but what they don’t realize is that physical
factors can be just as influential as what the book contains internally (Padak & Rasinski, 2007, p. 352).

*Front Cover*

When choosing a book, the front cover is typically the first thing readers notice. Book covers can have a great influence on the book selection process. One of the best strategies for choosing books is to ignore the common phrase, ‘Don’t judge a book by its cover.’ Book covers can contain several clues as to the genre, age and gender appropriateness, and whether or not the book is a recent release. Lohmiller (2008) would agree about judging a book by its cover. She describes one of her experiences checking out books at a library, where the librarian was baffled that she needed books with the exact ISBN’s listed; “What did it matter if it was hardback, library binding, or paperback? The content was the same. But the content doesn’t matter if no one checks it out. It’s not what’s inside that counts. I select books by their covers” (p. 13).

Not only are front covers valuable when selecting a book to read, they are also highly effective when selling a book. From a publishing standpoint, “the cover is a huge part of the way a book is marketed. It’s almost the entire advertisement” (Rosen, 2010, p. 16). There are specific criteria that book-publishing companies consider before presenting a book to the general public for harsh criticism. Some of the criteria considered, as mentioned in *Autobiography of a Cover*, include: “a strong central image that communicates the feeling of the editorial, something that stands out on crowded shelves, and a title large enough to be read from outerspace” (Rosen, p. 16). Once the ideal cover is finished, the marketing department then uses this image to sell the product by way of Web sites and online ads. As a book gains popularity, the possibility of a television series or movie production becomes more likely. In addition to book covers selling books, the cover also sells the author’s name. For example, “Names of best-selling authors
appear at the top of the page in letters at least as big as, if not bigger than, the title. Check out books by Harlan Coben, Nora Roberts, Stephen King, Mary Higgins Clark, and nonfiction author Bill Bryson” (Saricks, 2007, p. 26). The largely visible author names are one way in which books sell. Moreover, ‘brand name’ authors often display a full-page photograph of themselves on the back cover as marketing tool to lure the reader’s eye.

There are also times when a book cover can become a hindrance to a child choosing a book. Lohmiller (2008) further argues this point by saying, “Other failures include covers that date themselves with trendy fashions and hairstyles, or covers that try to include as many aspects of the book as possible, and in doing so fail to intrigue or entice the reader” (p. 13). Every detail of about a book should not be provided on the cover; students need to discover the book for themselves.

Illustrations

When choosing the books for the classroom library, according to the findings of Edmunds and Bauserman (2006), “teachers need to provide a variety of books that have different characteristics that children will desire to read—books that are scary or funny or have good illustrations” (p. 421). Not only should teachers include these factors when choosing narrative texts for their classrooms, but also for expository texts. In addition to children being influenced to read a narrative text, based on the characteristics of a book, they are also drawn to expository text for the same reasons and more. Children find expository text just as important as narrative text because they can “learn something from the book” (Edmunds & Bauserman, p. 421). In terms of narrative and expository text, “most children (and adults) are more likely to select an attractive looking book than one that is dull in appearance and gives no clue to its contents” (Swartz & Hendricks, 2000, p. 140).
To further support this, Carter (1988) and Kragler and Nolley (1996) reported that the illustrations found on the front cover and throughout the book are the top two factors in the book selection process. Gray (2009) found that realistic illustrations or photographs on the cover were the, “third key selection criterion used by students” (p. 477). Students today seem to be leaning towards lifelike pictures of characters. Likewise, the results from study conducted, using the BOOKMATCH strategy as mentioned above, children tended to look at the cover first, then open the book to look at the amount of illustrations on the pages, and then made their decision (Wutz & Wedrick, 2005). Other factors known to influence the book selection process among children include “topic/subject, matter, author, writing style, cover/illustrations, characters, and back-of-the-book summaries” (Swartz & Hendricks, 2000, p. 609).

**Title**

For some readers, the title can be the deciding factor if the book will get read or if it will not. Book marketing companies are aware of the impact the title has on the selling of literature, and therefore it must be catchy and enticing to the reader in some way. Ross and Chelton (2001) agree by saying that “readers said they were drawn both to an unusual, catchy title (in the case of an unfamiliar book) and to a familiar title that struck a chord” (p. 53). In a study involving students selecting books in a digital library, a total of 46 factors were identified as influential. The results show that the title was by far the “most frequently mentioned, noted by more than three-quarters of the child pairs and accounting for nearly one-fifth of all factors mentioned overall” (Reuter, 2007, p.1750). To better understand, there were a total of 48 child pairs, and 37 of those pairs had mentioned title as having a significant influence on their selections (Reuter).

At times, choosing a title by its cover can be controversial. Titles can be misleading and have no relation to the contents of the book. For example, “students may mistakenly assume the
only purpose of fiction titles is to label story content, not perceiving that the author is enticing them to read it or obliquely hinting at a central theme” (Ollmann, 1993, p. 651). Because book titles can mislead a reader, other strategies for selecting books will become important, such as reading the back-of-the-book summaries to gain more knowledge about what a book will actually contain.

**Book Length**

Ross and Chelton (2001) identify the “mood of the patron” when selecting a book to be very influential in the choice that he or she makes at that moment. With that said, Phythian-Sence and Clark (2008) recognize that students go into the book selection process with a specific desired reading experience in their mind. Is the reader wanting a quick read, or a longer text to keep him/her busy in his/her spare time? One of the features of a book that can impact the ‘mood’ of the reader is the length, or “degree of challenge posed by the text” (Phythian-Sence & Clark, p. 22) Ross and Chelton further found that the book’s size was a key factor in selecting books. After giving interviews to 194 committed readers, one responded with, “The third thing I look at (after author and description on the back cover) is the thickness. I will reject a book even if it’s a book by an author whom I know” (p. 53). This type of a response from an interview suggests that readers are strongly guided by what they do not want to read. By doing so, they can quickly rule out an entire genre or category. Similarly, the findings of Reuter (2007) mention that a book’s length becomes less of an impact as students age. She found that the length of a book “dominated with younger children but were not mentioned as often by older ones” (p. 1754).

As Hunt (1970) mentioned, students who feel competent in their reading abilities may select texts that are above their independent reading level. In a study mentioned in Wilson’s and Casey’s (n.d.) article, *Understanding the Recreational Reading Patterns of Secondary Students,*
the researchers found that 58% of the participants had selected books above their independent reading level. In addition, “within the fifty-eight percent, twenty-eight percent of the students chose material at their frustration level” (p. 43). This is the same information that Ollmann (1993) found as she observed middle school students choose books. She noted in her conclusions that the content of the book was much more important than the difficulty of the text. Indicators of text difficulty were down-rated, and students will “challenge themselves with difficult reading on interesting subjects” (p. 53). Because academic text is usually required, and there is a higher interest level in reading for pleasure, students may be more likely to struggle through a more difficult text if the motivation is there.

Print Size

Very little information has been found on how influential the size of print impacts students when they select books to read for pleasure. However, the size of the print can give the reader a sense of the difficulty level of the book. Because this study deals with students who are out of the trade book stage, and reading more and more chapter books, the print size will vary less, but is still considered a known factor when selecting books. The act of reading for pleasure can be strenuous for those who have a difficult time reading print that is too small, including those who have visual impairments.

Back-of-the-Book Summary

In terms of the back-of-the-book summaries, or blurbs, students have been observed reading them to gather a quick introduction to what the book will entail. Results from a study conducted by Swartz and Hendricks (2000) mentioned that 18 of the 31 participants used the back-of-the-book summaries as a deciding factor in the book selection process. For example, one student described that he chose the book Say Cheese & Die! “Because it said how the boy found
the camera and he took a picture and then it just stopped, I wanted to find out what happened” (p. 614). Some students may use the back-of-the-book summaries to judge an entire book’s content, while others use it as a motivational tool to want to read more.

Summary

The review of literature in this chapter focused on examining the theories behind motivation as well as how educators can use motivation in the classroom, specifically when reading. Understanding the underlying issues of motivation, teachers are better able to plan their curriculum and use instructional methods that will work well with students. With a recent push towards self-selection in literacy instruction, adults need to make available literature that will motivate, stimulate, and encourage reading as a worthwhile task. The above information about how children select books will allow those who choose literature for students to “gain insight into what students actually look for in books, and what they tend to ignore” (Stieve & Schoen, 2006, p. 600). Furthermore, this knowledge will help librarians, educators, and parents alike build their collection of literature by providing the materials that students like. Likewise, Padak and Rasinski (2007) concur and believe adults need to “keep up with children’s literature” and include these kinds of books in their collection (p. 352). Ross and Chelton (2001) add, “best seller lists can only go so far” when selecting books; it all depends on the “mood of the patron” at the very moment he or she is picking a book (p. 52). Although several factors can have an influence on a student’s selection of a book, the physical features that were mentioned here seem to be overlooked due to the stress of finding books based on children’s interests in genres, topics, and authors.
CHAPTER III. METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this investigation was to examine students’ book selection processes and to answer the following research question: When students are given the opportunity to self-select a book to read for recreation, what physical features of the book predominantly motivate the student to want to read it? Participants involved in the study were asked questions about their selection processes as a way to discover the motivating physical features associated with their choices. The methods and procedures for this study are explained in this chapter, along with how the participants were chosen. Furthermore, the research design is explained to provide background knowledge of why and how the data were gathered and analyzed a specific way.

Methods

Research Design

In this mixed-methods approach to collecting data, the use of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews provided the researcher with more accurate information pertaining to the research problem, rather than using one type of data collection in isolation (Mertler, 2009, p. 11). The research question that drives this study is, “What physical features of a book impact the book selection processes of students in fourth and eighth grade?”

The paper and pencil questionnaires, which contained 10 questions, were employed first to 92 participants as a way to gather a larger amount of data in a more timely fashion. The questions asked focused on the reader and the physical characteristics of books that have the greatest impact on his/her selection of books.

Following the questionnaire portion of data gathering, the researcher conducted one-on-one semi-structured interviews with a separate group of five participants at each grade level to gain a richer description of the reasons the participants chose their selections after interests have
been taken into consideration. Attached to the questionnaire was a short interest survey that all students completed in case they were chosen to take part in the interview session. This interest survey was used to gather the students’ reading interests and preferences, allowing the researcher to come prepared with books to the interview.

