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## A Survey of the Reading Interests of the Middle School Student

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A SURVEY OF THE READING INTERESTS  
OF THE MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENT

BY

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Master of Arts in Education degree  
Lindenwood College  
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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the reading interests of middle school students ranging in age from 10 to 14 years. The middle school has grown tremendously in acceptance since its beginnings in the 1960's. Years of study, careful planning, and evaluation using pilot schools preceded the success of this new grouping of students, usually consisting of grades six, seven, and eight. However, one aspect of the middle school did not receive the attention it deserved. Little can be found in a review of research on student use of the middle school library. Studies were directed either to the use of the elementary or the junior high library. The unique age group making up the middle school deserved research concerning their reading interests. These studies would provide the necessary information for the restructuring of the middle school library. This writer felt that a survey of middle school reading interests would also benefit teachers and librarians so that their students would not only be able to read but would include reading as an indispensable part of their lives, now and in the future.

A questionnaire was developed to determine the reading interests of the sixth, seventh, and eighth

grade students of two middle schools in the Midwest. Slightly over 1300 responded to the survey; 641 boys and 664 girls participated. The survey covered such topics as attitudes toward reading, the use of the library, favorite authors, books, and reading material.

The survey was completed by students in the two middle schools in March, 1984. Results were tabulated and percentages established for the 18 statements on the survey. Comparisons were made between the grade levels and sexes as related to reading interests of the participants.

The results of this study indicated that the middle school students were a unique group unto themselves and did indeed deserve a survey covering only their reading interests.

Among the findings of the survey, were a positive attitude toward reading by the majority of the students. However, television viewing was still preferred to reading a book. Scheduled library time was important to the older students who did not find time to use the library unless school time was set aside. The students preferred to select their own books. Adventure stories, mysteries, and humorous stories were favorite subjects among both boys and girls. The group surveyed had no preference concerning the sex of the novel's protagonist. Variety dominated the list of their

favorite books. Judy Blume was the favorite author of the majority of the students but many other authors were also named. Many students could not remember the name of an author. The girls on all levels wanted more romance stories in the library. Both boys and girls requested more mysteries. The number of books read monthly decreased considerably from grade six to grade eight, especially among the boys. The findings also indicated that a wide variety of books on various reading levels would be necessary in the middle school library to fill the needs of all the students.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

#### Recognition of the Problem and Rationale

One aim of the middle school is to establish habits which will enable its students to be independent, self-directing learners long after their formal educations have been completed. Therefore, a middle school reading program should not only insure mastery of the skills of reading but should also instill the lifelong habit of reading. (Culliton, 1973, p. 183)

If Culliton is to be taken literally, the middle school has been given an awesome task. The use of the basal reader in most school districts comes to an end with the completion of sixth grade. Is this then our final opportunity to alter Barmore and Morse's 1977 alarming statistics? They found that 10% of the population read roughly 80% of the books which are read yearly. They, also, stated that "surveys by the National Opinion Research Center indicate that Americans read fewer books than citizens of many other countries including England, France, Germany and the Scandanavian countries." (p. 57)

These facts suggest that with all the time spent on reading in the elementary schools, we are still failing to produce adults who are enthusiastic, consistent readers. Have we lost sight of the true goal of reading - to produce readers, hopefully life-long readers?

According to Huus (1973), pupils, upon completion of elementary school, "ought to have developed a love for reading, an enthusiasm for books, and a familiarity with literature." (p. 801) They should be prepared for a lifetime of pleasure through reading. Yet we know that few children, upon entering school, have a negative attitude toward reading, "but an uncomfortably large number of students do not like to read by the time they reach middle level schools." (Barmore, 1977, p. 57)

Deardorff (1982) stated:

that after years of being taught the skills of reading, they (the students) understand the term "reading" to mean not reading for enjoyment or even reading to gain information. It means ... learning myriad other boring skills that appear to have little connection to the printed page. (p. 42)

She suggested that blocks of time be set aside during reading class for children to read. Using this method, even her fifth grade slow readers showed improvement.

She unashamedly admitted:

that reading will be a lifelong passion. The credit for this transmutation goes not to me, however, but to books: good books, funny books, picture books, short novels. Books, books, and more books are responsible for firing my students' minds, loosening their imaginations, and, most important, turning them on to the printed word. (p. 42)

She has set aside her fear of leaving the basal reader that we, as teachers, have made sacred.

Bamberger (1976) had earlier made some of the same observations. He stated that "many children do not

read books because they cannot read well enough. They cannot read well enough because they do not read books." (p. 61)

Proof of this can be observed in Anne Adams' (1978) reading program in Durham, North Carolina. She had her first graders reading more than 300 books a year and a newspaper everyday because she taught beginning readers with library books and the daily newspaper. Her first graders scored "in the sixty-ninth to the ninety-eighth percentile on standardized (reading) tests." (p. 112) "We want students to be able to read anything they pick up. In merely mastering a series of textbooks, we held them back." (p. 113) Unorthodox, yes. Successful, yes.

Adams obtained unheard of success working with first graders but the middle school seems to be the ideal place to produce lifelong readers. Most students have mastered the skills that some found so boring. They are now free, if given the time, to actually read books, magazines and newspapers. Paradis and Arth (1975) described the middle school student as "one of the most energetic and eager students with which educators deal in public educational systems." (p. 329) Their recreational reading peak is reached at this time before the demands of high school consume so much of their free time.

The problem stated simply is: "How can teachers

instill in their students the desire to read and learn independently and hopefully become lifelong readers?" Through the research available on recreational or independent reading, this writer has found one answer to be the use of the reading interests of the middle school student.

#### The Use of the Interest Factor

Barbe (1963) succinctly said: "the importance of the interest factor in the reading program must not be minimized, for it is the keystone of the child's learning." (p. 490)

Howes (1963) added "the lack of interest causes many children, as well as adults, to fail in reading." (p. 491) Strange (1963) agreed and further stated "the more interest, the more reading; the more reading, the more knowledge." (p. 463)

Estes, who has done several studies on interests, attitudes, and their effects on reading comprehension, has concluded that: "how students feel about reading is as important as whether they are able to read, for, as is true for most abilities, the value of reading ability lies in its use rather than its possession." (1971, p. 135)

In addition, Stanchfield (1971) in discussing public and school libraries pointed out "we cannot develop appreciative readers until we have captured

their interest in reading. One of the most significant principles in motivation in learning is interest. This is a dynamic, projective, propulsive factor in encouraging children to read." (p. 46) She proved her statement in her studies concerning the use of interest in teaching boys not only to read but to enjoy reading.

Hick (1971), who warned of teaching a child to read and yet not developing the taste for reading, stated that "we shall have produced a nation of 'illiterate literates' --- those who know how to read, but do not read." (p. 37) She also added that "interest in reading is developed through the opportunity for wide reading, for listening to many stories, through exposure to many books." (p. 37)

Surprisingly, in the last twenty years, there have not been many studies of reading interests and none that this writer could find devoted exclusively to the middle school student. Prior to 1960, Sizemore (1963) noted that almost 300 studies had been published, and yet many new developments would have affected reading interests -- television, paperbacks, a tremendous increase in the number and variety of books published; and, regarding this paper, the creation of the middle school with its student body of 10 to 14 year olds.

The importance of the students' reading interests cannot be overemphasized. However, it must be

remembered that interest in reading is caught, not taught. Barbe (1963) stressed that children "catch interest from one another." But of even more relevance, it is caught from the teacher. Barbe continued, stating that "the teacher who is not interested in reading, or who does not find time to read, can hardly be expected to develop an interest in reading on the part of her children." (p. 489)

#### The Writer's Interest in Reading in the Middle School

Being an avid reader and always having encouraged her students to become recreational readers, this writer had a difficult time accepting the fact that all teachers did not enjoy reading and that few were knowledgeable of current children's literature. Especially shocking were the results of a study conducted by Mangieri and Corboy (1981) in which they surveyed nearly 600 elementary school teachers concerning their knowledge of recently published children's books and activities they use to promote recreational reading. Only 9% were able to name three children's books written in the past five years; 70% could not list even one single book. Concerning activities used to encourage reading, only 11% could name three or more activities; 89% were unable to name even three. "Most popular responses were reading to children, sustained silent reading, and designing or acting out plays." (p. 924)

While adequate, these are far from creative responses. Fifty per cent could think of only one activity. These results led Mangieri and Corboy to question elementary educators' knowledge of recreational reading and whether there is actually any independent reading being stressed in the classroom, even though every reading authority stresses the necessity of recreational reading as well as mastery of reading skills. This writer began to realize that recreational reading, in many cases, had a low priority.

This observation was further made known to the writer when she moved from an elementary school (grades K-6) to a middle school (grades 6-8). What happened to the students when they no longer had their basal readers? Had they become weekly users of the library? Were they given time to go to the library? Did their teachers share their knowledge of books when there were no formal reading classes? Who told them about the new juvenile books and authors? Were they on the road to becoming lifelong readers or would they become part of the 90% of Americans that seldom read a book? These were some of the questions that this writer wanted answered for she realized that this was a crucial age in turning students on to reading and regretfully perhaps the last chance for the schools to accomplish the true goal of reading--producing those who actually read rather than

those who know how to read. As Charlotte Huck (1979) commented:

It lies within the power of every teacher and librarian to give children a rich experience with literature. We must do more than teach children to read; we must help them to become readers, to find a lifetime of pleasure in the reading of good books. (p. 748)

Is the writer being an alarmist in putting such emphasis on this age group? Anderson (1945) in her study indicated that interest in reading was strongest at ages 13 and 14. Peterson (1955) reported in her investigation using the Chicago public schools that interest in reading was slightly higher in Grades Five and Six than in Grades Seven and Eight. An average of nine hours reading time per week was reported by students in Grades Six and Seven; while students in Grade Eight reported spending only seven hours per week reading.

Harris (1975), twenty years later, supported the previous data when he stated that voluntary reading usually increases in amount until the age of 12 or 13. The decline in recreational reading among pupils as they grow older may have many causes: increasing homework, the demands of a more active social life, and the attraction of TV, records, and the movies. Magazine and newspaper reading usually increases at this time. (P. 513)

In researching recreational reading of the middle school student, two ERIC searches were completed: one



under the heading "The Middle School Library"; the other, "Reading Interests of the Middle School Student." The first search was fruitless. Apparently little has been written at this time on the middle school library. The second search revealed some interest surveys on different grade levels in the middle school but none encompassing grades six through eight. Feeling very strongly that these students deserved their own reading interest survey since they are truly a unique group and with all the unanswered questions previously mentioned, needing to be addressed, this writer embarked on such an undertaking. Such a survey would be of tremendous value to the writer since after 21 years in the classroom, her assignment for the new school year was to be librarian in a middle school. Were the middle school libraries meeting the interests and needs of their newly formed student bodies, especially where they had once been junior high schools? Were the students being encouraged to use the library for recreational reading as well as research? Only the students would know the answers, and they have not been asked. As Lamberg (1970) so succinctly put it, "When in doubt, ask the student." (p. 40)

Some background information probably is necessary to introduce the reader to this often unpredictable age group before investigating their reading interests.

### The Middle School Student

Middle school pupils usually range in age from ten to fourteen. The child of ten is entering what can be called a preadolescent stage. When he approaches the age of 13 or 14, he enters early adolescence. (Kindred, 1976) The middle school students are truly children in the middle--between childhood and adolescence. They are looking for an identity, searching for their own individual, unique self. They need more help, support and understanding than any other age group. They must be loved, must be understood, must be given attention, and must be kept busy. They are changing at a tremendous rate physically, mentally, emotionally and socially.