**Participants**

The participants selected for this study were taken from a convenience sample of 92 students in grades four and eight and were those who completed a consent form giving permission to use the data gathered and analyzed. The purpose of this study was to examine students’ book selection processes, specifically the physical characteristics that impact their choice. The participants were taken from suburban schools located in Northwestern Ohio.

From the total 336 students in grades kindergarten through six enrolled at one elementary school, 29 fourth graders were selected to participate in this study. The elementary is predominately White (63%), with 24% Hispanic, 13% Black, and <1% Asian – Pacific Islander accounting for the student population. There are 16.4 full-time teachers, with a 21/1 pupil/teacher ratio. The average attendance rate is 94%. The eighth grade students came from a middle school, with a total of 648 students enrolled from grades six through eight. Out of 221 eighth graders, 63 were used in this study. The middle school consists of a population of 95% White students, 4% Hispanic, <1% Black, and <1% Asian – Pacific Islander. The pupil/teacher ratio is 15/1. The average attendance rate is 96%.

The participants who participated in the interview were selected by the teacher from the stack of questionnaires that had the students’ names on them. A total of 10 students, five from fourth grade and five from eighth grade were used for the semi-structured interviews. In fourth grade, five girls were selected for the interviews, while in eighth grade, three girls and two boys
were chosen. The purpose of the one-on-one interviews was to allow the researcher to gather more detailed information about the students’ choices when choosing a book to read for pleasure.

Instrumentation

According to Mertler (2009), the method of questionnaires as a way of collecting data gives the researcher the ability to gather quantitative, or numerical, data relatively quickly. All questions that were articulated through the questionnaire required a closed-response “where individuals simply select their response from a set of options provided to them” (Mertler, 2009, p. 117). The questionnaire developed for this investigation required the participants to select an option for each of the questions asked. If a response did not exist for their situation, the option of “other” was a possible response choice.

The questions were created based on factors that previous researchers found to be influential in children’s book selection processes. A few factors that have been researched in the past include genre, topic/subject matter, characters, and author (Gray, 2009; Swartz & Hendricks, 2000). However, this study’s questionnaire focused more on the physical features that impact the book selection, once factors such as genre, topic, author, or interests have been identified. The factors included were: book cover, illustrations, book length, back-of-book summaries, print size, and title. These factors have also been found influential in children’s book selection processes (Gray; Stieve & Schoen, 2006; Swartz & Hendricks). The researcher conducted the study by giving questionnaires, due to the fact that this method gathers data from a wide variety of students for a more accurate representation of the population. If only interviews were given, the select few participants would be speaking for an entire group of people and the data may become less accurate.
In addition to a questionnaire, the process of interviewing a portion of students was implemented to provide the researcher with richer data. Using more than one strategy for data collection made the study and the results more valid and credible (Mertler, 2009). The interviews were conducted in a quiet environment found within the school, such as the school library and a meeting room. Each interview was video-recorded and transcribed to enable the researcher to note participants’ exact responses and to see the physical features that the participants were explaining about the book they chose. For confidentiality purposes, students’ faces were not video-recorded.

Procedures

To establish a relationship with the participating schools and students, the researcher visited the school principals and classroom teachers to gain approval. Within the classroom, the researcher also sent home consent forms to parents/guardians for approval of their child to participate in the study (See Appendix A); students were also required to complete assent forms (See Appendix B). As soon as all consent forms were returned, the researcher began distributing the questionnaires (See Appendix C) at the two schools located in separate cities (29 from fourth grade and 63 from eighth grade). The questionnaires took approximately 15 minutes to complete; therefore, all of them were received the day of administration. The questionnaires were completed in classrooms through the use of paper and pencils. Following the administration of the questionnaires, five students from each grade level were randomly selected, from those who completed the questionnaire, to be involved in the one-on-one interview.

Prior to the interview, the researcher compiled a stack of five books for each interviewee based on responses to the interest survey given directly after the questionnaire was completed. The interest survey was used to gain knowledge about each interviewee’s reading interests (See
Appendix D), particularly the topics, genres, and authors most preferred. The selected books were uniquely chosen to ensure that the physical factors varied from book to book. No two books were identical in terms of the physical characteristics. For example, some books had appealing front covers with shiny lettering and vivid graphics, while others were blank bound; some texts featured back-of-the-book summaries, while others did not. In addition, chapter length, book length, font size, and illustrations differed for each text. Since the physical features varied so widely, the students were able to easily decide between the texts and clearly explain their reasoning. The books were presented to the participant who was asked to make a selection that he/she found enticing and motivating to want to read. Once the interviewee chose a book that seemed interesting to read, the researcher began asking questions to start the discussion. With the use of a semi-structured interview, the researcher had the capability of asking alternative or additional questions to make the interview more conversational, rather than question-answer (See Appendix E). The interviews were given in a quiet area of the school.

Data Collection

Data collection began in the middle of February 2011. The data gathered consisted of collecting the responses from the questionnaires, which was given to 29 fourth graders and 63 eighth graders. It took approximately 15 minutes for the participants to respond to the questionnaire. In addition to the questionnaires, the researcher examined the responses to interest surveys given to the 10 students chosen for the interviews. Each interview session lasted five to ten minutes. The questionnaires and interviews focused on gaining further insight into students’ processes of selecting books, with a special focus on the physical features that impact their selection. The questionnaires took place in the students’ classrooms and the interviews were
administered in the libraries or another quiet area of the schools. This information was
documented and transcribed for later use in Chapter Four.

Data Analysis

Once all data were gathered from the various grade levels and schools, the researcher
tallied the responses received from the questionnaires onto three separate spreadsheets, one for
each grade level and then a spreadsheet that compiled both grades (See Appendix D). This
allowed the researcher to observe any similarities or differences in the physical characteristics
that influence students in their book selection process. One of the questions included on the
questionnaire asked the participant to rank the top three most important physical factors that
impact his/her book selection. The researcher was able to compare how these factors change as
students grow older.

In terms of analyzing the data collected from the interview, the researcher transcribed the
video-taped footage to refer to it for qualitative analysis. The participants responded to specific
questions related to the physical factors about the book they chose and how these factors either
impacted or did not impact their selection.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the specific physical characteristics of books
that motivate students to choose a book off the shelf. In addition, the researcher was curious to
see if these factors of selecting books alter as students become older. Through the use of
questionnaires, the researcher gained a better understanding of the general population due to the
fact that the questionnaires were given to a large group of participants. To get a more in-depth
analysis of students’ selections, one-on-one semi-structured interviews were administered and
video-recorded. These specific participants critiqued the physical characteristics of a book that he/she identified as an interest.
CHAPTER IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The specific question that guided this investigation was: When students are given the opportunity to self-select a book to read for recreation, what physical features of the book predominantly motivate the student to want to read it? Those factors, along with those that are rarely considered, are identified in this chapter.

A total of 92 students, 29 fourth graders and 63 eighth graders, from two suburban schools in Northwest Ohio were asked to take a 10-question questionnaire that would provide insight on the physical factors that most impact their selection and also how they feel about the books available to them in the classroom, school library, and at home. From the 92 students who participated in the questionnaire, 10 students, 5 from fourth grade and 5 from eighth grade, were randomly selected by the teacher to take part in a short interview that would delve deeper into their processes. These students were asked to complete a brief interest survey prior to the interview so that the researcher could gain knowledge about the students’ reading preferences.

After the topics, genres, and authors most desired by each student were obtained, the researcher gathered five books per student to use during the interview. The books that were used varied in visual appeal, chapter length, print size, and length. To begin the interviews, the students were asked to pick one of the five books based on appearance that looked most motivating to want to read for fun. This led to further questions about why the student chose one book over the others. Deeper, more qualitative data were gathered. The researcher provided base questions; however, these were supplemented with further questions to clarify or probe more deeply into the students’ responses.
Data Analysis

*Fourth Grade Questionnaire Results*

After analyzing the results from the fourth grade questionnaires (See Appendix F), the researcher was able to recognize the physical features of books that fourth grade students consider the most and the least.

The survey included several questions to provide the researcher with some general background information before asking specific questions about the book selection process. The responses for all questions by item are included in Appendix F. Of the 29 participants, 31% read every day; 41% read when they have the time; 24% read when it is assigned, and 3% never read. Of the genres provided, 14% prefer fiction titles, 28% prefer non-fiction, 17% prefer comedy, 7% prefer fantasy, and the remaining 31% prefer other genres that were not listed. The majority of the students who selected “other” indicated mystery as their favorite genre, while historical fiction also seemed to be a favorite.

When asked if they select books by their appearance, the majority (41%) responded that they “sometimes” do, while 21% responded “yes” and 34% responded “no.” The question that followed asked the participants to indicate which physical factor draws their attention the most. From the list of options, which included front cover, title, illustrations, font size, book length, and back-of-the-book summary, the results displayed that fourth grade students are most drawn to the front cover of the book (48%) (See Table 1).

This includes what the title looks like in terms of size and graphic appeal, illustrations, colors used, and the size of the author’s name. The second factor considered most important was the back-of-the-book summary (31% of the students). Seven percent indicated that the title had an impact on their selection, while another 7% said illustrations influenced them.
Table 1
Physical Factors Related to Fourth Grade Students’ Book Selection Process

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<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Front Cover</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Title</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Illustrations</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Font size</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Book length</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Back-of-the-book summary</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students were asked if they selected all of their books using the factors considered above. The results display that 55%, in fact, do choose their books in this manner, while 45% do not and resort to other strategies when selecting books.

Because choice was identified previously as a motivational factor, a question was included in the questionnaire to note the percentage of students who actually finish the books they have chosen themselves. According to student responses, 97% of the participants recorded either “usually” or “sometimes.” Furthermore, only 3% marked “never” to this question.

The last three questions on the questionnaire asked the participants to rate the quality of the books found in the classroom, school library, and at home. By including this question, the researcher was able to understand how well teachers, librarians, and parents know the students to provide them with the most motivational books possible. The fourth graders seemed to be very pleased with the books provided to them in all three settings. For the books found within the school library, 59% marked “great selection,” while 38% indicated that the selection was “ok.”
Only 3% indicated that the selection found within the school library was “not very good.” Similar results were found with books in the classroom. Thirty-four percent responded with having a “great selection,” and 48% responded that the books were an “ok selection.” Seventeen percent marked “not very good” when describing the selection of books found within the classroom. Lastly, it was no surprise to find that the students found that the books at home were the ones they were most pleased with, due to the fact that they probably chose them themselves, or someone who knows their reading preferences took part in the selection process. Sixty-six percent marked “very pleased;” 24% marked “somewhat pleased,” and only 10% marked “not pleased” to this question.