**Physical Development:** American youth today are maturing physically much sooner than children 50 years ago. Today's sixth graders are developmentally comparable to seventh graders of the early 1900's. Rapid physical growth takes place at the onset of puberty for boys at the age of 14, and for girls at about age 12. This is the awkward age resulting in poor motor coordination. All these changes lead to a low tolerance for fatigue. Anxieties over personal appearance and feelings of restlessness and irritability are present. (Kindred, 1976, p. 25) The adolescents' self image is very fragile at this time, and yet, they must learn to accept themselves so that they can accept others.

**Mental Development:** Kindred goes on to state that the most rapid mental growth occurs between the ages of nine and twelve. There will be a wide range in mental abilities because of the irregularities of physical, social and psychological growth. Children, during this time, are passing from Piaget's stage of concrete operations and entering his stage of formal operations. The child of middle school age is ready to move from an understanding of the real and the concrete to the theoretical and hypothetical. Again, individual differences will determine when this will occur.

Creativity must also be encouraged and nurtured at this age. The middle school child might not be as spontaneous as the younger child, but opportunities for creative efforts should be available and divergent thinking should be commended, not criticized. (p. 26)

**Social Development:** Parents and teachers who are used to being the absolute center of their children's lives are often shocked and dismayed when they discover this is no longer the case. The peer group becomes all important. The opinions of peers are first in importance and acceptance by them is crucial. The middle school child makes every effort to be like other members of his group. Often he resents and resists adult authority represented by either his parents or teachers. The student is trying to express his new independence and

yet he is still inwardly very unsure of himself.

Emotional Development: The ten or eleven year old, while undergoing great physical changes, becomes very sensitive. He must learn to control his emotions which seem to be ruling him. Wiles and Bondi (1981) state that

Erratic and inconsistent behavior is prevalent among emerging adolescents. Anxiety and fear contrast with reassuring bravado. Feelings tend to shift between superiority and inferiority. Coping with physical changes, striving for independence from the family and becoming a person in his own right and learning a new mode of intellectual functioning are all emotion-laden problems for emerging adolescents. (p. 28)

In summary, there are certain basic needs which all children have during these years. Wiles and Bondi have listed the following:

1. The need to be safe and free of threat.
2. The need to be loved.
3. The need to be part of a group with identification and acceptance.
4. The need to be recognized.
5. The need to be independent. (1981, p. 31)

#### Reading and the Middle School Student

As early as 1889, True did a study in a small village entitled "What My Pupils Read", which recorded his students' reading interests. Norvell in 1950, did extensive research involving over 50,000 secondary school students which attempted to bring about curriculum reform. Robinson and Weintraub in 1973, and Weintraub, again in 1977, summarized children's reading interests

and pleaded for more extensive research. In fact, Zimet in 1966, in her review of past research stated that "more than 300 studies of children's interests and story preferences" had been reported prior to her study. There have been doubtless hundreds more published and unpublished surveys since her study. Yet with the middle school coming into existence in the 1960's and now numbering in the thousands, this writer has found very few studies directed specifically to the reading interests of the 10 to 14 year old. Most studies lump them into the Young Adult (YA) reading group which spans the ages of 11 to 20 year olds. This writer thoroughly disagrees with this practice.

If one is going to accept the uniqueness of the middle school age group, then one must also accept the fact that this emerging group needs studies into their reading interests. These studies hopefully would reveal that there are classics written for this group as well as books that will let them know that they are not alone in their fears, their uncertainties, their emotional highs and lows, as well as all the feelings that make up the preadolescent and the early adolescent years.

There are constant studies being done on the high school students' reading interests, favorite authors, reading habits, and their interest in the new realism found in their books. Perhaps a lot of this interest

has been generated by some controversial novels and authors that target their work for this age group and have made it "open season" on YA novels. But what of the middle school student who still enjoys Ramona by Beverly Cleary, The Summer of the Swans by Betsy Byars, and Bridge to Terabithia by Katherine Paterson; and yet by the eighth grade has turned to The Outsiders by S. E. Hinton, The Chocolate War by Robert Cormier, and Paul Zindel's The Pigman.

The range here is considerable but so are the changes taking place in the 10 to 14 year old reader. Mertz has tried to unlock some of the puzzlement in her article "Understanding the Adolescent Reader". She stated that:

The central theme of adolescence is the finding of one's self. The adolescent must learn to know a whole new body and its potential for feeling and behavior, and fit it into a picture of himself. He must define the place he will occupy in adult society. (1975, p. 179)

Reading can help students find the identities they are seeking.

Puberty produces various effects on adolescents. Kohlberg and Gilligan state that "sexuality is a central concern for the self of some 14 year olds; it is something deferred to the future of others." (1971, p. 1060) Interest in sex during the teenage years is definitely not unusual. It's the responsibility of the

teacher and the librarian to have the wisdom to recognize that sex is simply one of the many concerns confronting adolescents. There is a tendency in our culture to blow this sexual interest, which is perfectly healthy, out of proportion.

These years also are the time when a major shift occurs in the ability to think. Piaget had found all students go through three stages of mental development:

<u>STAGES</u>	<u>APPROXIMATE AGES</u>
Pre-operational	Birth to 6 or 6 1/2
Concrete-operational	6 or 6 1/2 to 12 or 13
Formal-operational	12 or 13 to 18

During the concrete-operational stage, children become able to reason logically about "concrete" or real experiences they have had. They don't consistently reason correctly about abstractions, verbal propositions, or experiences they have never had. The "late" concrete child becomes good at reasoning by induction (making generalizations from several specific instances) but reason badly by deduction. Most children of middle school age will be somewhere in Piaget's concrete-operational stage, with a few entering the formal-operational stage. "The essential difference between the formal-operational thought and the concrete-operational is that the latter is centered on reality, whereas the former grasps the possible transformations and assimilates reality only in terms of imagined or

deduced events." (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969, p. 11)

Kohlberg states "a large portion of Americans never develop the capacity for abstract thought. Most who do, develop it in earlier adolescence (11 to 15) but some do not reach full formal reasoning until the twenties." (1971, p. 1065)

These stages tell us "how" the middle schooler thinks not "what" he thinks about. This "what" would reveal the students interests and concerns. This is a time of ambivalent feelings. The student wants to be independent but still must depend on adults. He needs the approval of his peer group who become an essential part of his life. His views on school are also mixed. It is a place to meet his friends but also a place for learning. It brings together the teenager, his peers, and adults. Here, he finds himself surrounded by many more individuals who hold different beliefs about drugs, sex, authority figures, the value of study, and attitudes toward parents. All this can cause the adolescent great anxiety. (Kagan, 1971) But this experience is necessary for mental operations to develop. Social interaction provides the breeding ground for development of new mental abilities. The student learns that others think differently, see things differently, and have different beliefs. This is very necessary for mental growth. This period provides the



training for the adult world. Vicarious experience through reading helps many adolescents during this period.

Carlson (1974) describes five stages of satisfaction students at a given age-level can acquire from reading:

First stage - "unconscious delight" This stage is experienced by children in grades 3 through 7. The reader finds himself unconsciously absorbed in the imaginary world and action on the page.

Second stage - "vicarious experience" This stage occurring in grades 7 through 9 happens at about the same time that formal-operational thought is developing. It requires the reader to hypothesize about a character, environment, or situation which could be totally different from his own world and experience.

Third stage - "seeing oneself" This stage occurs when the reader suddenly meets himself encountering situations similar to his own, rediscovering his emotions and relationships. Knowledge that someone else has shared the same emotions such as guilt, despair, fear, or anything else that would make the reader uneasy about himself occurs in grades 9 through 11. This is middle adolescence. Novels can be very useful at this age for students concerned with problems of drugs, pregnancy, mental illness and death.

Fourth stage - "philosophical speculation" This stage occurs during grades 11 through 14 and represents a time when the maturing adolescent attempts to understand moral and physical dilemmas. The individual is capable of dealing with abstractions.

Fifth stage - "aesthetic experience" This stage occurs when the reader sees the harmony of the total pattern. This stage occurs usually following high school during grades 14 and up. (pp. 24-26)

One can see how closely these stages follow the mental stages of Piaget previously mentioned. Although some of

these stages are beyond the 10 to 14 year old, knowledge of both Carlson's and Piaget's stages can help teachers understand this age group and they in turn can help the middle school reader.

In summary, there are many reasons why the middle school student reads. Books can be a source of information and can provide a variety of experiences to help the adolescents in their pursuit of meaning and order. They can provide an escape from adolescent concerns. They can be read for instant gratification as well as for illumination of self. The book can offer the reassurance and deep satisfaction of a vicarious triumph. Reading fulfills the students' immediate needs and concerns while preparing them for the roles and demands of the adult world. As teachers and librarians, "we can recognize our students' needs and give them literature which can help them in their search for themselves." (Mertz, 1975, p. 185)

The question of why they read has been addressed, but we still do not know what they prefer to read and if we are providing them with books that meet their interests.

#### Statement of the Problem

It is the purpose of this study to survey the stated reading interests of the middle school student

in order to determine if their needs are being met. This knowledge will be helpful to librarians and teachers in selection of materials for a middle school library and in promoting recreational reading.

#### Significance of the Problem

Since no reading interest survey on the middle school can be found at this time, and recognizing the need to set up middle school libraries or convert junior high school libraries for this age group, a survey would have beneficial results. It has also been previously noted that teachers are often unaware of student interests in reading. A study of this nature should be of significance to the middle school librarian, teacher, and especially this writer in helping to guide reading experiences and making them so pleasurable that the foundations will be laid for these students to become lifelong readers. The importance of the interest factor, if utilized, can greatly contribute to the success of this endeavor. Teachers and librarians, having insight into student reading interests, and working together, can offer significant contributions toward the attainment of this goal.

#### Definition of Terms

Middle School is defined here to be a school encompassing grades six through eight; other definitions might include grade five.

Middle School Student is defined as a student ranging in age from ten to fourteen and attending a middle school.

Reading Interests is defined as the element of self-involvement in reading without pressure from outside; a spontaneous acceptance and an inner recognition of the appropriate.

Stated Reading Interests are defined as the categories of reading that the students state as their preferences, determined through questionnaire responses.

## CHAPTER TWO

Review of LiteratureLandmark Studies of Children's Reading Interests

Long before the concept of the middle school in the 1960's, there were reading interest studies directed at students of middle school age, the 10 to 14 year old age group, which shed valuable light on the reading interests of these students. One of the most influential of these studies was an investigation by L. M. Terman and Margaret Lima in 1931 that concluded "there are certain well-defined tendencies in reading interests that change as the child's experience grows and his imagination and reasoning powers develop" (cited in Witty, 1960, p. 541).

This study listed several factors in the development of reading interests; age, school environment, the home, and mental ability were among a few. These researchers were among the first to note that reading interests were very similar for boys and girls until the age of nine. They found that age nine is "when the divergence is very marked and the breach continues to widen up to adult life ...." (p. 541) Other conclusions were that girls read more than boys, with boys preferring adventure and girls liking "sentimental" fiction. Boys

read more nonfiction but both liked animal stories. Reading increased steadily from age six to twelve or thirteen and then showed a gradual decrease.

Lazar (1937) also reported "marked sex differences" in the books read by boys and girls. Some of her conclusions were that girls read more books than boys and that both ranked mystery stories first. Girls then chose stories about home or school, while boys listed adventure, detective, history, invention, science, nature and animal stories as their next choices (cited in Witty, 1960).