_Eighth Grade Questionnaire Results_

The exact questionnaire was given to a population of 63 eighth grade students. The results can be found in Appendix G.

Of the 63 participants, 10% read everyday; 43% read when they have the time; 40% read when it is assigned, and 8% never read. Of the genres provided, 37% prefer fiction titles; 13% prefer non-fiction; 13% prefer comedy; 3% prefer fantasy, and the remaining 35% prefer other genres that were not listed. The questionnaire allowed space for the students to handwrite their “other” preferred genre; it appears students enjoy reading books found within the mystery genre. When asked if they select books by their appearance, the majority (62%) responded that they “sometimes” do, while 25% responded “yes” and 1% responded “no.”

The question that followed asked the participants to indicate which physical factor draws their attention the most. From the list of options, which included front cover, title, illustrations,
Table 2

Physical Factors Related to Eighth Grade Students’ Book Selection Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Front Cover</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Title</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Illustrations</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Font size</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Book length</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Back-of-the-book summary</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

font size, book length, and back-of-the-book summary, the results display that eighth grade students are most drawn to the back-of-the-book summary (37%). The second most important factor considered is the front cover (33%). Ten percent indicated the title as having an impact on their selection; 6% marked illustrations; 3% marked font size, while 11% consider the book’s length. When asked if the participants choose all of their books this way, 51%, in fact, do choose their books in this manner, while 49% do not and resort to other strategies when selecting books. To answer the question, “Do you usually finish the books that you select yourself?”, 63% reported that they “usually” do; 35% reported “sometimes,” and only 2% reported “no.”

The last three questions on the questionnaire asked the participants to rate the quality of the books found in the classroom, school library, and at home. For the books found within the school library, 10% marked “great selection,” while 70% indicated that the selection was “ok.” Nineteen percent indicated that the selection found within the school library was “not very good.” Similar results were found with books in the classroom. Eight percent responded with
having a “great selection,” and 57% responded that the books were an “ok selection.” Thirty-three percent marked “not very good” when describing the selection of books found within the classroom. The eighth grade students seemed most pleased with the books found at home. Thirty-five percent marked “very pleased,” 46% marked “somewhat pleased,” and 17% marked “not pleased” to this question.

Fourth Grade Interest Results

From the five girls selected for the interviews, interests were identified through the use of a brief interest survey that asked the students to identify preferred topics, genres, and authors to read. In addition, the students were asked if they prefer longer books or shorter books and if it mattered that the book contain pictures/illustrations.

Allie, who was interviewed first, reported that her favorite genre to read is comedy and her favorite topic is anything that is funny. She does not prefer a specific author, but does like books that are longer. Lastly, it did not seem to matter to her if the books contained pictures or not.

Cinderella also preferred to read humorous books, such as Diary of A Wimpy Kid by Jeff Kinney. She mentioned that she enjoys other books by Jeff Kinney, but no specific topic to read about was identified. Like Allie, Cinderella also prefers longer books, but with no pictures.

Isabelle reported that she enjoys reading books of the fairy-tale genre, but also poetry and mystery. Her favorite topic to read about is anything fairy-tale, but no specific authors were given. Isabelle responded to, ‘Do you like longer books or shorter books?,” by saying, “It all depends.” In her opinion, a book does not have to have pictures for her to like it.
Megan has an interest in non-fiction books, specifically about dogs, because she likes to learn about them. Her preferred author to read is Charlotte Wilcox, and she tends to like books that are shorter in length. Once again, Megan does not care if a book contains pictures.

Lastly, Tweety was interviewed, and prior to that, she identified non-fiction books to be her favorite genre. Because she is currently learning about Native Americans in school, she identified Native Americans as being her favorite topic to read about. Tweety did not mention a certain author that she prefers; however she did recognize that she likes both long and short books, depending on what it is. She recorded on the survey that she especially likes books with pictures, which several non-fiction pieces of literature contain.

_Eighth Grade Interest Results_

In terms of the three girls and two boys interviewed in the eighth grade, interests were also identified using the same interest survey as used with the fourth grade students. The students were asked to identify preferred topics, genres, and authors to read. In addition, the students were asked if they prefer longer books or shorter books and if it mattered that the book contain pictures/illustrations.

Alex’s interests consisted of reading genres such as thriller and fantasy, such as the books, _Lord of The Rings_ by J.R.R. Tolkien, _Percy Jackson and The Olympians_ by Rick Riordan, and the Books of History Chronicles by Ted Dekker. In addition to the authors listed above, Alex also enjoys reading books by Frank Peretti. He mentioned that his favorite topics to read about are books that include alternative realities and the unexplainable. Lastly, he prefers longer books that do not contain pictures or illustrations.

Hailey indicated her favorite genres to read are horror, fantasy, and fiction, specifically books about vampires, ninjas, wolves, cats, and anime. Because she liked _The Chronicles of_
Vladimir Todd, she prefers to read books by that author, Heather Brewer. She is partial to books that are medium to long in length, but does not care if a book has pictures or not.

Because Ramone likes to learn, he prefers reading non-fiction titles about past wars. He did not identify an author that he is especially drawn to and he will read books that are short or long in length. It does not matter to Ramone if a book has pictures/illustrations or not.

Steve reported on her interest survey that she prefers reading the horror genre, specifically about the topic of murder or mystery. Her favorite author to read is Stephen King and books that are longer. She does not care if a book contains pictures or illustrations.

Lastly, Mary identified that her favorite genre is fiction and her favorite topics are love and magic. She reported that she enjoys reading books by J.K. Rowling, such as the Harry Potter series. She identified that she likes longer books over shorter books, and books that contain/do not contain pictures/illustrations.

Fourth Grade Interview Results

From the number of interests identified by the students, five books were selected per student based on his or her preferences. Observations were made while the student had the opportunity to look through each book before choosing one of them that looked motivating to want to read. These observations, along with a brief discussion about the physical features of the books that were chosen are explained in more depth below.

Allie indicated an interest in comedy, so the books selected included Allie Finkle’s Rules for Girls Best Friends and Drama Queens (Cabot, 2009), Because of Winn Dixie (DiCamillo, 2000), Dork Diaries (Russell, 2010), Ramona the Brave (Cleary, 1975), and Say What? (Haddix, 2004). Allie immediately picked up Dork Diaries without considering the other books. When asked to explain why she chose this book, she said she likes to read stuff that looks like diaries.
In terms of the physical characteristics, Allie was drawn the illustration of the girl on the front cover. She mentioned that girl looks scared and she wanted to know more about why she is scared. When asked why she did not choose *Ramona the Brave* (which was blank bound), she responded with, “because it doesn’t have any pictures and it doesn’t look like a funny book.” Throughout the interview, it was recognized that Allie uses several of the physical features of books when selecting, such as the illustrations, and the back-of-the-book summary. When asked if she usually finishes a book she selects, she mentioned that she always does. Details of the interview with Allie can be found in Appendix H.

Cinderella also indicated an interest in comedy, therefore the same children’s literature was used for her interview as well. Cinderella first picked up *Dork Diaries* and began flipping through the pages. She then picked up *Because of Winn Dixie* and did the same thing. Lastly, she picked up *Allie Finkle’s Rules for Girls Best Friends and Drama Queens* and looked through the first couple of pages and decided on that book as her choice. She did not consider *Say What?* or *Ramona the Brave*. When asked why she chose her book, she said because it is about best friends and drama queens. She later mentioned that she does not base her selection on the size, pictures, or back-of-the-book summary, but mainly the first couple of pages of the text. When probed, she mentioned that she would like to see more comedy books found within the school library. Details of the interview with Cinderella can be found in Appendix I.

Isabelle mentioned fairy-tale to be her favorite genre, so the books selected for her were *Diary of A Fairy Grandmother* (Codell, 2005), *Princess Sonora and the Long Sleep* (Levine, 1999), *The Enchanted Caribou* (Cleaver, 1985), *The Fairy Tale Book* (adapted by Scoggins, 2010), and *The Fairy-Tale Life* (Burch, 1994). Of the following books, Isabelle first picked up *Diary of A Fairy Grandmother* and flipped through the pages to examine the inside features of
the book. Next, she picked up *The Fairy Tale Book* and followed the same process of flipping through the pages. After she set the book down, she went back to *Diary of A Fairy Grandmother* and chose this book as the one she would want to read for fun. Her reasoning for choosing this book was because she recognized that the front cover had an illustration of an older woman soaring through the sky on a skateboard, which was funny to her. In addition, the front cover included a band of glitter that was flowing off the wand that the woman was holding in her hand. With Isabelle’s interests being fairy tales, she also chose the *Diary of A Fairy Grandmother* because the other front covers of the books seemed to present more princess-like stories, when she was in search of a fairy tale plot. Isabelle mentioned that *The Enchanted Caribou* by Elizabeth Cleaver was not motivating to want to read because, “Pretty much the cover is boring. It’s too blah, and the black and white illustrations are dull.” When asked how she felt about the books in the classroom and in the school library, she mentioned both were “ok,” but she wished there were more non-fiction books. Additionally, when probed, she said the book could use a little updating as far as motivational appeal. Details of the interview with Isabelle can be found in Appendix J.

Megan identified non-fiction, dogs, and books by Charlotte Wilcox to be of interest to her; therefore the books selected for her were *My Boyfriends’ Dogs* (Mackall, 2010), *Speak!* (Rosen, 1993), *Trash!* (Wilcox, 1988), *Wegmanology* (Wegman, 2001), and *Why Do Dogs Have Wet Noses?* (Coren, 2006). Megan took no time to choose the two books that she would most likely read for fun, which were *My Boyfriends’ Dogs* and *Why Do Dogs Have Wet Noses?* When asked why she chose *Why Do Dogs Have Wet Noses?* she said because the picture of the dog on the front cover is very “cute,” and it looks like a book that could provide her with a lot of information about dogs. Her reasoning behind picking *My Boyfriends’ Dogs* is that it is longer.
and seems like a book that would keep her interested for a long period of time. In reference to
Trash!, she did not choose this book “because one, you don’t even know what kind of book it is
because it doesn’t describe it.” It was apparent that Megan was choosing books strictly by the
physical factors. Furthermore, she did not choose Wegmanology because it was too big and she
does not like books that are large. While talking with Megan about the book selection found
within the classroom, she mentioned that she feels very positive about the books provided to her,
and she would be able to choose any book off the shelf and read it until she’s finished. Details of
the interview with Megan can be found in Appendix K.