A list of the top ten books chosen by the adolescent or near adolescent-age child was compiled by Rankin in 1944. She studied the circulation of books in public libraries in Illinois, New York and Ohio, which represented "large and small urban and village populations." Her list included:

1. Sue Barton, Senior Nurse by Helen D. Boylston,
2. The Good Master by Kate Seredy,
3. Caddie Woodlawn by Carol R. Brink,
4. Silver Chief to the Rescue by Jack O'Brien,
5. Mountain Girl by Genevieve Fox,
6. The Jinx Ship by Howard Pease,
7. Silver Chief, Dog of the North by Jack O'Brien,
8. Who Rides in the Dark by Stephen Meader,
9. Peggy Covers the News by Emma Bugbee, and
10. Sue Barton, Student Nurse by Boylston (cited in Witty, 1960, p. 542).

The titles and authors have changed but many of the subjects, such as animals and adventures, were already establishing a pattern that has continued to present time.

In 1945, Witty, Coomer, and McBean gave a survey to almost 8000 children in elementary schools in Chicago to determine their favorite books. Animal stories was their first choice. The same sex differences already mentioned were again noted (cited in Witty, 1960).

Another study by Taylor and Schneider (1955) covered the book preferences of Chicago public school students in grades five, six, seven and eight. They found a "statistically significant difference between boys and girls in their choice of subject interests." (cited in Witty, 1960, p. 542) Boys chose adventure, sports and games. Girls chose teen-age stories in five out of the top seven categories. Boys' interests at all grade levels were more evenly distributed covering adventure, animals, sports and humor.

Norvell, after a twenty-five year study of 24,000 children from grades 3 to 11, published his findings in 1958 in his book, What Boys and Girls Like to Read. His thoroughly researched study, assumed to be the definitive study of the time, led to some far-reaching conclusions. Among them, he noted that adult sources were frequently in error with regard to what children really select and enjoy in literary material. Peers' recommendations carried much more weight than those given by teachers or other adults.

Waldron (1977) reported an informal study at the

Public Library of Princeton, N. J. in which the children wrote down their choices in four categories: My Favorite Book in the World, Best Book I Read This Year, Book I Hate Most, and Most Boring Book I Ever Read. The findings were:

1. My Favorite Book in the World - Charlotte's Web by E. B. White
2. Best Book I Read This Year - The Wonderful Wizard of Oz by L. Frank Baum
3. Book I Hate Most - Captains Courageous by Rudyard Kipling (It had appeared on a school's suggested summer reading list)
4. Most Boring Book - had no clear cut winner. The librarian explained that "the children didn't really understand what boring meant" (p. 13)

The Newbery Award is the oldest award for children's books having been established in 1922. It is awarded to the author of the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children, published the preceding year by a committee of the American Library Association. However, Waldron stated "children by and large, don't seem to like Newbery winners" (p. 14). Call It Courage, From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler, and Island of the Blue Dolphins were noted as exceptions. Waldron agreed with Norvell that adults did not always select the books that proved to be children's favorites.

Norvell (1958), as well as Harris (1975), King (1967),



Zimet (1966), Petola (1963), Wolfson (1960), Witty (1946), and Thorndike (1941) have all recorded sex differences in boys' and girls' reading interests. Norvell stated that at many stages in the child's development, the sex of the individual determined his or her book selection. Few differences were noted through age eight. But at about age nine, girls were found to enjoy many boys' books but boys did not enjoy girls' books. Boys read about adventurous action, courage, heroism, real people and animals; while girls favored adventure without violence, mystery, love, home and school life, pets, patriotism and sentiment. There was an overlapping with regard to animal stories in grades four through six. Both boys and girls preferred animal stories about dogs and horses. King (1967) also noted that boys read more nonfiction at this age than girls. And in accordance with the studies already cited, girls read books considered to be of interest to boys, but boys usually would not read a book considered to be of interest to girls.

These landmark studies were the foundations on which many other studies were based. They were often cited as references for the studies of the sixties and seventies.

#### Reading Research of the Sixties and Seventies

The publication of G. Robert Carlson's Books and

the Teen-Age Reader in 1967, while revolutionary in many areas, gave needed insight in understanding the youngsters of the turbulent sixties. Many of his findings have been included in Chapter One. However, with regard to reading interests, he noted:

1. Age and sex determined reading preferences. These sex differences are reflected not only in the kind of story each prefers, but in the type of characters, the plot, the setting, and the time unit within those kinds.
2. They (the teen-ager) generally choose or reject books on the actual subject-matter content of the book. They will read books of great language difficulty if the subject lies close to their interests, and they reject even simple books about subjects that bore them.
3. Chronological age is more important than is mental age in determining what a child will enjoy reading. The average and the above-average thirteen-year-old will be interested in reading the same kind of books. (p. 23-24)

Carlson has given the following list of subjects as those of greatest interest to the 11 to 14 year old or "early adolescent":

1. Animal stories,
2. Adventure stories,
3. Mystery stories,
4. Tales of the supernatural,
5. Sports stories,
6. Growing up around the world,
7. Home and family-life stories,
8. Broad, bold slapstick,
9. Settings in the past,
10. Car or hot-rod stories, and
11. Science fiction. (pp. 23-27)

The dominant reading interest remained fiction. However, virtually all children read comic books. This

preference peaks in popularity at this age much to the dismay of teachers trying to urge their students to turn to books.

Stanchfield (1962) had already reached the same conclusion as Carlson (1967) regarding chronological and mental age in her study of 300 boys in grades four, six, and eight. Her subjects showed similar reading preferences as their peers, regardless of chronological age or reading achievement. So it was concluded that the brightest students as well as the slowest would enjoy comic books as well as the subjects in Carlson's list at this age.

Pauk (1973) and Estes and Vaughn (1973) lent support to Stanchfield's study. Both used the Dale-Chall formula to ascertain the level of difficulty of their reading material. Pauk used the material he had chosen first with students needing remedial help. His subjects were junior high age or older; all were two years below grade level based on their scores on standardized reading tests. He used material one year below their reading ability and the subjects were able to read, comprehend, and enjoy the articles on their own. Pauk next used the material with junior high students who were at or above grade level. These students, at the end of the study, were reading articles three years beyond the levels at which they started.

Pauk concluded:

1. the mature subject matter of the articles held their interest so well that concentration was at an exceptionally high level, enabling them to read at higher levels without difficulty ... and
2. controlled levels of reading ability are important, but appropriate levels of interest are crucial (p. 461).

Estes and Vaughn worked with 46 fourth graders chosen randomly from classes from two schools. They were reading at a 4.0 level. Potentially interesting reading material was chosen with a readability placement score of 5.4-5.6. Each student was then tested on the passages they selected as being of highest and lowest interest. On the comprehension check there was a variance of 20 points with an average High Interest score of 86/100 and the average Low Interest score being 67/100. They felt that their study reaffirmed "that interest does appear to be a very potent factor in determining reading comprehension." (p. 151) They suggested that:

students can and should be allowed to pursue a wide variety of interests through reading, taking advantage of the "wandering" tendency of their "independent" reading levels. This could mean that students would be reading several things at any given time, rather than large numbers of them on the same page of a common book. (p. 152)

Belloni and Jongsma (1978) found similar results in their study of low-achieving seventh graders as Pauk (1973), and Estes and Vaughn (1973). One of their

conclusions was that students would benefit from the recreational reading of difficult materials if they viewed them as highly interesting.

Witty (1961) did extensive research on the effect of television on children from 1949 to 1960. He received replies to questionnaires from 2000 pupils, their parents, and their teachers. Reports showed that the amount of time spent before the TV had increased from 12 hours per week for second graders to 24 hours per week for high school students. Witty also found that only about one hour per day was spent reading, or 1/3 of the average time given to television. Although the time spent reading has increased since the advent of TV, Witty warned that "it is well to remember that reading is less popular than TV and radio and consumes much less of the child's time." (p. 112) He did not try to discourage TV viewing but gave several suggestions on how its wise use could benefit the child.

Hamilton (1976) reported on his study on TV viewing from 1970 to 1973. He had 253 seventh graders from New York and New Jersey answer questionnaires. For a six week period, the pupils were given the choice of reading or not reading books related to television programs. His conclusions were:

that seventh grade pupils give more time to TV than they do to reading, one hour daily to reading, compared to three hours to TV. When given the

opportunity to read TV tie-ins related to their favorite television series, children will read when their interests are stirred. TV may be a source of stimulation and incentive to some students. (p. 130)

Stanchfield (1962) interviewed fifty-one eighth grade boys of different reading abilities in Los Angeles. She found their reading interests to be:

1. outdoor life,
2. explorations and expeditions,
3. tales of fantasy,
4. everyday life adventure of boys,
5. historical fiction,
6. sea adventure,
7. sports and games,
8. war,
9. humor,
10. science fiction,
11. mystery and detective, and
12. outer space (p. 203)

She found no significant difference in the interests of above-average, average, and below-average male readers. She did find that boys had a narrower range of interests than girls and that it was difficult to motivate boys to read unless the reading material appealed to their interests. The boys all felt reading to be very important. Stanchfield suggested that:

all junior high school teachers develop a good attitude toward reading by talking about interesting books, by reading books aloud, by displaying appealing books, by advertising challenging books on bulletin boards, and by providing every opportunity for students to become exposed to various types of literature that might motivate them to read (p. 208).

Approximately ten years later, Fraim (1979) did a follow-up study to see if boys' interests had remained

stable. Some 200 junior high boys rated their reading preferences on a questionnaire. Eight of the first twelve choices were still found to be among the boys' favorites. Only fantasy, everyday life adventures, historical fiction, and outer space lost their high rankings. Automobiles moved from twenty-sixth place to second.

Although there were some popularity shifts, the survey showed boys' reading interests had not changed significantly in either subject matter or style during the decade between the surveys. The two researchers concluded that changing life styles, new trends in public interest, and television viewing might have influenced the slight changes that were noted.

Feeling that little attention had been shown to the interests of the junior high school student, Johnson and Shores (1963) obtained responses from 1521 junior high school students from six different schools in widely differing areas of Illinois. They were interested in reference books as well as recreational reading. They found that 50% of this age student wanted to read fiction, especially mystery, stories about boys and girls their own age, adventure, and romance. Students also reported interest in reading about science (18%) and social sciences (11%). In the sciences, they wanted books about animals, automobiles, chemistry or

astronomy. While in the social sciences, they were interested in history, famous people, war and cultures. In direct contrast to previous studies, their conclusion did not show a great difference in the preferences of boys and girls at this age. They stated:

In general, the reading interests and informational needs of junior-high-school boys and girls are similar. However, there is a tendency for boys to show greater interest in science and sports and hobbies than girls, and for girls to show more interest in social science topics than boys.  
(p. 163)

Vaughan's study (1963) lent support again to sex preferences being greater than intelligence preferences among eighth graders. His study consisted of 67 boys and 67 girls in eighth grade at a technical junior high school. They were classed as bright, average, and dull depending on their IQ scores. Newspaper and magazine choices were included in this study in order that all reading material possible be used as reading choices. The findings were both boys and girls ranked humor and mystery among their top choices. Other conclusions were:

1. Boys prefer science, while girls prefer stories of home and school and love interest.
2. Only 15% of the girls liked books about inventions, but 67% of the boys chose this type of reading.
3. 67% of the girls preferred stories with love, but only 18% of the boys chose this category.
4. Poetry ranked twelfth (out of 12) by the boys and eighth by the girls.



5. The comic magazine is high on the list of reading for both boys and girls, but the greatest preference is shown by the 91% of the dull boys who chose this type of magazine.
6. The comic section of the newspaper was preferred by both boys and girls. (p. 197-198)

It was interesting to note that the average group was the largest group having library cards to the public library but that the students in this study did not make use of the library even though it was within walking distance of their homes.

The groupings of bright, average, and low seemed to have much less significance than the sex differences.

Schulte (1969) chose children from four major geographic regions of the United States in her study of the recreational reading interests of the intermediate child. Based on 6358 responses to "an interest inventory of fictitious titles, girls selected realistic fiction and fanciful tales while boys chose historical fiction, history, science and health. Poetry and social studies were selected least often by both groups." (cited in Robinson and Weintraub, 1973, p. 89)

Geographical areas had no bearings on their reading interests. However, there was a decrease in the number of interests as the children grew older. The use of the school library was positively related to reading interests but no such correlation was made to public libraries.

An interesting study was conducted by Pugh (1969) in Great Britain. A survey of the reading habits and attitudes of 80 thirteen and fourteen year-old children used personal interviews to determine the following findings:

79% of the subjects read comics; 74 percent, magazines; and 94 percent, newspapers. Books in the preceding two month period ranged from five percent who reported reading one book to 22.5 percent who reported reading four to five books. No books had been read in the time period asked about by 15 percent of the sample. Library browsing and recommendations by friends accounted for the greatest proportion of the reasons given for selecting a book. Books were most frequently obtained from the public library, the school library, or from a friend. (cited in Weintraub, 1971, p. 207)

Pugh's findings coincided greatly with those studies previously cited on children in the United States. More studies would have to be found to see if the reading interests of this age group are the same in other countries, but one does speculate on the universal aspects indicated here.

King (1967), in her review of research on children's reading interests and preferences, made a good summary of the findings of the sixties. Those applicable to this age group are:

1. Reading interests tend to change as new interests are developed.
2. Reading interests do not necessarily reflect informational needs.

3. In the intermediate grades, pupils prefer mystery, adventure, animal stories, family life stories, biographies, sports, science, and social studies.
4. Children seem to be maturing faster in their reading interests.
5. Definite differences in reading interests among girls and boys become apparent after age eight.
  - a. Boys read more non-fiction than girls.
  - b. Girls read more poetry than boys.
  - c. Both boys and girls rank adventure, action, mystery, animal stories, patriotism and humor high in their preferences.
  - d. Boys prefer stories of science, invention and vigorous action.
  - e. Girls prefer stories of home and school life, sentimentalized fiction, and fairy tales.
  - f. Boys have a wider range of interests than girls.
  - g. Girls will read a book considered to be of interest to boys but the reverse is seldom true.
6. Personal recommendations rank high in determining the selection of reading materials.
7. Pupils read a variety of reading materials including books, comics and magazines.
8. Prose form, particularly narrative, is preferred to poetry.
9. Children prefer stories with a good plot, much action, and humor. (pp. 148-151)

Ashley (1970) stated that "reading interests cannot effectively be studied without reference to reading dislikes." (p. 1088) He surveyed the likes and dislikes of 900 elementary children in grades four through seven. They were given 40 topics from which to choose. Their first choices were quite predictable; mysteries,

adventure, ghost stories, comics and science fiction. Love stories were disliked by more than half the children. This peaked among fifth grade boys. Sports were disliked by 306 boys and girls. This peaked with seventh grade girls but also occurred among fifth and sixth grade girls. Ashley's table showed that poetry was disliked by 42% of all children in grades four to seven. Books about war were disliked by 71% of all the girls. (It should be noted that this was the time of the Vietnamese War.)

Ashley stated that, according to his study, reading now peaks between the ages of 10 and 11. One of what he called his guidelines was very disheartening. He stated that "the best chance of encouraging good reading habits lies in - and before - grade four. There is very little chance after grade five" (p. 1096).

However, Kimbrough (1972) did not come to the same conclusions as Ashley. Her study covered the recreational reading of fourth through sixth graders in fifteen schools and resulted in responses from 2,765 children who kept a reading record during a six-week period. They were to list their three top choices and give their reasons for reading these selections. The largest numbers were given to the categories of animal stories, humor, biography, and mystery. These are in keeping with most studies mentioned. However,

Kimbrough found that the sixth grade children selected the highest average number of books. As already mentioned in Chapter One, Anderson (1945) had found reading peaking at ages 13 and 14. Then Peterson (1955) reported the greatest time spent reading to be in grades five and six. Harris (1975) supported Kimbrough when he found that voluntary reading increases until the age of 12 or 13. Although Ashley's attempt to include both the likes and dislikes of the reader was very enlightening, his findings that "reading tastes have become well-nigh crystalized" (p. 1096) by grade five, does not seem to agree with previous studies.

Geeslin and Wilson (1972) investigated the reading interests of the 12-year-old retarded reader to learn whether their reading age would fall below their chronological age. Thirty 12-year-olds with reading ages between 10 and 11 years, were asked to choose books they would enjoy reading. Thirty books that other investigators had found popular were classified as Class 1, appealing to third graders, Class 2, appealing to fifth graders, and Class 3, appealing to seventh graders. The twelve-year-old boys tended to favor Class 3 books. Among the boys, there was no statistically significant differences made on any of the three grade levels.

Girls formed a different pattern. They chose

books preferred by their reading-age peers even if they were 12, and only in fifth grade. Geeslin and Wilson stated that:

One of the most important findings was that 12 year-old girls in the seventh grade, although they read poorly, preferred the same books that were liked by whole classes of seventh graders. Twelve-year-old subjects made decisions for books which they could not be expected to read without great difficulty as well as for books which presented easier reading tasks. (p. 755)

Geeslin and Wilson concluded their study with the implication that "grouping according to interest is at least as important as ability grouping." (p. 755)

Robinson (1955), Stanchfield (1962), and Carlson (1967) had all come to the same conclusions in their earlier studies. They all recommended having a wide range of material from which the retarded as well as the advanced reader can choose.

Members of Beta Upsilon chapter, Pi Lambda Theta, (1974) conducted an informal study consisting of responses from 811 children, ages seven to twelve, concerning their reading interests. On their Reading Interest Form, each child filled in his name, age, sex, school, and the title and author of a book he had read. There were also open ended statements which allowed the child to make comments on why he or she liked or disliked the book. For the purposes of this review, only the answers of the ten, eleven, and twelve year-olds

will be examined. Ten-year-old boys liked plenty of excitement in books about animals, mysteries, and science. Girls found excitement, plot, characters, content, and humor important factors in books about animals, mysteries, and people. Their first choice, animals, had twice as many votes as mysteries, their second choice. Eleven-year-old boys were more concerned with content than with plot or characters. Mystery and animals were two strong favorites followed by transportation, sports, and science; girls were concerned with plot and characters with a strong preference again for mysteries, followed by animals, people, and make-believe. Twelve-year-old boys liked an exciting content and good characters. They liked nonfiction just as well as fiction and preferred stories about animals and science. Girls, at this age, indicated plot and content as reasons for reading books about animals, mystery, and people. But they had a wide variety of other interests, too. Humor was important at nearly every age for both boys and girls. Interest in mysteries increased as the children became older. The older children were more critical of the books they read, but overall there were few faults found with the books read.

The interests of the thirteen-year-old, were found in Johnson's summary (1974) of the data obtained from the National Literature Assessment Survey. About 14%

of the thirteen-year-olds were already reading adult novels. Also, 37% read another book by the same author and named the author. The survey listed eight categories and 86% of the thirteen-year-olds had read and could give a title in these categories. The increased sophistication of the thirteen-year-old as compared to the twelve-year-old reader was very evident.

Freiberger (1974) surveyed the new interests among teenagers of the seventies. She conducted a survey for The New York Times to learn if teenagers were reading and if so, which books did they choose. Questionnaires were sent to 7000 secondary and intermediate schools' librarians and English chairmen. However, a random sampling of 100 replies had to be chosen due to the wide variety of answers. The fiction-novel remained the most popular, followed by mystery-suspense, science fiction, and biography-autobiography, with about 40% of the top 25 books being written for adults. It should be remembered that this survey included the high school reader. Some trends noted were a growing interest in the occult, witchcraft, magic, spiritualism, astrology and the bizarre; an interest in the problems of the 1970's; and an interest in more serious advanced materials.

#### The Realism of the Seventies

Although there were some popularity shifts, reading



interests had not changed much in subject matter or style until the realism of the 1970's. Research over long spans of time and Donelson's comparison of interests of the 1950's compared to the 1970's seemed to show that children's stories reflected the times and, although categories remained the same, the realistic fiction of the 1970's was a mirror of this decade and its problems.

Zimet (1966), in her review of research of children's interests and story preferences reported that Browmand and Timplin (1959) and Gray (1960) had both reported that children's reading interests had varied greatly from the 1920's compared to the 1950's, another time of change and upheaval. In more current research, Donelson (1977) looked at adolescent literature from an historical perspective and drew the same conclusions. Namely, that as our world changed so drastically in the last decade, children's interests of today are very different from those of the 1950's. In 1959, Dunning reported on a survey of 14 librarians who were to choose the "outstandingly popular" adolescent novels of the time. The top ten were:

1. Seventeenth Summer by Maureen Daly,
2. Hot Rod by Henry Gregor Felson,
3. Going on Sixteen by Betty Cavanna,
4. Double Date by Rosamund Du Jardin,
5. The Black Stallion by Walter Farley,
6. Junior Miss by Sally Benson,
7. The Sea Gulls Woke Me by Mary Stolz,

8. Wait for Marcy by Du Jardin,
9. Prom Trouble by James Summers, and
10. All-American by John Tunis. (pp. 3885-3886)

Although the subject matter covered in these books did not tackle many topics that the realistic novel covered, five of the books are still being published. They are Seventeenth Summer, Going on Sixteen, The Black Stallion, Junior Miss, and The Sea Gulls Woke Me. These popular novels have stood the test of time.

Pettit in 1961 composed a list of what was considered the best of adolescent literature at that time. The top 12 included:

1. Johnny Tremain by Ester Forbes,
2. The Yearling by Majorie Rawlings,
3. Seventeenth Summer by Maureen Daly,
4. My Friend Flicka by Mary O'Hara,
5. Good-Bye My Lady by James Street,
6. Winter Wheat by Mildred Walker,
7. Swiftwater by Paul Annixter,
8. Caddie Woodlawn by Carol Brink,
9. Lassie, Come Home by Eric Knight,
10. The Ark by Margot Benary-Isbert,
11. Ready or Not by Mary Stolz, and
12. The Loon Feather by Iola Fuller (cited in Donelson, 1977, p. 241)

Only Swiftwater by Paul Annixter is no longer published. Eleven of the novels from this list are still popular; many of them are published in paperback as well as hardback. These novels all followed certain guidelines:

no early or forced marriages, no pregnancy outside of marriage; no drugs, alcohol, or smoking; no profane or obscene language; no deaths; no ethnic references; no school dropouts unless as object lessons; no divorce; no sense of the ambivalent

cruelty and compassion of young people; no alienation of young people from society or family; no sexuality or sensuality. (Donelson, p. 242)

The favorites of the 1970's will show the trend toward realism. The guidelines followed in the novels popular in 1959 and 1961 had been abandoned, and a very different kind of adolescent novel was produced. In 1972, Donelson recorded a list of the top ten novels recommended by approximately 100 English teachers. His list included:

1. The Outsiders by Susan Hinton,
2. The Pigman by Paul Zindel,
3. Mr. and Mrs. Bo Jo Jones by Ann Head,
4. Durango Street by Frank Bonham,
5. Bless the Beasts and Children by Glendon Swarthout,
6. April Morning by Howard Fast,
7. Tuned Out by Maia Wojciechowska,
8. Light in the Forest by Conrad Richter,
9. The Contender by Robert Lipsyte,
10. My Darling, My Hamburger by Paul Zindel.  
(cited in Donelson, 1977, p. 243)

The top ten in 1976 were recommended by nearly 200 teachers and included:

1. The Chocolate War by Robert Cormier, (cruelty)
2. The Outsiders by Susan Hinton, (street life, gangs, death)
3. The Pigman by Paul Zindel, (death)
4. A Day No Pigs Would Die by Robert Newton Peck, (death)
5. A Hero Ain't Nothing but a Sandwich by Alice Childress, (drugs, hopelessness)
6. Bless the Beasts and Children by Glendon Swarthout,
7. Summer of My German Soldier by Bette Greene, (prejudice)
8. Dinky Hocker Shoots Smack by M. E. Kerr, (family problems)
9. Mr. and Mrs. Bo Jo Jones by Ann Head, (pregnancy prior to marriage)
10. Go Ask Alice, (drugs) (cited in Donelson, 1977, p. 243)

Most of these titles would be found in today's middle school library to satisfy the seventh and eighth graders' reading interests.