Lastly, Tweety reported that non-fiction books and books about Native Americans were
interesting to her. The books selected for Tweety were, Cheyenne (Gaines, 2000), The Crimson
Cap (Howard, 2009), The Girl Who Chased Away Sorrow: The Diary of Sara Nita, a Navajo
Girl (Turner, 1999), To Spoil the Sun (Rockwood, 1976), and Trail of Tears: The Tragedy of the
American Indians (Marsico, 2010). When the interview began, Tweety first picked up The Girl
Who Chased Away Sorrow and began looking through the pages. She quickly put the book down
and picked up The Crimson Cap next and followed the same pattern throughout all of the books.
She chose To Spoil the Sun about one minute later. When asked why she had chosen that book,
she mentioned that it looked interesting. While flipping through the pages, she noticed a map of
where all of the Native Americans lived, which was cool to her. Tweety mentioned that she
selects books by flipping through the pages and then resorting to a summary on the back for
more information. In terms of physical characteristics, she said that she does not care what the
book looks like as long as the content was something she was interested in. Lastly, she said that
she “usually” finishes the books she reads and has a positive disposition about the selection of
books found in the school library. Details of the interview with Tweety can be found in Appendix L.

_Eighth Grade Interview Results_

Due to Alex’s interests being thriller and fantasy, the books selected for his interview were, *The Chronicles of Vladimir Todd* (Brewer, 2009), *Dark Angel* (Klass, 2005), *Incarceron* (Fisher, 2007), *The Oracles Betrayed* (Fisher, 2004), and *The Spiderwick Chronicles: The Seeing Stone* (DiTerlizzi & Black, 2003). When the books were displayed, Alex began by picking up three of the five books that he had not already read and started to carefully examine the front covers and back-of-the-book summaries. He eliminated *The Spiderwick Chronicles: The Seeing Stone*, and also *The Chronicles of Vladimir Todd* due to having already read them. He took no time to choose *Incarceron* based on the front cover/title and the explanation of the plot given in the back-of-the-book summary. During the interview with Alex, he mentioned specific ways he used the title of *Incarceron* to predict what the book will be about. Here is what he had to say, “But the title.... like some of the letters are like saws and spears. It implies it’s a book about torture or something like that. Um, gears and clocks signify it’s something mechanical. Just the way the front cover is done you can tell it’s going to be an adventurous thriller book.” When asked to describe the books available in the classroom and school library, he said that the book selection depends on the classroom he is in. He prefers the public library when choosing a book to read for fun and does not care if the books are outdated. Details of the interview with Alex can be found in Appendix M.

Hailey identified several interests on the survey, including medium to longer books about horror, fantasy, and fiction novels. In addition, the topics of vampires, ninjas, wolves, cats, and anything anime were identified as preferred topics that she enjoys reading about. With that said,
the books chosen for Hailey were, *Dust City* (Weston, 2010), *Fire-Starter* (King, 1980), *The Parliament of Blood* (Richards, 2008), *Three Quarters Dead* (Peck, 2010), and *Scary Stories* (2006). Without analyzing any of the books, Hailey first flipped through the first couple of pages for each of the books before picking up *The Parliament of Blood* to open up and examine. She set the book back down after appearing to read a bit of the first page. She then picked up *Three Quarters Dead* and read the back-of-the-book summary. When finished, she ended up choosing *Three Quarters Dead* based on the coolness of the front cover. She especially liked that there was a photograph of three teenage girls on the front. She mentioned that she usually picks all of her books based on the front cover and back-of-the-book summary, but also the thickness of the book can have an impact too. If it is really short, she mentioned she most likely will not read it. When asked, she said that she will usually finish all of the books that she starts, unless she gets to a point where she loses interest, then she will stop. Lastly, Hailey discussed the options available in the school library. During this discussion, she said that the library has a pretty good selection, but some of the books are outdated and there could be more books available. Details of the interview with Hailey can be found in Appendix N.

Because Steve identified horror books about murder and mystery, and books by Stephen King, the same books were used as Hailey for the interview. Steve immediately chose the Stephen King book without picking up and examining the options. The reason behind her quick decision was because she has read other books by Stephen King, such as *Pet Cemetery* and *Cujo*, in which she really enjoyed. She immediately eliminated *Three Quarters Dead* from the options available. When asked how she picks her books for independent reading, she reported that after she examines the front cover of the book, she reads the back-of-the-book summary. She specifically stated that the front cover must be really cool; it can’t just have the title of the book
and nothing else. She mentioned that if a book does not contain a back-of-the-book summary, she simply reads the very last page of the book, which sometimes can ruin the story, but also have the power to motivate her to read the entire book to see why it came to end the way it does. When asked if she usually finishes the books she reads, she responded with, “Yeah, I usually finish it.” However, when asked if she finishes the books that others pick for her, she responded with, “Um, well, it depends because sometimes I read like a few chapters of it and I don’t like it, but then I get rid of it.” She believes the selection of books available in the school library is “pretty ok”. She tends to go to the library a lot to fulfill her love for reading. Details of the interview with Steve can be found in Appendix O.

Ramone mentioned his interests being non-fiction books and books about wars on the survey. The books selected for him were, Causes of World War I (Ziff, 2006), Children of War (Ellis, 2009), Kristallnacht, The Night of Broken Glass (Fitzgerald, 2008), War Is... (edited by Aronson & Campbell, 2008), and The War of 1812 (Nardo, 1991). Ramone began by carefully examining each book. He first picked up The War of 1812 and began to look in the middle of the book first. He flipped through a few of the pages and read the text for approximately 30 seconds. He continued this pattern throughout all of the books, when finally deciding on War Is... because the story is told from the perspective of individuals who have actually gone through wars. The physical characteristics of the book did not really have an impact on his selection, as he mentioned. He actually mentioned that none of the books looked exciting to read, due to the fact that he focuses more on the content of the book when selecting. Furthermore, Ramone refers to the back-of-the-book summary when choosing books. He tends to pick all of his books this way, but sometimes he said he will go to the middle of the book to recognize the difficulty level of the words to see if he will be able to read the text without encountering problems. In addition to this,
he read a few lines found within the middle of the book for the same reason. Ramone acknowledged his reading ability and chose a book based on what he knew he could read. He reported that he always finishes the books that he selects. Details of the interview with Ramone can be found in Appendix P.

Lastly, Mary reported that she enjoys reading longer fictional books about love and magic. The following books were selected for Mary: *A Wizard of Mars* (Duane, 2010), *Jekel Loves Hyde* (Fantaskey, 2010), *Low Red Moon* (Devlin, 2010), *Magic Under Glass* (Dolamore, 2010), and *The Seven Songs of Merlin* (Barron, 1997). Mary immediately chose *The Seven Songs of Merlin* without picking up any of the books. When asked why, she mentioned that she liked the design of the front cover because it looks peaceful and magical. She eliminated *Jekel Loves Hyde* because it looks “kinda dark,” and also *Low Red Moon* because, “It looks kinda dark and thin, like not very substantial.” She said that she does not pick all of her books based on the front cover, but also reviews the back-of-the-book summary to gain more knowledge about the book’s content. Additionally, she reported that when she chooses books to read for fun, she always finishes them. She extended her feelings toward the physical characteristics of book and how they impact her selection by saying that they play a big part, specifically the size of the book, in terms of thickness, and also the front cover. When discussing the books found within the school library, she believes that it needs a bit of improvement. She would like to see more mature books with serious plots, rather than so many comical books. Details of the interview with Mary can be found in Appendix Q.

Discussion of Results

The specific question that guided this investigation was: When students are given the opportunity to self-select a book to read for recreation, what physical features of the book
predominantly motivate the student to want to read it? To answer this question, the survey results indicated that the back-of-the-book summary and the front cover are the most influential physical factors students in grades four and eight consider when selecting a book for independent reading.

Although the students mentioned these strategies as helpful, they also indicated that they do not choose all their books this way, which means other strategies are utilized. The students used more than one strategy to select books to meet their interests, reading level, and to satisfy their motivational needs. It appears that the books available to the students in the two participating schools provide a wide variety of options from which students may choose. This statement was also supported during the interviews when students mentioned that the books in the classroom, library, and at home are up-to-date and, for the most part, in good condition.

In terms of the 10 students who were interviewed, the students in fourth grade took less time to choose one of the five books provided, appearing that their decisions were made strictly from looking at the front cover, title, and book size without even considering interior factors such as print size and chapter length. Most of the eighth grade students who were interviewed took the time to thoroughly analyze each book and its features as if their book selection strategies are more developed than those students in fourth grade. The eighth grade students were extremely interested in elaborate plots that correlate with their interests. One student mentioned that the front cover simply made the book look “dark and thin” and “not very substantial.” This student then resorted to the back-of-the-book summary, as did most of the students in eighth grade, to gather a better picture of what the book entails.

Summary

This chapter summarizes the results from the questionnaires and the insight gathered through the observations of the interviews. The method used for selecting books for the
interviews was based on each individual student’s reading interests. The researcher obtained five books per student that varied in graphic appeal, length, and other attributes such as back-of-the-book summary. The selected books were reviewed by the researcher, and verified by a teacher knowledgeable about children’s literature, to ensure the accuracy of categorizing the books. It was determined that although the students seemed to use more than one strategy when selecting a book, the physical factors that truly motivate them to open a book and read it are the front cover and back-of-the-book summary.
CHAPTER V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research question that grounded this study is: When students are given the opportunity to self-select a book to read for recreation, what physical features of the book predominantly motivate the student to want to read it? Motivation is a powerful notion and it frequently makes a difference between temporary and superficial learning and learning that is internalized and permanent (Oldfather, 1993). By understanding the underlying issues of motivation, teachers can carefully construct a curriculum and a classroom environment that provides access and availability to a wide range of texts that are suitable to meet the students’ ability levels and interests. With a recent push towards self-selection in literacy instruction, adults need to make available literature that will motivate, stimulate, and encourage reading as a worthwhile task. Because this study found that students, in fact, do use self-selection strategies that involve the physical features of books, this chapter will discuss the factors that were most considered. In addition, recommendations for teachers, librarians, parents, and cover art designers are suggested as a means of motivating students in and out of the classroom to become life-long readers who strive to learn.