Donelson also mentions writers that he feels will last in popularity for many years. These are Nathaniel Benchley, Vera and Bill Cleaver, Susan Cooper, John Donovan, Rosa Guy, Isabelle Holland, M. E. Kerr, Patricia McKillip, Mary Stolz, and Lawrence Yep. Some of these do write on topics of interest to the middle school student, as well as, for the young adult. These authors, and the best books of 1970 and 1976, had broken the taboos previously mentioned and "are very much of our time. They are honest and real novels about real human beings caught up in the real dilemmas we all face." (Donelson, pp. 246-247)

These lists have concentrated on the older adolescent including the ninth grader and the high school student. The current interests of the ten and eleven-year-old were revealed by an informal study conducted by Higgins and Kellman (1979). They polled 212 fifth and sixth graders. They focused on this age group because "10 to 12 year olds usually are developing well-defined likes and dislikes, are old enough to express their feelings well in writing, and are young enough to be interested in doing so." (p. 72) The researchers did not consider their study scientific or

even conclusive, but their survey touched on an age group on which this writer had trouble finding information.

Judy Blume was again the favorite author. One student said "It's like she knows me and is writing about me." However, this age had many favorites and Blume was not a runaway in popularity. Other favorites were Beverly Cleary, Laura Wilder, Lois Lenski, John Christopher, Carolyn Keene, C. B. Colby, and adult author, Alex Haley.

Some of the favorite books were: Are You There, God? It's Me, Margaret, A Day No Pigs Would Die, A Wrinkle in Time, The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe, and Freaky Friday.

The subjects that this age group liked to read about were: "kids with problems, animal stories, science fiction, mysteries, sport stories and love stories." (p. 73) The title was cited by 129 and the cover by 164 children as what first attracted them to the book.

Higgins and Kellman concluded that:

1. among this age child, a teacher's or a librarian's personality or interests have a strong influence on what is or isn't read,
2. the variety of titles mentioned by individual youngsters show us that any one child may be reading on several reading levels at the same time, and

3. if children turn away from banal-looking, boring books in favor of TV, some of the responsibility must be put on the publishers who often seem to underestimate children's tastes. (p. 74)

The reader of the seventies was very different from any other reader studied so far. Burton (1974) asked 1000 students from a middle school in Bayside, New York what a teacher had done or could do to interest them in reading. The following are some of the suggestions she received:

1. Let us choose our own books.
2. Suggest names of interesting stories.
3. Let us read along with taped stories.
4. Assign creative projects instead of book reports.
5. Let us read comic books, magazines, and newspapers.
6. Take us to the school library.
7. Have a classroom library.
8. Bring appropriate book clubs to the attention of students.
9. Prepare teacher and/or student annotated book lists.
10. Let us read at our own pace. (cited in Ley, 1979, p. 24)

### Research into the Eighties

The trend toward realism continued into the eighties. However, there were other studies that contain pertinent information that should also be examined.

Beyard-Tyler and Sullivan (1980) did a study investigating adolescent preferences for types of theme and sex of character in contemporary stories. Their two

separate studies consisted of 576 subjects in grades seven, nine, and eleven. In their sex preference study, they were in agreement with Harris (1975), King (1967), Zimet (1966), Norvell (1958), Witty (1945), and Thorndike (1941) who all recorded that boys and girls after age eight have different reading interests. They found that:

boys preferred story synopses with male protagonists and girls preferred synopses with female protagonists. Boys' preferences for male protagonists became significantly stronger as grade level increased, whereas girls' preferences for female protagonists decreased significantly as grade level increased. (p. 104)

Harris (1975) stated that "sex differences in reading interests are most pronounced in junior high school, lessen during the senior high years, and are not relevant in adult readers" (p. 515).

Beyard-Tyler and Sullivan's other study (1980), revealed strong preferences for themes in which the central problem was resolved successfully over those in which there was no resolution to the problem. It seemed that solving the problem was important to this age group, perhaps reflecting their own desire to solve their problems successfully. These adolescents accepted realistic solutions when they were presented by their favorite authors.

The reading interests of the gifted child in fourth through sixth grades were surveyed by Goostree (1981).

Data was gathered from the 69 state assisted gifted programs in Missouri. This data indicated that gifted children had highly positive attitudes toward reading with their favorite reading interests being comedy, mysteries, adventure, myths, and legends, and stories about boys and girls their own age. Sex differences were also noted in this group.

Cicccone (1981) surveyed the stated reading attitudes and interests of sixth grade students and compared these with interest in self-selected reading materials. She chose as her subjects, 50 sixth graders attending public school in an urban area of central New Jersey. The students first filled out a questionnaire to determine their reading interests. They then recorded their self-selected reading materials over a nine week period. The results showed that boys read approximately 17 books while the girls read approximately 24 books both slightly less than they had stated they would on the questionnaire. The most popular subjects for boys were sports and cartoons/comics; their least favorite out of sixteen categories was romantic stories. The girls chose fiction and cartoons/comics as their top choices; science fiction was ranked last. Both ranked poetry as their fifteenth choice. The students wanted to choose their own reading material. Their questionnaires and actual



self-selected materials were most consistent. Ciccone emphasized using reading interests in reading programs. She stated that doing so "may promote positive adult reading habits." (p. 18)

Blair (1982) had one of the few studies devoted specifically to the middle school student, in this case, grades five, six and seven. However, his primary goal was to ascertain whether basic skills were being over-emphasized and thereby not helping students develop the ability and desire to read and learn independently. He found that:

1. 71 percent felt the materials used in reading class helped in other school subjects, 29 percent did not.
2. 52 percent felt that working with the reading materials in school helped them outside of school, 48 percent did not.
3. 40 percent of the students liked the reading materials used in class, 60 percent did not.
4. The students' interests were;  
Sports - 33 percent  
Animals - 20 percent  
Mystery - 12 percent  
Comics and Humorous Stories - 7 percent  
Other topics received less than 5 percent each.
5. 30 percent felt teachers would choose school work or ditto sheets to read. 16 percent responded that they didn't know what teachers would select for them. 54 percent felt teachers would select books to match their interests. (pp. 5-6)

Blair concluded that there was a lack of communication between teachers and students regarding

students' reading interests, and the purpose of reading instruction.

The reading interests of students in elementary and secondary schools in Connecticut were surveyed by Donald Gallo (1983). He received answers from 1,647 male and 1,752 female students from 51 schools in 37 different towns and cities. Some of his findings were that females in grades four through six preferred books dealing with problems of growing up, followed by animals, mystery/suspense, and romance; while romance dominated the interests of girls in grades seven through twelve. For boys, sports remained at the top of the list at all grade levels. Variety dominated the list of their favorite books. When selecting books, the dust jacket seemed to be the first attraction for students at all grade levels except for males in grades ten and eleven where the title of the book was somewhat more important.

There are two surveys that do name specific titles that should be included in this review of research. They both show that the realistic novel is still very popular.

In 1982, BAYA, an organization of San Francisco Bay Area Young Adult Librarians, conducted one of the most recent surveys of teenagers' reading interests. Librarians polled 7,933 young adults between the ages

of 11 and 20. The informal survey was not structured to be exclusively representative of the Bay Area. A simple form was used on which the teenagers were to state their favorite author, title, and subject, or type of book. Judy Blume topped the list and outdistanced the other authors by several hundred percent. Both sexes listed Forever as their favorite book. Love stories were preferred by female readers, whereas males preferred adventure and mystery. Both sexes liked fantasy, humor, and real-life stories. Sex was also a favorite topic.

#### 1982 Favorites

<u>Authors</u>	<u>Subjects</u>
1. Judy Blume	1. Humor
2. Stephen King	2. Love stories
3. J. R. R. Tolkien	3. Horror/occult
4. John Steinbeck	4. Mystery
5. Agatha Christie	5. Fantasy
6. V. C. Andrews and S. E. Hinton	6. Adventure
7. C. S. Lewis	7. Real-life novels
8. Beverly Cleary	8. Science fiction
9. Danielle Steele	9. Animals
10. Norma Klein	10. Sports

#### Titles

1. Forever (Blume)
2. Flowers in the Attic (Andrews)
3. Are You There, God? It's Me, Margaret (Blume)
4. The Outsiders (Hinton)
5. Lord of the Rings (Tolkien)
6. Of Mice and Men (Steinbeck)
7. Petals on the Wind (Andrews)
8. To Kill a Mockingbird (Lee)
9. Wifey (Blume)
10. The Hobbit (Tolkien) (Goodhope, 1982, p. 33)

One can see the tremendous range this YA group

covered. Many of these titles reflected the older subjects' favorites in this survey.

Karlin (1982) conducted the survey for the Hunter Bookstore near the UCLA campus in Berkley, California. This survey was of particular interest because it was not taken in school or by teachers or librarians. Apparently, hundreds of younger readers used this store because it had one of the best selections in Los Angeles. The average age of the customer was about 13 and the ratio of girls to boys buying books was about 20 to 1. The most popular authors and titles were:

Judy Blume	<u>Forever and Wifey</u> (from the adult section)
Ellen Conford	<u>The Alfred G. Graebner Memorial School Handbook of Rules and Regulations;</u> <u>Dear Lovey Heart, I Am Desperate;</u> and <u>Hail, Hail, Camp Timberwood</u>
Robert Cormier	<u>The Chocolate War</u> and <u>I Am the Cheese</u>
Paula Danziger	<u>Can You Sue Your Parents for Malpractice?;</u> <u>The Cat Ate My Gymsuit;</u> and <u>The Pistachio Prescription</u>
Lois Duncan	<u>I Know What You Did Last Summer;</u> <u>Killing Mr. Griffin;</u> and <u>Summer of Fear</u>
S. E. Hinton	<u>The Outsiders</u> and <u>Tex</u>
M. E. Kerr	<u>Dinky Hocker Shoots Smack</u> and <u>Gentlehands</u>
Norma Klein	<u>Breaking Up</u> and <u>Mom, the Wolfman, and Me</u>

Madeleine L'Engle	<u>Arm of the Starfish;</u> <u>Meet the Austins;</u> <u>The Moon by Night;</u> <u>The Young Unicorns;</u> and <u>A Ring of Endless Light</u>
Richard Peck	<u>Are You in the House Alone?;</u> and <u>Secrets of the Shopping Mall</u>
Paul Zindel	<u>My Darling, My Hamburger;</u> <u>The Pigman;</u> <u>The Undertaker's</u> <u>Gone Bananas</u>

Zindel and Cormier are the authors boys buy most.

(p. 33)

As a final survey, this writer would like to include one conducted by Elleman (1982) for Booklist and published by the American Library Association. It was based on the top 50 reading choices of thousands of children across the United States. 1,060 nominations were made; some getting only one vote. The following were chosen by children. The top 50 titles (in order of popularity) were:

1. Superfudge by Judy Blume
2. Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing by Judy Blume
3. Are You There, God? It's Me, Margaret by Judy Blume
4. Charlotte's Web by E. B. White
5. Blubber by Judy Blume
6. Where the Sidewalk Ends by Shel Silverstein
7. The Black Stallion by Walter Farley
8. Charlie and the Chocolate Factory by Roald Dahl
9. Where the Red Fern Grows by Wilson Rawls
10. Deenie by Judy Blume
11. The Hobbit by J. R. R. Tolkien
12. Ramona the Pest by Beverly Cleary
13. Forever by Judy Blume
14. A Wrinkle in Time by Madeleine L'Engle
15. The Outsiders by S. E. Hinton
16. Little House on the Prairie by Laura Ingalls Wilder
17. Tiger Eyes by Judy Blume

18. The Boxcar Children by Gertrude Warner
19. The Mouse and the Motorcycle by Beverly Cleary
20. Curious George by H. A. Rey
21. The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe by C. S. Lewis
22. How to Eat Fried Worms by Thomas Rockwell
23. James and the Giant Peach by Roald Dahl
24. A Light in the Attic by Shel Silverstein
25. Ramona Quimby, Age 8 by Beverly Cleary
26. Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH by Robert O'Brien
27. Freckle Juice by Judy Blume
28. Nothing's Fair in Fifth Grade by Barthe DeClements
29. Encyclopedia Brown series by Donald J. Sobol
30. The Cat in the Hat by Dr. Seuss
31. Green Eggs and Ham by Dr. Seuss
32. The Cat Ate My Gymsuit by Paula Danziger
33. Otherwise Known as Sheila the Great by Judy Blume
34. Hardy Boys books by Franklin W. Dixon
35. Nancy Drew Books by Carolyn Keene
36. Lord of the Rings Trilogy by J. R. R. Tolkien
37. Little House books (as a group) by Laura Ingalls Wilder
38. Flowers in the Attic by V. C. Andrews
39. It's Not the End of the World by Judy Blume
40. Cinderella
41. Charlie Brown and Peanuts books (as a group) by Charles M. Schulz
42. Narnia Chronicles (as a group) by C. S. Lewis
43. Choose Your Own Adventure series
44. Ramona and Her Mother by Beverly Cleary
45. Island of the Blue Dolphins by Scott O'Dell
46. Bridge to Terabithia by Katherine Paterson
47. Black Beauty by Anna Sewell
48. The Pinballs by Betsy Byars
49. Bunnicula by Deborah and James Howe
50. Amelia Bedelia by Peggy Parish. (pp. 508-509)

This survey canvassed 190 schools, 108 public libraries, two individual children, and eight groups. The subjects were from large cities, like Brooklyn, New York, to small towns such as Ripon, Wisconsin. Votes were included from Riyadh International Community School in Saudi, Arabia and one Canadian library. The

heavier response was from grades four through eight.

One Massachusetts woman concluded:

This survey dramatized for me the tremendous power a teacher has to raise and broaden tastes and cultural value among her students. Thirty minutes a week in the library can supplement, enrich, and stimulate a good classroom program; it cannot adequately nourish a poor one. Children who are required to read challenging books (yet encouraged to select them according to their own tastes) learn the joys of literature. Those who aren't led (or pushed) through that door may never open it on their own. (p. 508)

### Summary

This writer has attempted to show by the research reviewed, the sharp division between the reading interests of the upper elementary school student and those of the older junior high school student. Few selections included among the junior high choices are also found among the choices of the fourth through sixth graders. However, the middle school is composed of students from both groups. A survey, devoted to students from sixth through eighth grade would focus exclusively on the middle school population. By eliminating the fourth, fifth, and ninth grades, a true picture of the reading interests of the middle school student would emerge instead of the fragmented picture which is the only one that can be presented at this time.

## CHAPTER THREE

The QuestionnaireSurvey Research in Education

Americans have long accepted the survey in their lives. The average citizen has filled out questionnaires, has been subjected to face-to-face interviews, and has, perhaps most frequently of all, participated in telephone interviews. The Nielson TV Ratings are based on a survey of the TV programs being watched by randomly chosen families at specific times. This survey has the power to cancel programs on which tremendous amounts of money have been spent. However, survey research is not held in such high esteem by all educational researchers.

The goal of all research in education according to Ebel "is to improve the effectiveness of our educational efforts." (1980, p. 126) The Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes toward the Public Schools, published annually since 1969 in the Phi Delta Kappan, attempted to do this. This survey has been known to exemplify excellent research techniques and while giving no answers to educator's dilemmas, it has always had a tremendous impact on education and has influenced changes in the public school system. This poll is



greatly respected and the findings carefully studied. Yet, Ebel stated that experimental research is the most highly honored among the five types of educational research because "it is so scientific in its objectives and in its methods." (1980, p. 128) Ebel defended survey research by explaining its role in educational research. It "seeks to discover current conditions in education." The survey's tasks are "to identify common problems, to learn about circumstances associated with those problems, and to discover what seems generally effective in solving these problems." (p. 131) We must know how things now stand in order to take intelligent action toward improvement.

In 1845, Horace Mann published a survey showing pupil achievement in Massachusetts. His survey led to improvement in teaching methods and to close supervision of the educational process by local school committees. (cited in Ebel, 1980, p. 131)

The National Longitudinal Study of 1972 used a survey initiated by and conducted for the National Center for Educational Statistics. The follow-up surveys consisted of questionnaires given to 20,872 individuals. The survey dealt with the participants' educational experiences and occupational attainments after graduation. (cited in Ebel, 1980, p. 133)

These two surveys have been singled out to show

that surveys have been used successfully in educational research for over a century for local use as well as for national studies.

### The Survey in Library Research

The survey has played an irreplaceable role in library research because it deals directly with those who use the library. It gives current data which can be used immediately to improve services, provide materials, and implement programs desired by patrons.

Gallup conducted an interview survey which profiled the reading public and their use of the library. The survey, "Book Reading and Library Usage: a Study of Habits and Perceptions", was commissioned by the American Library Association (ALA) and conducted in 1978. This was a telephone interview of 1515 adults, a representative sample of men and women throughout the U. S. According to this survey, 77% of these adults read a book in 1978 with 59% visiting the library. One very interesting finding that was revealed was that the presence of minor children in a home promotes book reading. (Gell, 1978)

School Library Media Quarterly devoted two entire issues, Winter, 1982 and Spring, 1982, to library research. Stroud (1982), in reviewing doctoral dissertations on library research, called for "the type

of research that can provide the field with more meaningful and generalizable information." (p. 132) She also decried the lack of publication of library research studies. With regard to school libraries and students, Stroud researched methodology being used in studies pertinent to the school library media field covering the years 1976-1981. In her study, limited to doctoral dissertations, she found that approximately 56% used survey research. She justified the use of the survey by stating "that so much information needed in the field must be obtained from people. The survey method which makes use of interviews, observations, tests, case studies, and questionnaires, is well suited for this purpose" (p. 127). Of the 89 dissertations examined, 16 dealt with the "reading interests, content and selection of children's and young adult books, and reading preferences" (of students) (p. 128). Another 19 were concerned with students' viewpoints concerning their library media centers.

Gaver (1965) developed a checklist for evaluating secondary schools' library media center's services. This checklist has been adapted and used by many researchers. In 1976, Stroud further refined the checklist and it subsequently was published as the "Purdue Self-Evaluation System (PSES) for School Media Centers." This checklist was used by Denman (1979) to

assess the quality of audiovisual programs in high schools in Missouri during the 1977-1978 school year. (cited in Stroud, 1982) Although these studies were directed to secondary schools, one can see the use of the survey lends itself to the gathering of timely data concerning school libraries at all levels.

Pertiz (1977) analyzed research papers appearing in core journals of the library field from 1950 through 1975. Her study showed an increase in research between 1960 and 1970, with a decrease in the early 1970's. She also found :

that while the college or university library was most often the subject of research, the school library was one of the least frequently studied. Only two percent of the research papers she examined had the school library as the major thrust. (cited in Stroud, 1982, p. 125)

Aaron (1982) reviewed dissertations from January, 1972 to December, 1980. She found a resurgence in the number of research articles being published in standard library journals, as well as, an increase of research focusing on library services to children and young people. She listed five reasons for such growth:

- (1) there is a need to justify media programs threatened by cutbacks;
- (2) in order to maintain their academic status, library faculty have been required to publish scholarly works;
- (3) in times of reduced budgets baseline data is badly needed;
- (4) federal fellowships

are being provided for advanced study; and (5) an increased number of doctoral degrees are being awarded by graduate schools of library science. (p. 210) Hopefully, this proved that Stroud's call for more research had not fallen on deaf ears.

Aaron's article reviewed over 150 studies. Among these, she cited five studies that dealt with reading interests and preferability concerning school-age youngsters. None dealt with the middle school student. She concluded her article by making recommendations for future research studies. Her first recommendation being for "user needs studies of those served by the library media program." (p. 233) This writer tried to address this recommendation by determining the reading needs of the middle school student as indicated by the data collected from a reading interest survey.

#### The Use of the Survey in the Classroom

In his article "Helping Reluctant Readers Help Themselves: Interest Inventories", Lamberg said "when in doubt, ask the students." (1977, p. 40) He not only recommended using the interest inventory or survey in the classroom but suggested new approaches for its use. He used his inventories several times in a year instead of just once. He also broke up the long survey form, that might overwhelm the student, into several short

surveys that he spread over a period of time. His inventories helped teachers but were primarily designed "for students to identify their interests, to reflect upon them, and to measure the growth of their interests as they do a greater and greater variety of reading." (p. 41) He included a sample of his five inventories in his article; the Interest Inventory, the Activities Inventory, the Inventory of Problems and Goals, the Reading Interests Inventory, and the Content Related Inventory. With these five surveys, he certainly did ask his students and thereby developed a successful recreational reading program. His students have accepted the responsibility for selecting their own reading materials and have taken the first step on their way to becoming lifelong readers.

#### Development of a Reading Interest Survey for the Middle School Student

The questionnaire in this study was developed primarily to survey the reading interests of the middle school student ranging in age from 10 to 14 years. Previous research studies have covered all the topics found on this questionnaire. However, the significant difference was that these topics had never been presented in a comprehensive survey aimed specifically at this age group.

Ciccone (1981) felt that "teachers are often unaware of student attitudes toward and interests in reading." She stated that "a study of this nature should be of significance to the teacher in helping to guide student reading experiences and making them more pleasurable" (p. 10). Her thesis "Reading Attitudes and Interests of Sixth Grade Pupils" provided this writer with a model on which to base her questionnaire. Feeling that the information gained from Ciccone's twenty topics could be used as guidelines for her survey, this writer based twelve of her statements on the same topics. Ciccone used statements such as "I prefer reading materials that I choose for myself" instead of questions. This same form was used in this writer's questionnaire. It was felt that this approach brought more open and positive responses since students of this age are wary of questions, feeling as though they are being interrogated with all its negative connotations.

According to Williamson, Karp, and Dalphin's suggestions (1977) the questionnaire was kept short and simple. The beginning statements were very easy to answer and broad in scope with more personal and thought-provoking statements being placed at the end of the survey. Both structured and open-ended statements were used so that free-response information was

obtained in certain areas. The teachers that administered the survey were encouraged to help the students if they showed any confusion concerning the directions or the information being sought.

The survey instrument consisted of 18 statements, some with multiple answers. The first seven statements dealt with background information concerning the students' reading habits outside of the school. Statements eight through thirteen reflected the use of the school library. The last statements revealed the middle school students' personal reading interests and preferences.

Statements one and two concerning the use of the public library are found on most attitude checklists. (Estes, 1971 and Rowell, 1972)

1. I use the public library weekly\_\_\_, every two weeks\_\_\_, occasionally\_\_\_, never\_\_\_.
2. I have a public library card.  
(yes\_\_\_, no\_\_\_.)