Summary

A total of 29 fourth grade students and 63 eighth grade students completed a 10-question questionnaire about the type of reader they are and the physical factors that they consider when choosing a book. Of the 92 students who finished the questionnaire, 10 were randomly selected (5 from each grade level) by the classroom teachers to take part in a brief 5-minute interview session. The method of using questionnaires was designed to provide an overall scope of the general population, while the semi-structured interviews gave the researcher the opportunity to more closely examine the physical features that impact children’s book selections. In this mixed-
methods approach to collecting data, the use of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews provided the researcher with more accurate information pertaining to the research problem, rather than using one type of data collection in isolation (Mertler, 2009, p. 11). Furthermore, using more than one strategy for data collection made the study and the results more valid and credible (Mertler).

It was noted in Chapter One that a major consideration to be included in this study was the idea that students’ reading interests should be recognized before asking them to identify the factors they consider. Edmunds and Bauserman (2006), Haynes and Richgels (1992), Stieve and Schoen (2006), and Swartz and Hendricks (2000) are just a few of the studies that examine the factors that motivate students in their book selection process in the more recent years. Collectively, the findings from these studies have identified personal interest, author, genre and title as having a significant impact on students’ selection of literature.

With that said, the researcher gained the interviewees’ reading interests by attaching a five-question interest survey to the back of the paper and pencil questionnaire. The interest survey asked students to indicate their favorite topics to read about, preferred authors, genres, and other book characteristics that may have an impact. Using this information, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews, in which asked the interviewee to choose one of the five books provided by the researcher based on his/her reading interests. Questions were asked about the physical features of the book that was chosen and reasons why the other books were not chosen. Observations were made about the length of time it took the students to select a book, the strategies that were implemented, and the factors considered and not considered.
Once the questionnaires and interviews were completed, the researcher tallied the data gathered from the questionnaires into a spreadsheet and transcribed the interviews for further analyzing.

Conclusions

The results of this study confirm that students, in fact, do consider certain physical factors of books when self-selecting literature for independent reading. However, other factors were recognized, too. Although the students used in this study were not necessarily interested in the same types of reading materials, they all mentioned certain physical characteristics having an impact in their selection.

The results first suggest that even when students are provided with books that satisfy their interests, the final decision to read a book relies also on visual appeal. If a student mentioned that he/she enjoys reading books about cars, one cannot expect that the student will have a desire to read any book about cars. The student, who’s interests have been met, will resort to the physical factors of the book to make a more precise selection depending on the specific physical factor that the student considers most of the time. Three physical factors were found to be most influential between both fourth and eighth grade students, the front cover, the back-of-the-book summary, and the title.

It is apparent that children growing up in the age of the 21st century are “increasingly visual, and the youngest generations have little patience with anything that is not as clear and sharp as high-definition television” (Lohmiller, 2008, p. 14). The fourth grade students were most drawn to the front covers of the books, supporting the above statement. The illustration on the cover motivated them to want to read about the book to see how the illustration relates to the plot.
Results from a study conducted by Swartz and Hendricks (2000) mentioned that 18 of the 31 participants used the back-of-the-book summaries as a deciding factor in the book selection process. By reading the back-of-the-book summary, the students mentioned that they were able to get a glimpse as to what the book will be about. The back-of-the-book summaries were rated the most important factor considered by the eighth grade students, while it was ranked second most important for fourth graders.

The third most considered factor recognized in both the fourth and eighth grade results was the title. For some readers, the title can be the deciding factor if the book will get read or not. Book marketing companies are aware of the impact that the title has on the selling of literature, and therefore it must be catchy and enticing to the reader in some way. Ross and Chelton (2001) agree by saying that “readers said they were drawn both to an unusual, catchy title (in the case of an unfamiliar book) and to a familiar title that struck a chord” (p. 53). In Reuter’s study (2007), the title was by far the most frequently mentioned factor for selecting a book.

Another conclusion can be made from the results by analyzing the factors that were not considered. In Chapter Two, Phythian-Sence and Clark (2008) mentioned that one of the features of a book that can impact the ‘mood’ of the reader is the length, or “degree of challenge posed by the text” (p. 22) Ross and Chelton (2001) further found that the book’s size was a key factor in selecting books. In this study, the size of the print and the book’s length were two factors that were only considered by a small number of students. With that said, it appears that students are highly intrinsically motivated to read and do not focus their selection on the difficulty level of the book. Hunt (1970) contends that if a student is intrinsically motivated to learn more about a topic, the difficulty level of the book becomes irrelevant and the student will still learn from the
text. Likewise, Rasinski (1988) concurs in a statement that acknowledges how powerful internal motivation can play in students’ drive to educate themselves on new topics. The findings of Reuter (2007) mention that a book’s length becomes less of an impact as students age. She found that the length of a book “dominated with younger children but were not mentioned as often by older ones” (p. 1754). As Hunt (1970) mentioned, students who feel competent in their reading abilities may select texts that are above their independent reading level and still be successful.

Recommendations

For Teachers

On the issue of motivating students to read, the research confirms that students first need to find books in which they are interested in and then have available the books with the physical factors that are most motivating to pick off the shelf. It is recommended that the teacher conduct a brief interest survey at the beginning of the year to establish an overview of the students’ reading preferences, in terms of topic, author, and genre. Furthermore, teachers should observe their students’ behaviors and choices when selecting books in the classroom. The teacher can then follow-up by asking the students why they chose the book, to identify the physical features considered. As teachers host individual conferences with students, Smith and Becher (1960) reported during their study that an, “outcome was an improved teacher-pupil relationship and a more complete understanding of the child and his needs. This enabled the teacher to guide the child’s reading in such a way as to broaden his interests and challenge him to further endeavor” (p. 84). The educators involved in their study noticed an increased motivation to read when the students were able to select their own books and share with peers.

Furthermore, Wendelin and Zinck (1983) emphasize the importance of understanding how children select their books because it helps the teacher select better reading materials for
activities involving literature response. In terms of literature response, Gambrell (1996) noted in her theory of an engaged reader that engaged readers are socially interactive. With that said, it is recommended that teachers allow students to self-select books and participate in book clubs, book talks, and other activities that allow students to share their experiences with literature and recommend books to others. Cunningham concurs by saying, “Sharing those books once a week with someone who ‘oohs and aahs’ about your reading choices is also a surefire motivator” (Cunningham, 2005, p. 89).

Another recommendation for teachers is to model effective self-selection strategies so that students can develop their own strategies for selecting appropriate books. It is recommended that students learn a strategy that helps to find a good match between their reading ability and their interests (Wutz & Wedrick, 2005). Several book selection strategies were mentioned in Chapter Two, such as the Goldilocks strategy, the BOOKMATCH method, and the Five-Finger method. However, teachers can go further by promoting strategies that are based on the physical features. The teacher can explain to students that front covers and titles can give clues as to what the book will be about but can also be misleading, and a better strategy for choosing a book could be to read the back-of-the-book summary. By reading the back-of-the-book summary, students can become enticed to find out more about the book and also to quickly determine if the topic will be of interest to them. When students select books that are appropriate for their reading level, this notion supports Gambrell et al. (1996) in that a student who feels competent in his or her reading capabilities and believes reading is valuable and important, will exert more energy into reading related activities due to positive feelings of self-concept.

Lastly, teachers should continue to provide a wide variety of texts to meet the reading preferences of all students. Teachers can work to expose students to new genres and topics in
effort to expand the types of books students will look for as independent reading material.

Moreover, given the comments by students in this study, teachers should more closely analyze the front covers and back-of-the-book summaries that are provided to students in the classroom, as these are the factors that students highly pay attention to when selecting literature to read for fun. With that said, once the teacher has found a selection of books that look as if they are appealing to students, the teacher should display the books in the book area and make sure that the front covers are showing. Students will see the front covers and be more likely to pick a book outside of their comfort zone based on the visible front cover, and the recommendation of the teacher.

For Librarians

An educator may have the most sophisticated teaching techniques available, yet with no staff to motivate students, their efforts will be entirely wasted. Librarians are highly trained individuals in the field of library science. Often times, when students enter middle school their library time is cut back and the only available time they have to visit the library is during study halls or academic assists. Librarians need to consider the time that students spend in the library as valuable time to share their passion for reading in hopes that it will motivate them.

To begin, librarians are one of the individuals responsible for the selection of literature available to the students. It was mentioned above that The Quick Picks Committee states, in reference to the Top Ten Quick Picks list of 2006, the list can “be a guide for professionals to determine what reluctant readers are apt to read” (2006, p. 9). With that said, it is important for students to read quality literature, but librarians should understand that this can also limit the students’ freedom and lead them to select a book that they are less interested in. It is recommended that librarians, and other adults continue to use these lists to ensure that books are
age appropriate and meaningful. However, librarians should also consider the importance of front covers as a motivational factor for students when selecting a book. It was mentioned during an interview that a few of the books provided in the school library were torn, beat-up, and overall, out-dated, resulting in the student not checking out the book. In this case, librarians are recommended to take an inventory of the books available to students and judge the quality before putting it back on the shelf for a student to check out.

Lastly, it is recommended that librarians research the most popular books for the age level of the students and share these books with the students as they enter the library. As the classroom teacher should display the front covers of books, so should a librarian. Displaying books by their front covers is a great way to share popular books that are most read by student’s that age. It is important for the librarian to make sure that the reviews on the books are from students similar in age, rather than adults who can sometimes have different opinions and views than the students.

For Parents

The results display that students were most pleased with the books provided to them at home. Whether the parents choose the literature for the child, or the child picks their own collection, parents should be encouraged to talk with their child on a regular basis about the books that their child is engaged in. A great opportunity to have a brief discussion about the book is during dinnertime, before bed, or on the way to school, if possible. If it is apparent that the child is not engaged in reading related activities, it is recommended that parents model positive reading behaviors in the home, such as reading the newspaper, reading magazines, or novels. By reading in front of children, they begin to notice that reading is of value and importance for building life-long reading habits. As mentioned in Chapter Two, intrinsic and extrinsic
motivation can play a huge role in the learning process. Extrinsic rewards are not always recommended, but when dealing with an unmotivated student, sometimes it can help to set goals and chart progress by means of a sticker chart, or other form of reward. Over time, the child will become more confident in his/her reading capabilities and be more willing to take a risk with a more difficult book. Likewise, “a student who feels competent in his or her reading capabilities and believes reading is valuable and important, will exert more energy into reading related activities due to positive feelings of self-concept (Gambrell et al.).

Lastly, parents can add to the child’s collection of books by surprising them with a desired book as a gift. Building a wide variety of texts at home is just as important to extend learning after the school day has ended. A literate-rich environment should be found not only in school libraries but also in classroom collections and the home environment to outline the importance of literacy development in children’s lives.

For Cover Art Designers

The results suggest that students are highly interested in the front cover of books and back-of-the-book summaries. The front cover may be considered by the appeal of the graphics, the title, the usage of color, and the size of the author’s name. It was mentioned during the interview with Hailey that she chose a book because it had three teenage girls on the front and the title looked as if blood was dripping from it. In addition, during the interview with Megan, she did not choose a book with a blank binding because there was no title to tell what the book was called, no illustrations to give hints about the story’s plot, and no indication of an author. As some students examine front cover, others refer to the back-of-the-book summary when in need of more information about the book. It is recommended to cover art designers and book publishing companies to include these features, for they are what the majority of students used in
this study considered when choosing a book to read for pleasure. It is important to know that a front cover that gives away much of the book’s content is not effective for motivating students to read. If they recognize all the details of the book by looking at the cover or reading the back, there is no need for them to start reading the inside. Lohmiller (2008) further argues this point by saying, “Other failures include covers that date themselves with trendy fashions and hairstyles, or covers that try to include as many aspects of the book as possible, and in doing so fail to intrigue or entice the reader” (p. 13). Every detail of about a book should not be provided on the cover; students need to discover the book for themselves.

For Further Study

The findings from this study branch off of other studies conducted on the factors that impact students’ motivation to read. This low scale study identified that students in grades four and eight have specific physical factors of books that they consider when choosing a book, and this was evident throughout the questionnaires and the interview process.

Other studies could expand this research by working with a larger population of students that extend across a wider range of grade levels. This study analyzed a total of 29 fourth grade students and 63 eighth grade students through the use of questionnaires and interviews. It would be more beneficial to follow a larger group of students over a period of several years to pinpoint changes that take place in the child’s selection strategies. In addition to this, because the physical factors that the students considered in both fourth and eighth grade were similar, it does not appear that their selection strategies vary greatly. A study that followed students from a lower elementary level through a middle school level would most likely identify much more variance in the physical factors that students consider due to the fact that the appearance of books are highly contrasting. Another interesting study would be to compare the book selection processes
of reluctant readers to avid readers. By doing so, the researcher could gain knowledge about the factors that reluctant readers consider and compare these to those that avid readers focus on when selecting a book.

Additionally, this study might be replicated by modifying the methods used to gather data. It would be interesting to work with teachers, librarians, and parents to examine the ways in which they prepare children to select books and whether or not the strategies modeled set the student up for success failure. After collecting this information, then turn to the students to see how they feel about the methods presented to them. Instructional strategies and book selection techniques will vary by location, which makes reading motivation a topic which research is always needed, because all teachers are different, all children are different, and instructional practice are constantly changing.

Summary

This chapter presented a summary of the investigation of fourth and eighth grade students’ book selection strategies and the physical factors that impact their selections. Conclusions from the data were presented based on questionnaire results and interview observations. According to this study and the participants who were involved, it was determined that, while students each have their own unique strategy for choosing a book to read for pleasure, the front cover and back-of-the-book summary were determined to be the most influential factors that students evaluate.

Recommendations for teachers, librarians, parents, and cover art designers were included in this chapter in addition to possibilities for continuing research. Teachers need to support students in their ability to choose their own books, while librarians and parents can act as role models to deliver the importance and value of reading outside the classroom. Cover art designers
should embrace the findings of this research in order to construct book covers that are most appealing to this age group. It was apparent that the students, in fact, do judge books by their covers in most cases, but resort to other strategies when the front cover is not enough. This students questioned and interviewed represent a small population; therefore this study is only one contribution to the area of students’ book selection processes and reading motivation.
REFERENCES

(2006). Picking the Quick Picks. *Young Adult Library Services, 4*(2), 7-9.


Cunningham, P. (2005). “If they don’t read much, how they ever gonna get good?” *The Reading Teacher, 88*-90. doi:10.1598/RT.1.10


doi:10.1598/RT.59.5.1.


APPENDIX A.

PARENT CONSENT FORM
To: Parents and Guardians  
From: Bria Gibson, Graduate Student  
Re: Invitation to Participate in a Research Project  

My name is Bria Gibson and I am a currently pursuing my Master’s Degree in Reading from Bowling Green State University. To graduate, I am required to submit a thesis related to my area of study. I will be gathering this research with fourth and eighth grade students at your child’s elementary or middle school. I am inviting your child to participate in this research study. I am interested in seeing how the physical characteristics of books, such as front cover, illustrations, and back-of-book summaries impact students’ book selection processes. This research could help teachers to better understand what characteristics are most influential when students choose books. The teachers can use this knowledge to provide highly motivating and appealing literature for the students in the classroom and library. Students who participate could benefit by learning more about the factors that motivate them to read.

About 100 students will be selected to complete a questionnaire that will require them to use a Scantron form to mark their responses. Conducting the questionnaires will take about 15-20 minutes to complete. Of the students who complete the questionnaire, ten will be randomly selected to participate in a one-on-one interview session, which will be video recorded and last about 10 minutes. During the interview, the researcher will present a variety of age appropriate books that were noted as an area of interest to the student. The books selected will be similar to those that can be found in the student’s school library. The student will then choose a book that he or she would like to read, and a discussion will take place about the physical characteristics that influenced his or her choice. To keep the student’s confidentiality in tact, the video camera will be directed on the book that is being discussed. Students can refuse to participate at any time.

In order for students to participate, we will need your written permission. If you are interested in having your child join in this project, please sign and return one copy of this permission slip. Please keep the other copy for yourself. Participation is voluntary, and you or your child may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without problems. Your child’s participation in this study will not impact his or her grade/class standing or relationship with the school.

If you agree to participate, I can share with you your child’s results from the questionnaire and/or interview. When results of the study are analyzed and written up, I will provide a copy of the report to the school. The results of your child’s assessment are confidential. In written data and oral presentations, your child will be identified only by use of their first name and an assigned number. The information gathered will be used for research purposes only and will be stored in a secure area during the time of the study. Because this study involves asking children about their book selection process and the motivating physical features that have an impact on this process, there are no risks to any participants beyond those encountered in their daily lives.

Thank you very much for considering this request. I look forward to hearing from you. Please contact me at briag@bgsu.edu or my advisor, Dr. Cindy Hendricks, at (419) 372-7341 or cindyg@bgsu.edu if you have any questions about this study. If you have any questions regarding your child’s and your own rights as research participants, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Board, Bowling Green State University at (419) 372-7716 or hsrb@bgsu.edu.

I grant permission for (Child’s Name) ____________________________, born on (Child’s Birthday) ____________________________, to participate in this research project. I have read the description of the study and I am agreeable to all the terms and conditions.

______________________________  _______________________
(Signature of parent or guardian)  (Date)
APPENDIX B.

STUDENT ASSENT FORM
To: Fourth and Eighth Grade Students  
From: Bria Gibson, Graduate Student  
Re: Invitation to Participate in a Research Project

My name is Bria Gibson and I am a Graduate student at Bowling Green State University. To graduate, I must do a research study. I will be doing this research with fourth and eighth grade students. I would like you to help me with this study. I want to find out what motivates you to pick a book. Your answers could help teachers choose books to keep in their classrooms, which could help keep students like you interested in reading.

If you want to help me with this study, you will be asked to take a short questionnaire that will last about 15-20 minutes. You will be asked questions about how you pick books, and you will record your answers onto a Scantron form. You will only have to take this questionnaire once. There is a chance that you may get chosen to be interviewed too. During the interview, you will choose a book that I bring, and I will ask you questions about why you chose the book. The interview will be video recorded, but your face will not be shown. You can choose not to be interviewed or take the questionnaire at any time.

If you want to take this questionnaire and/or be interviewed and help me with my study, I will need you to sign this form. Any answer you give me will not be shared with anyone else, and your grade or standing in class will not be impacted. Nothing bad will happen if you choose to take this questionnaire, but you can tell me that you do not want to finish it at any time. If you ever have any questions, please ask me!

Thank you for reading this and learning about my study! If you want to take my questionnaire, please sign your name below.

_________________________________                ____________________________________  
(Signature of student)                     (Date)
APPENDIX C.

QUESTIONNAIRE
Directions: Please answer each question. Write the letter of your answer on the line to the left of the question.

1. How do you describe yourself as a reader?
   A. Read everyday (Love it and can’t get enough!)
   B. When I have time
   C. When assigned
   D. Never

2. What genre of book do you tend to read most of the time?
   A. Fiction
   B. Non-fiction
   C. Comedy
   D. Fantasy
   E. Other ______________________________________

3. Do you select books by their appearance?
   A. Yes
   B. No
   C. Sometimes

4. What physical factor draws your attention the most?
   A. Front cover
   B. Title
   C. Illustrations
   D. Font size
   E. Book length
   F. Back-of-the-book summary

5. When picking a book for fun, please rank the three most important factors you consider.
   1____
   A. Front cover
   B. Title
   C. Illustrations
   2____
   D. Font size
   E. Book length
   F. Back-of-the-book summary
   3____
   G. Other

6. Do you select all your books this way?
   A. Yes
   B. No
7. Do you usually finish the books that you have chosen yourself?
   A. Usually
   B. Sometimes
   C. Never

8. How do you feel about the books available to you in the school library?
   A. Great selection
   B. Ok selection
   C. Not very good selection

9. How do you feel about the books available to you in the classroom?
   A. Great selection
   B. Ok selection
   C. Not very good selection

10. How pleased are you with the books provided to you at home?
    A. Very pleased
    B. Somewhat pleased
    C. Not pleased

Reminder: You may get chosen to be part of a short (5 min.) interview. You may choose NOT to be interviewed if you are selected. Thank you for participating in my study!
APPENDIX D.