Vaughan (1963), Harris (1975), and Mendoza (1983), studied the use of the public library by school children with special emphasis on its location within the community.

Statements three, four, and five were chosen to reveal if there was a positive atmosphere in the students' homes that would encourage reading.

3. My parents like to read.  
(yes\_\_\_, no\_\_\_.)



4. My parents buy books for me.  
often\_\_\_, sometimes\_\_\_, never\_\_\_.
5. I spend my own money to buy books.  
often\_\_\_, sometimes\_\_\_, never\_\_\_.

Estes (1971) and Ciccone (1981) included statements similar to statements three and four to measure attitudes toward reading. Mendoza (1983) also included these statements in her survey. She felt that if books were present in the home and deemed valuable enough to be given as presents, this would be evidence of their high priority.

Leisure time is very important to the middle school student. They have much less free time than they had as young children and therefore value it more. Statements six and seven dealt with how they use their leisure time with regard to reading and TV.

6. I like to read books in my spare time.  
yes\_\_\_, no\_\_\_.
7. I prefer TV to reading a good book.  
yes\_\_\_, no\_\_\_.

Witty (1961), Hamilton (1976), and Higgins and Kellman (1979) all included reading and/or watching TV in their studies. Although specific numbers of hours spent on either activity were not determined in this survey, it was interesting to note if TV still was number one with this age group.

The school library was the target for statements eight and nine.

8. I use the school library weekly\_\_\_, every two weeks\_\_\_, occasionally\_\_\_, never\_\_\_.
9. My class has a regular library time. weekly\_\_\_, every two weeks\_\_\_, no scheduled time\_\_\_.

The school library was easily accessible to students in both schools and some teachers had scheduled library times as part of their curriculum. But there were some students who never checked out a book. Heathington and Alexander (1978) used interviews and observations in their study to determine the positive or negative attitudes that might explain to what degree the school library was used. They concluded that "attitudes play an extremely vital role in establishing this lifelong habit (or reading)" (p. 769).

Norvell (1958), Thorndike (1941), and Harris (1966) all did studies on statement ten.

10. I prefer the main character of a book to be male\_\_\_, female\_\_\_, doesn't matter\_\_\_.

They concluded that many boys refuse to have anything to do with "girls' books" or books about girls. Their conclusion and opinions like Washburne's (1972) have caused much controversy among reading experts.

She stated:

One should straddle sex-related interests by not selecting topics of interest only to boys or only to girls. And if this is not possible, choose for the boys. Girls are more flexible and can often enjoy masculine stories, too. (p. 539)

It was hoped that statement ten would show whether

this attitude was true of the children of the 1980's or whether they were more concerned with a good story no matter if the protagonist was male or female.

Statement 11 covered many different types of reading material.

11. I read the following: magazines, newspapers, comics, paperbacks, fiction, non-fiction, poetry.  
often\_\_\_, seldom\_\_\_, never\_\_\_.

Miller (1967) covered magazine, comic book and newspaper reading in his study. Norvell's study (1966) extensively reviewed magazine usage. While Harris (1975) included newspaper reading as well as magazines in his study. These previous studies were compared to the present findings.

Statement 12 was included in this survey to ascertain who really has the strongest influence on the middle school reader.

12. I mostly read books suggested by the librarian\_\_\_, suggested by a teacher, suggested by a friend\_\_\_, found on my own\_\_\_.

Heathington (1979) and Higgins and Kellman (1979) investigated this question in their studies. Both studies found even young students to have very independent views concerning their book favorites.

If students wished to find books on their own, statement 13 was included to reveal what they found initially drew them to a book.

13. I am first attracted to a book by the cover\_\_\_\_, the author\_\_\_\_, the title\_\_\_\_, the summary inside the book cover\_\_\_\_\_.

Mendoza (1983) and Higgins and Kellman (1979) studied this question as another means of promoting interest in reading.

In nearly every reading interest survey from fourth grade through high school, statements 14, 15, and 16 were found.

14. I like to read:
- |                      |                          |
|----------------------|--------------------------|
| Adventure stories    | Geography/History books  |
| Animal stories       | Hobby books              |
| Biographies          | Humorous stories         |
| Car/Motorcycle books | Mysteries                |
| Cartoons/Comics      | Poetry                   |
| Career books         | Romantic stories         |
| Folk Tales/Fables    | Science/Nature books     |
| Science Fiction      | Stories about Growing Up |
| Sports Books         | Stories about the Past   |
| Supernatural stories | War stories              |

15. My favorite authors are:

First \_\_\_\_\_  
 Second \_\_\_\_\_  
 Third \_\_\_\_\_

16. My favorite books are:

First \_\_\_\_\_  
 Second \_\_\_\_\_  
 Third \_\_\_\_\_

In statement 14, the students were to rank the ten top subjects on which they liked to read. Lazer, as early as 1937, included this information in her survey. She, as did later researchers, had the subjects ranked separately in two lists, the boys' favorites and the girls'. Harris (1975), Donelson (1977), Higgins and Kellman (1979), and Mendoza (1983) are but a few of

those researchers who included a listing of favorite subjects in their surveys. The subjects have changed somewhat over the years but it is interesting to note the number that have continued to appear on all or most of the lists.

Donelson (1977) included several surveys that contained statements 15 and 16 in his review of adolescent literature. He included Dunning's list (1959) of the top ten novels for adolescents and Pettit's list (1961) which contained the top 12 novels. Donelson himself surveyed English teachers to find out what adolescents were reading in 1972 and 1976. These surveys included specific titles and lists of favorite authors. The surveys of Higgins and Kellman (1979) and the BAYA, an organization of San Francisco Bay Area Young Adult Librarians, survey (1982) are two of the most recent surveys that also covered statement 15 and 16.

Statements 17 and 18 were also open-ended statements, as were statements 15 and 16.

17. If it were possible, I would like to have more books on \_\_\_\_\_ in my school library.
18. I read approximately \_\_\_\_\_ books for pleasure in a month.

These questions have appeared on many surveys such as Ciccone's study (1981). However, they elicited such a wide range of responses that they are usually most

meaningful to the individual surveyor who can use this information to enhance her own reading program or library usage.

#### Description of the Population

A survey covering the reading interests of the students of grades six, seven and eight, attending two middle schools in the Midwest, was conducted to gain insights into their recreational reading. Each middle school had an enrollment of approximately 750 students.

School A is located in a city with a population of 37,000. It has 6,100 students enrolled in its schools. This community has been surrounded by other small towns and has little additional land available for future growth. The town itself has lost several of its larger industries which effects monies used for its public schools. Therefore, it has nearly become a "closed" community with decreasing enrollment in its public schools. This has necessitated the closing of two of its elementary schools. It has two middle schools at present.

School B is located in a town with a population of 3,000. It has nearly 3,000 students enrolled in its public schools due to the fact that its school district takes in surrounding areas in addition to the town itself. Twenty years ago, it was a small farming

community but with the building of affluent subdivisions and with industrial growth, especially the General Motors plant that opened in 1983, it has become a growing community with families from all over the country transferring to this area. The industrial growth and annexation of additional areas into its school district has greatly increased school monies. At present, its schools are going through a period of growth. It has one middle school.

The survey was given in March, 1984, with complete cooperation of the two principals and their teachers. Although there was not 100 percent participation, most nonparticipation was due to absenteeism rather than the students exercising their right not to participate which was read to them as a part of the directions.

The survey consisted of 18 statements with most calling for yes or no answers; there were four open statements in which the students wrote their own personal answers. The survey was identical for all three grades. It was printed on three different shades of paper to keep grade levels separate and to facilitate tabulation of the results. See the Appendix for a copy of the survey.

#### Analysis of the Survey

As the questionnaires were returned, each grade

level was divided into male and female groups. Each group's responses were then tallied separately as well as together for a total grade result. Responses were carefully examined and percentages were established for most responses. Some responses were given rank-order. There were a few responses for which percentages and rank-order were figured. A comparison was then made among the three grades and with the surveys found in the review of literature.

### Assumptions

For the purposes of this study, the writer had to assume that the statements used on the questionnaire were valid and reliable, and that the pupils responded earnestly to each of the statements. The students did not hesitate to answer "I don't know." Many freely offered comments, such as "I like all the books I read" or the more disheartening "I don't like to read." It was also assumed that the middle school students had not been asked about their reading interests before and therefore gave spontaneous answers. A further assumption was that the use of their reading interest survey would be helpful to the middle school librarian. The final assumption was that this short time of reflection by the students' would help them assess their attitudes toward reading and their reading habits.



Limitations

This study is limited by the local nature of the study covering only the opinions of students from two midwest cities. It was not meant to reflect the reading interests in all middle schools across the country. In no way was this study to be used as a comparison of the two schools or their individual library programs. Two schools with very different populations were specifically chosen to obtain information from a cross section and therefore give the study a slightly broader scope. This study was also limited to the stated reading interests indicated by the students.

## CHAPTER FOUR

Results of the Questionnaire

There were 1306 questionnaires that were used wholly or in part for this study. Some students did not fill out the entire survey, had ambiguous answers, or did not follow directions. Seven surveys could not be used because the students did not indicate whether they were male or female. Of the total questionnaires; 407 were returned from the sixth grade, 441 from the seventh grade, and 458 from the eighth grade. Surveys were filled out by 641 males and 665 females.

The responses to the 18 items have been tabulated and the results are found in Tables 1 through 18. The titles of these tables refer directly to the statements on the questionnaire. The actual number of responses, found in parentheses, varied with each statement. The percentages based on these responses have been recorded. The percentages have been rounded off to the nearest hundredth and therefore do not always equal 100%. The tables will be discussed as they appear in the text.

Use of the Public Library

Table 1 shows how frequently the students reported using the public library. The data show that as the

student grows older, weekly use of the public library decreased. However, the number of older students who reported they use the library "occasionally" showed a slight increase. In general, sixth graders reported use of the public library more often than did either the seventh or eighth graders.

TABLE 1

USE OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

	Weekly	Every 2 weeks	Occasionally	Never
SIXTH GRADE				
Male (198)*	11%	14%	58%	18%
Female (208)	10%	15%	63%	13%
Total (406)	10%	14%	60%	15%
SEVENTH GRADE				
Male (226)	4%	14%	62%	19%
Female (215)	7%	14%	66%	12%
Total (441)	6%	14%	64%	16%
EIGHTH GRADE				
Male (217)	4%	11%	63%	22%
Female (241)	5%	8%	71%	16%
Total (458)	5%	9%	67%	19%

Total students surveyed - 1305

\*Numbers in parentheses indicate the number of students responding to each statement.

Possession of a Public Library Card

Table 2 shows whether the students had a public library card at the time of the survey. An analysis of Table 2 shows that as the grade level increased so did the number of students who did not have a library card. The girls in all three grades reported having cards

more often than did the boys.

TABLE 2

POSSESSION OF A PUBLIC LIBRARY CARD

	Yes	No
SIXTH GRADE		
Male (197)	72%	28%
Female (208)	79%	21%
Total (405)	76%	24%
SEVENTH GRADE		
Male (226)	70%	30%
Female (215)	78%	22%
Total (441)	74%	26%
EIGHTH GRADE		
Male (217)	69%	31%
Female (241)	73%	27%
Total (458)	71%	29%

Total students surveyed - 1304

Parents' Reading Habits

Table 3 indicates parents' interest in or lack of interest in reading. Students reported that their parents' interest in reading was about the same percentage at all grade levels. The students' responses from all three grades indicated that nearly 90% of their parents enjoyed reading. There was a slight difference noted between the percentages of parents of the eighth grade males and females. The eighth grade males reported that their parents showed a greater interest in reading than the parents of the eighth grade girls. In both the sixth and seventh grades, the females recorded

slightly higher "yes" percentages than the males.