READING INTERESTS SURVEY
Reading Interests Survey

Student Name: ____________________________________________

1. What is your favorite genre of book to read? (Fiction, Nonfiction, Fantasy, Science-Fiction, Poetry, Mystery, Other)

2. What is your favorite topic to read about?

3. Do you prefer reading a certain author? If so, who?

4. Do you like longer books or shorter books?

5. Does it matter if a book has lots of pictures in it in order to want to read it?
APPENDIX E.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Interview Questions

1. What was the first thing that attracted you to choose this book?
   - Why not this book instead?
   - Did any of the physical factors of the book influence your choice?

2. Do you tend to pick all of your books this way?

3. Do you usually finish the books that you pick on your own?

4. Tell me what makes a book exciting to want to read.

5. Do the physical features of books impact your book selection process?

6. Do you feel that the books in your classroom and school library are attractive and motivating to want to read? If not, what kind of books would you like to see?

7. Is there anything else you want to tell me about how you choose books to read for fun?

* Other questions may arise as the interview is in session due to responses given by the participants.
APPENDIX F.

FOURTH GRADE QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS
### 1. How do you describe yourself as a reader?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read everyday</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I have time</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When assigned</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2. What genre of book do you tend to read most of the time?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fiction</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-fiction</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comedy</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fantasy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3. Do you select books by their appearance?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4. What physical factor draws your attention the most?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Front Cover</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustrations</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Font size</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book length</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 5. When picking a book for fun, please rank the three most important factors you consider.

#### 5-1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Front cover</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustrations</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Font size</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book length</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Back-of-the-book summary</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 5-2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Front cover</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustrations</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Font size</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Book length</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Back-of-the-book summary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5-3. When picking a book for fun, please rank the three most important factors you consider.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Front cover</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Title</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Illustrations</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Font size</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Book length</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Back-of-the-book summary</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Do you select all your books this way?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choice</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Yes</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. No</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. Do you usually finish the books that you have chosen yourself?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choice</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Usually</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Sometimes</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Never</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. How do you feel about the books available to you in the school library?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selection</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Great selection</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Ok selection</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Not very good selection</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. How do you feel about the books available to you in the classroom?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selection</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Great selection</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Ok selection</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Not very good selection</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10. How please are you with the books provided to you at home?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selection</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Great selection</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Ok selection</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Not very good selection</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX G.

EIGHTH GRADE QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS
1. **How do you describe yourself as a reader?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Read everyday</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. When I have time</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. When assigned</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Never</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. **What genre of book do you tend to read most of the time?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Fiction</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Non-fiction</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Comedy</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Fantasy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Other</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. **Do you select books by their appearance?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Yes</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. No</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Sometimes</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. **What physical factor draws your attention the most?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Front Cover</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Title</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Illustrations</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Font size</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Book length</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Back-of-the-book summary</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5-1. **When picking a book for fun, please rank the three most important factors you consider.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Front cover</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Title</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Illustrations</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Font size</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Book length</td>
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<td>F. Back-of-the-book summary</td>
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<td>G. Other</td>
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<td>5-2. When picking a book for fun, please rank the three most important factors you consider.</td>
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<td>B. Title</td>
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<td>D. Font size</td>
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<td>C. Never</td>
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<th>9. How do you feel about the books available to you in the classroom?</th>
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<tr>
<td>B. Ok selection</td>
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<td>57%</td>
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<td>C. Not very good selection</td>
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<td>10. How please are you with the books provided to you at home?</td>
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<td>Percentage</td>
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APPENDIX H.

INTERVIEW WITH “ALLIE”
Allie’s Interests: Comedy

Books presented to student:
Because of Winn Dixie by Kate DiCamillo
Best Friends and Drama Queens by Meg Cabot
Dork Diaries by Rachel Renee Russell: Book chosen
Ramona The Brave by Beverly Cleary
Say What? by Margaret Peterson

1. What was the first thing that attracted you to choose this book? (Dork Diaries)
“I like reading books that are like diaries.”

-Why not this book instead? (Ramona The Brave)
“Because it doesn’t have any pictures and it doesn’t look funny.”

-Did any of the physical factors of the book influence your choice?
“It looks like she’s scared, so I wonder why she is scared. The other ones look good, but I just really like this one.”

2. Do you tend to pick all of your books this way?
“Sometimes...like when I look at a book sometimes I will look inside and other times I won’t.”

-Do you ever look at the pictures inside, or the font size?
“No, but sometimes I do.”

-Do you ever read the back-of-the-book summary?
“Yeah. That can help me pick a book.”

3. Do you usually finish the books that you pick on your own?
“I finish it.”

4. Tell me what makes a book exciting to want to read.
“Like...when it talks about one thing for the whole chapter and it doesn’t keep changing

5. Do you feel that the books in your classroom and school library are attractive and motivating to want to read? If not, what kind of books would you like to see?
“Those are really good books.”

-Would you pick any book off the shelf and read it?
“Yeah.”

6. Is there anything else you want to tell me about how you choose books to read for fun?
“Sometimes, like, instead of reading the back, I might read the first page.”
APPENDIX I.

INTERVIEW WITH "CINDERELLA"
Cinderella’s Interests: Jeff Kinney, Comedy

Books presented to student:
Because of Winn Dixie by Kate DiCamillo
Best Friends and Drama Queens by Meg Cabot: Book chosen
Dork Diaries by Rachel Renee Russell
Ramona The Brave by Beverly Cleary
Say What? by Margaret Peterson

1. What was the first thing that attracted you to choose this book? (Best Friends and Drama Queens)
   “Because it’s about best friends and drama queens.”

   - Why not this book instead? (Ramona The Brave)
     “No reason really.”

   - Did any of the physical factors of the book influence your choice?
     “No.”

   - Did you look at the size of the book, or the back-of-the-book summary? What do you look at?
     “The first couple of pages.”

2. Do you tend to pick all of your books this way? I notice you looked closely at the title and the first couple of pages.
   “Yeah.”

3. Do you usually finish the books that you pick on your own?
   “I usually finish all of them.”

4. Do you feel that the books in your classroom and school library are attractive and motivating to want to read? If not, what kind of books would you like to see?
   “They are ok.”

   - What could make them better do you think?
     “More comedy. I don’t care about the physical factors.”

5. Is there anything else you want to tell me about how you choose books to read for fun?
   “No.”
APPENDIX J.

INTERVIEW WITH “ISABELLE”
Isabelle’s Interests: Fairy Tales

**Books presented to student:**
- *A Fairy Tale Life* by Joann Johansen Burch
- *The Fairy Tale Book* by Liz Scoggins
- *Princess Sonora and The Long Sleep* by Gail Carson Levine
- *Diary of A Fairy Godmother* by Esmo Raji Codell: Book chosen
- *The Enchanted Caribou* by Elizabeth Cleaver

1. What was the first thing that attracted you to choose this book? (*Diary of A Fairy Grandmother*)
   “Um, like the front cover. Like it’s a grandmother and usually they are little kids. She is on a skateboard in the air.”

   - Why not this book instead? (*The Enchanted Caribou*)
     “Pretty much the cover is boring. It’s too blah and the black and white illustrations are dull.”

   - What about this one? It’s small and has gold writing on it. (*Princess Sonora and The Long Sleep*)
     “Because it looks like it would be more of a princess story.”

   - And what about that one over there? (*A Fairy-Tale Life*)
     “It just looks more about like real people.”

2. Do you tend to pick all of your books this way?
   “No, sometimes I read the summary on the back.”

3. Do you usually finish the books that you pick on your own?
   “Um, it all depends. Like if the book is beginning to sound a little boring then no, but if it sounds more fun, then yeah.”

4. Do you feel that the books in your classroom and school library are attractive and motivating to want to read? If not, what kind of books would you like to see?
   “Um, in the classroom they are ok, and in the school library they are ok.”

   - What do you think could make them better?
     “Like, if we had like more non-fiction books. There are a whole bunch of fiction books and not enough for everyone to choose one in the non-fiction. Most of them are pretty cool looking though.”

5. Is there anything else you want to tell me about how you choose books to read for fun?
   “No, not really. Hehe”
APPENDIX K.

INTERVIEW WITH “MEGAN”
Books presented to student:

*Why Do Dogs Have Wet Noses?* by Stanley Coren: Book chosen

*Trash!* by Charlotte Wilcox

*My Boyfriends' Dogs* by Dandi Daley Mackall: Book chosen

*Speak!* by M. Rosen

*Wegmanology* by William Wegman

1. What was the first thing that attracted you to choose this book?

   “Well I’d probably pick one of these two. (*Why Do Dogs Have Wet Noses?* or *My Boyfriends’ Dogs*) On this one (*Why Do Dogs Have Wet Noses*?), the dog is really cute, and it looks like really good information because I like to learn about dogs. And this one (*My Boyfriends’ Dogs*) because it’s longer, and it would probably keep me interested and reading for awhile.”

   - Why not this book instead? (*Trash!*)

     “Because one, you don’t even know what kind of book it is because it doesn’t describe it.”

   - Why not this one? This dog is really cute. (*Wegmanology*)

     “Because it is really big, and I don’t like tall books. And, it looks just more like about tricks and dogs.”

   - Did any of the physical factors of the book influence your choice?

     “Yeah, like I’ll look at the pictures in the book, and I’ll read the captions on the back, and also the title.”

2. Do you tend to pick all of your books this way?

   “No, not all of them. Like on the Internet at our school library we can type in the title and get some information about how the book is. Sometimes I’ll read a page or two

3. Do you feel that the books in your classroom and school library are attractive and motivating to want to read? If not, what kind of books would you like to see?

   “Well at the library we have good books and some not-so-good books. Um, in our classroom we have decent books because I like to read chapter books and books that are funny too!”

   - So you could go into the classroom and pick any book off the shelf and no matter what it looks like you will read it?

     “Yeah!”

   - And it’s not the same in the library?

     “Well there are some that are really really old and look like their teared up and if I get that book I wouldn’t want anything to happen because then I would feel bad. And then there are some that are like too short and really really kid ones that I don’t want to read.”
APPENDIX L.

INTERVIEW WITH “TWEETY”
Tweety’s Interests: Native Americans, Non-fiction

**Books presented to student:**
The Cheyenne by Richard Gaines  
The Crimson Cap by Ellen Howard  
The Girl Who Chased Away Sorrow by Ann Warren Turner  
The Trail of Tears by Katie Marsico  
**To Spoil The Sun by Joyce Rockwood: Book chosen**

1. What was the first thing that attracted you to choose this book? *(To Spoil The Sun)*
   “Because when I flipped through the book it looked kinda interesting. I could tell it talked about all the different Indians and where they lived. At the beginning, when I flipped through, I saw a map of where the Indians used to live and in Social Studies we are doing stuff about Indians.”

   - Why not this book instead? *(Trail of Tears)*
   “I would actually pick all of them if I could.”

   - Did any of the physical factors of the book influence your choice?
   “Um, I flip through the book to see what it looks like and then like if there’s a summary on the back, I’ll read that.”

   - So you don’t really care what the book looks like, as long as it’s got the right content inside?
   “Yeah...”

2. Do you tend to pick all of your books this way?
   “Mostly.”

3. Do you usually finish the books that you pick on your own?
   “Sometimes. Like if I’m reading it and I got half-way done with a chapter and my teacher tells us to put our books away, then I put my book away.”

   - What about books at home when you have time to read. Do you finish those?
   “Yeah, I finish those books.”

4. Tell me what makes a book exciting to want to read.
   “Mainly, like, it doesn’t tell you in the beginning, but you have to read to the middle to see if it’s interesting.”

5. Do you feel that the books in your classroom and school library are attractive and motivating to want to read? If not, what kind of books would you like to see?
   “Yeah, mainly because some of those books, like if you had to do a report or something they would help us out really good.”
APPENDIX M.

INTERVIEW WITH “ALEX”
Alex’s Interests: Thriller

Books presented to student:
Dark Angel by David Klass
Incarceron by Catherine Fisher: Book chosen
The Chronicles of Vladimir Todd: Tenth Grade Bleeds by Heather Brewer
The Oracle Betrayed by Catherine Fisher
The Spiderwick Chronicles: The Seeing Stone by Tony DiTerlizzi and Holly Black

1. What was the first thing that attracted you to choose this book?
“Um, well, most of the time I look at the front cover and then I read the back. When it doesn’t give a lot of detail I look on the inside cover.

-Why not this book instead?
“I’ve already read these two books and they were ok.”

2. Do you tend to pick all of your books this way?
“Mostly, but sometimes I’ll pick a book based on who it’s by. Um, if it’s an author I know even if the front cover looks weird, and maybe I didn’t read the back of it I would have read it. Yeah, even some books I enjoy I would avoid. I’ve read some pretty scary stuff, but like this one book my mom read sounded interesting to me and it looked cool, but based on what she said it was terrifying so I didn’t read it just yet.”

3. Do you usually finish the books that you pick on your own?
“Always...I always finish the book.”

4. So the physical characteristics don’t really impact your choice, as long as it has a back-of-the-book summary for you to read?
“I mean, yeah, sometimes I’ll just skim through it to see what happens. There are times when they make it sound really interesting, and I get into it and I’m like whoa, what just happened; this book looked really interesting, and now I don’t want to read it. But usually I try to finish the books I read.”

5. Do the physical features of books impact your book selection process?
“Well I don’t really care about how long the books are because I’ve read Lord of the Rings, so yeah.”

-Did the shiny cover impact your selection at all? (Incarceron)
“Um, not really, but the title... like some of the letters are like saws and spears. It implies it’s a book about torture or something like that. Um, gears and clocks signify it’s something mechanical. Just the way the front cover is done you can tell it’s going to be an adventurous thriller book.”

6. Do you feel that the books in your classroom and school library are attractive and motivating to want to read? If not, what kind of books would you like to see?
“It really depends on which classroom I’m in. Like, I was in Mrs. Conner’s class and she had *Diary of A Wimpy Kid*, and I read that and loved it. But then when I finished and wanted to start the next one, I couldn’t because she only had the first one, and I was disappointed. I kinda feel like I get a better selection at the public library.”

-Do you think the books are up-to-date or could they use a little improvement?
“Really don’t care if a book is old. Like, I picked up *Jurassic Park* at the school library and it was pretty interesting. I saw the movie, and I wanted to compare it.”

7. Is there anything else you want to tell me about how you choose books to read for fun?
“No, not really. The front cover helps, and if it sounds interesting on the back then I’m just drawn in.”
APPENDIX N.

INTERVIEW WITH “HAILEY”
Hailey’s Interests: Horror, Thriller, Anime

**Books presented to student:**

*Three Quarters Dead* by Richard Peck: Book chosen

*The Parliament of Blood* by Justin Richards

*Scary Stories* (2006)

*Dust City* by Robert Paul Weston

*Fire-Starter* by Stephen King

1. What was the first thing that attracted you to choose this book?
   “I like this one. (*Three Quarters Dead*) I picked it because the cover looked really cool and there are three teenage girls on the front. I like how the title looks like blood is dripping and then even the back-of-the-book summary looks blurry and mysterious.”

   - Why not this book instead? (*Fire-Starter*)
   “It just didn’t look very interesting; it didn’t pop out. The title Fire-Starter just didn’t sound cool.”

   - What would be your second choice?
   “Dust City because the cover is cool and it sounds really cool on the summary.”

2. Do you tend to pick all of your books this way?
   “Usually, or it depends on how thick the book is sometimes. Like, if it’s really short I probably won’t read it.”

   - Does the chapter length have an impact on you?
   “No, not really.”

3. Do you usually finish the books that you pick on your own?
   “Like if it interests me at first I would read it, and then if halfway through it I don’t like it, I will just put it down and not read it.”

4. Do you feel that the books in your classroom and school library are attractive and motivating to want to read? If not, what kind of books would you like to see?
   “I think the library has a pretty good selection. Some of the books are out-dated and the books in the classroom...there isn’t very much to choose from.”

5. Is there anything else you want to tell me about how you choose books to read for fun?
   “Occasionally, like if I have a favorite author then I will go through their books, and if any interest me I will try and read them.”
APPENDIX O.

INTERVIEW WITH “STEVE”
Steve’s Interests: Horror, Thriller, and Stephen King

Books presented to student:
*Three Quarters Dead* by Richard Peck
*The Parliament of Blood* by Justin Richards
*Scary Stories* (2006)
*Dust City* by Robert Paul Weston

**Fire-Starter by Stephen King: Book chosen**

1. What was the first thing that attracted you to choose this book?
   “Well, I’ve read other books by Stephen King, like *Pet Cemetery*, and *Cujo*, and I just love his books.”

   - Is there any book you eliminated right away?
   “Um, probably *Three Quarters Dead.*”

2. Do you tend to pick all of your books this way?
   “No, I look at the front cover, and I look at the back of the book summary.”

3. Do you usually finish the books that you pick on your own?
   “Yeah, I usually finish it.”

   - What about when someone picks the book for you?
   “Um, well, it depends because sometimes I read like a few chapters of it and I don’t like it, but then I get rid of it.”

4. Tell me what makes a book exciting to want to read.
   “Um, the front cover has to be really cool. It can’t just be like the title of the book and then nothing else. It just has to look cool.”

5. Do you feel that the books in your classroom and school library are attractive and motivating to want to read? If not, what kind of books would you like to see?
   “Well, I feel that the books they have right now are pretty ok. I read books from the school library all the time.”

6. Is there anything else you want to tell me about how you choose books to read for fun?
   “I always read the last page of the book, like incase it doesn’t have a back-of-the-book summary.”
APPENDIX P.

INTERVIEW WITH “RAMONE”
Ramone’s Interests: Past Wars, Non-fiction

Books presented to student:
Causes of World War I by John Ziff
Children of War: Voices of Iraqi Children by Deborah Ellis
Kristallnacht by Stephanie Fitzgerald
The War of 1812 by Don Nardo
War Is... edited by Marc Aronson Patty Campbell: Book chosen

1. What was the first thing that attracted you to choose this book?
“I really like this one because it actually tells about someone who was in the war and what life was like.”

-Did any of the physical factors of the book influence your choice?
“Um, not really. I look at the back of the book summary and like the middle of the book to see if I understand the words inside.”

2. Do you tend to pick all of your books this way?
“Yeah, most of the time. I like to take my time when picking a book to see if I can even read it.”

3. Do you usually finish the books that you pick on your own?
“Yes, most of the time.”

4. Do the physical features of books impact your book selection process?
“Um, yeah, like in this one, the picture shows exactly like what a war scene would have been like.” (The War of 1812)

-So the out-datedness didn’t really impact your choice?
“No...”

5. Do you feel that the books in your classroom and school library are attractive and motivating to want to read? If not, what kind of books would you like to see?
“Yeah!”

-What about books at home? Do you pick your own?
“Yeah, most of the time, yeah. Like I’ll get some for presents and most of the time I pick them out.”

6. Is there anything else you want to tell me about how you choose books to read for fun?
“I like the illustrations too, like if they look interesting.”
APPENDIX Q.

INTERVIEW WITH “MARY”
Mary’s Interests: Fantasy, Mystery

Books presented to student:
A Wizard of Mars by Diane Duane
Magic Under Glass by Jaclyn Dolamore
Jekel Loves Hyde by Beth Fantaskey
Low Red Moon by Ivy Devlin
The Seven Songs of Merlin by T. A. Barron: Book chosen

1. What was the first thing that attracted you to choose this book?
   -Why not this book instead?
   “It looks kinda dark and thin like not very substantial.” (Talking about Low Red Moon)
   -Did any of the physical factors of the book influence your choice?
   “Um, like I liked the design of the cover. It looks very peaceful and magical.”

2. Do you tend to pick all of your books this way?
   “I usually read the back summary.”

3. Do you usually finish the books that you pick on your own?
   “Yeah, all the time!”

4. Do the physical features of books impact your book selection process?
   “I would say normally the physical factor plays a big part. Like the size and the cover; the thickness of the book.”

5. Do you feel that the books in your classroom and school library are attractive and motivating to want to read? If not, what kind of books would you like to see?
   “I think it needs improvement.”
   -What kind of books would you like to see?
   “I’d like to see a little bit more mature books. They have a lot of like comical books, but not a lot of serious books. They are pretty updated in terms of copyright date, though.”

6. Is there anything else you want to tell me about how you choose books to read for fun?
   “No, that’s pretty much it.”