TABLE 3

PARENTS READING HABITS

	Yes	No
SIXTH GRADE		
Male (194)	89%	11%
Female (202)	90%	10%
Total (396)	89%	11%
SEVENTH GRADE		
Male (222)	88%	12%
Female (214)	87%	13%
Total (436)	88%	12%
EIGHTH GRADE		
Male (214)	89%	11%
Female (234)	85%	15%
Total (448)	87%	13%

Total students surveyed - 1280

Books Purchased by Parents

Table 4 shows the percentage of parents who bought books for their children. It appears that the girls' parents purchased books in greater numbers than did the boys' parents. As the boys became older there was even less money spent on books for them. This was noted in the seventh and eighth grade boys' responses of "never" being 24% and 26%, respectively, as compared to the sixth grade boys' response of 10%. The sixth graders' parents purchased the greatest number of books for their children with a steady decline revealed by the seventh and eighth graders' responses. (See next page for Table 4.)

TABLE 4

BOOKS PURCHASED BY PARENTS

	Often	Sometimes	Never
SIXTH GRADE			
Male (198)	13%	77%	10%
Female (208)	17%	77%	6%
Total (406)	15%	77%	8%
SEVENTH GRADE			
Male (226)	10%	65%	24%
Female (215)	18%	65%	17%
Total (441)	14%	65%	21%
EIGHTH GRADE			
Male (216)	8%	65%	26%
Female (241)	15%	70%	16%
Total (457)	12%	68%	21%

Total students surveyed - 1304

Books Purchased by Students

Table 5 shows the percentage of students who were willing to spend their own money on books. Those who were willing to do so "often" remained constant through all three grades. Males who bought books "sometimes" dropped considerably in seventh grade and continued to drop in eighth grade. Those who "never" purchased books increased at the same grade levels by 20% over the male sixth graders. The percentage of girls spending their money on books also decreased as they became older. The percentage of those who "never" spent their money on books was notably higher on all grade levels when it was compared with those who "often" spent their own money. It was also noteworthy that the males and females in

sixth grade recorded almost identical percentages in all three categories regarding their book buying habits.

TABLE 5

BOOKS PURCHASED BY STUDENTS

	Often	Sometimes	Never
SIXTH GRADE			
Male (198)	11%	65%	24%
Female (208)	10%	66%	24%
Total (406)	10%	66%	24%
SEVENTH GRADE			
Male (225)	9%	47%	44%
Female (215)	11%	61%	28%
Total (440)	10%	54%	36%
EIGHTH GRADE			
Male (216)	9%	44%	48%
Female (240)	10%	52%	38%
Total (456)	10%	48%	42%

Total students surveyed - 1302

Reading in Spare Time

Table 6 reveals whether the students read in their spare time. The sixth graders' responses indicated that they enjoyed recreational reading more than the seventh and eighth graders. The seventh and eighth grade males reported dividing their spare time equally between reading and other activities. The girls in all three grades, while showing some decrease as they grew older, continued to use their spare time reading in relatively high percentages. There was a very noticeable difference between the percentages recorded by sixth graders who used their spare time for reading as compared to the percentages reported by the eighth graders.

TABLE 6

READING IN SPARE TIME

	Yes	No
SIXTH GRADE		
Male (189)	62%	38%
Female (201)	85%	15%
Total (390)	74%	26%
SEVENTH GRADE		
Male (221)	56%	44%
Female (208)	71%	29%
Total (429)	63%	37%
EIGHTH GRADE		
Male (206)	49%	51%
Female (229)	68%	32%
Total (435)	59%	41%
Total students surveyed - 1254		

Preference of TV to Reading

TV is still preferred to reading as Table 7 shows. The preference of males gradually increased from sixth grade to eighth grade. Females' interest in TV peaked at the seventh grade level; and, then, decreased slightly by eighth grade. (See next page for Table 7.)



TABLE 7

PREFERENCE OF TV TO READING

	Yes	No
SIXTH GRADE		
Male (185)	67%	33%
Female (193)	56%	44%
Total (378)	62%	38%
SEVENTH GRADE		
Male (218)	73%	27%
Female (204)	65%	35%
Total (422)	69%	31%
EIGHTH GRADE		
Male (204)	78%	22%
Female (216)	63%	37%
Total (420)	70%	30%

Total students surveyed - 1220

Use of the School Library and Scheduled Library Time

Tables 8 and 9 are too closely linked to be discussed separately. Table 8 indicates how frequently the school library is used, while Table 9 reveals the frequency of scheduled library use. The seventh and eighth grade students recorded a tremendous drop in school library usage. The students who used the library only "occasionally" increased from sixth grade to eighth grade by over 40%. When Table 9 is studied, it reveals that scheduled library times changed from 5% having "no scheduled time" in sixth grade to 77% having no set library time in eighth grade. Correlations can be made between the two tables. For example, 53% of the sixth graders reported a "weekly" scheduled time and 50% of

those students responded that they use the library weekly. 37% of the seventh graders reported "no scheduled time" and 43% of them used the library only "occasionally" and 5% recorded "never" using it. With 77% of the eighth graders having "no scheduled time", 67% found time to "occasionally" use the library and 7% responded that they "never" use it.

TABLE 8

USE OF THE SCHOOL LIBRARY

	Weekly	Every 2 weeks	Occasionally	Never
SIXTH GRADE				
Male (197)	49%	26%	20%	5%
Female (208)	50%	23%	25%	1%
Total (405)	50%	25%	22%	3%
SEVENTH GRADE				
Male (226)	21%	30%	46%	4%
Female (214)	13%	39%	41%	7%
Total (440)	17%	34%	43%	5%
EIGHTH GRADE				
Male (215)	11%	16%	64%	8%
Female (240)	9%	16%	69%	6%
Total (455)	10%	16%	67%	7%

Total students surveyed - 1300

(See next page for Table 9.)

TABLE 9

SCHEDULED LIBRARY TIME

	Weekly	Every 2 weeks	Monthly	No scheduled time
SIXTH GRADE				
Male (197)	56%	39%		5%
Female (208)	51%	44%		5%
Total (405)	53%	42%		5%
SEVENTH GRADE				
Male (222)	11%	34%	15%	40%
Female (211)	3%	43%	21%	33%
Total (433)	7%	38%	18%	37%
EIGHTH GRADE				
Male (210)	2%	22%		76%
Female (231)	1%	21%		78%
Total (441)	2%	22%		77%

Total students surveyed - 1279

Sexual Preference of the Main Character

Table 10 shows whether middle school students had a strong preference regarding the sex of the main character of a book. Although there were some males who preferred to read about females and also some females who preferred the main character to be male, the greatest percentages of students on all grade levels recorded that the sex of the main character didn't make any difference. The males agreed at all three grade levels reporting nearly the same percentages, which varied only from 74% to 78%. The females had a slightly greater variance, ranging from 79% in seventh grade to 86% in sixth grade and 90% in eighth grade. There was a larger percentage of males that preferred to read about males

than females who wanted the main character to also be female.

TABLE 10

SEXUAL PREFERENCE OF THE MAIN CHARACTER

	Male	Female	Doesn't matter
SIXTH GRADE			
Male (198)	17%	5%	78%
Female (208)	1%	13%	86%
Total (406)	9%	9%	82%
SEVENTH GRADE			
Male (224)	21%	5%	74%
Female (214)	4%	17%	79%
Total (438)	13%	11%	76%
EIGHTH GRADE			
Male (215)	18%	4%	78%
Female (240)	3%	7%	90%
Total (455)	10%	6%	84%

Total students surveyed - 1299

Preferences for Various Reading Material

Table 11 indicates how often the students read seven different types of reading material. The table gives three choices, "often", "seldom", and "never", that could be chosen by the students. The percentages discussed here were based on the "often" category. Rank-order was used in order to present the results in a concise and clear manner. The seventh and eighth graders ranked the different types of reading material identically. In sixth grade, fiction was ranked highest. Poetry received the smallest percentages of all seven reading materials on each grade level.

TABLE 11

PREFERENCES FOR VARIOUS READING MATERIALS

	Reading Material	Percentages
SIXTH GRADE		
	Fiction (397)	71%
	Magazines (401)	55%
	Paperbacks (397)	54%
	Comics (398)	48%
	Non-fiction (397)	33%
	Newspapers (396)	23%
	Poetry (396)	9%
SEVENTH GRADE		
	Magazines (437)	71%
	Fiction (429)	61%
	Paperbacks (431)	52%
	Comics (431)	42%
	Newspapers (428)	34%
	Non-fiction (424)	23%
	Poetry (431)	8%
EIGHTH GRADE		
	Magazines (456)	71%
	Fiction (453)	59%
	Paperbacks (452)	49%
	Comics (451)	42%
	Newspapers (451)	28%
	Non-fiction (447)	19%
	Poetry (445)	7%

Book Recommendations

Table 12 shows whether the students chose books on their own or were influenced by others. Most students marked only one of the four choices in deciding who influenced their book selection. However, some students combined choices and in so doing formed some new categories. Only one new category, "found on my own and suggested by a friend", received a significant percentage

of the responses on all grade levels. The greatest percentage of all students surveyed found books on their own. Some students received help from their friends, but very few indicated that the librarian or the teacher had any real influence on their selections. Rank-order was used to record the data for this table.

TABLE 12

<u>BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS</u>		Percentages
SIXTH GRADE (387)		
1.	Found on my own	64%
2.	Suggested by a friend	14%
3.	Found on my own and suggested by a friend	12%
4.	Suggested by librarian	3%
5.	Suggested by teacher	1%
SEVENTH GRADE (424)		
1.	Found on my own	67%
2.	Suggested by a friend	12%
3.	Found on my own and suggested by a friend	11%
4.	Suggested by librarian	7%
5.	Suggested by teacher	3%
EIGHTH GRADE (445)		
1.	Found on my own	65%
2.	Suggested by a friend	18%
3.	Found on my own and suggested by a friend	7%
4.	Suggested by librarian	5%
5.	Suggested by teacher	3%

Total students surveyed - 1256

#### Primary Attraction to Books

Table 13 indicates what first attracted the students to a particular book. Rank-order was used again for Table 13, listing the first five choices as was done in

Table 12. The students again created several more categories by marking more than one choice. The percentages of these new categories were minimal. However, some were included in the table. The primary attraction to a book was the title for both sixth and seventh grade students. While the eighth graders selected the summary as their first choice, followed closely by the title. The choice of the author had very low percentages in all grades, ranking fifth in grades six and seven. Among the eighth graders, it received only 2% and ended up in a three way tie for sixth place. It was interesting that all three grades gave the cover the same percentage, 20%. (See next page for Table 13.)

TABLE 13

PRIMARY ATTRACTION TO BOOKS

		Percentages
SIXTH GRADE		
(388)	1. Title	35%
	2. Summary	31%
	3. Cover	20%
	4. Cover and Title	5%
	5. Author	3%
	Cover and Summary	3%
SEVENTH GRADE		
(424)	1. Title	37%
	2. Summary	27%
	3. Cover	20%
	4. Cover and Title	5%
	5. Author	4%
EIGHTH GRADE		
(440)	1. Summary	34%
	2. Title	31%
	3. Cover	20%
	4. Cover and Title	4%
	5. Title and Summary	4%
	6. Author	2%
	Cover and Summary	2%
	Cover, Title, and Summary	2%

Total students surveyed - 1252

Favorite Subjects

Table 14 shows the students' top five choices selected from a list of 20 subject areas in reading. Rank-order was used to list the students' favorite subjects. Ties were also recorded. There was great similarity among males of all three grades. Their top four choices were the same but in different order. They were: adventure stories, mysteries, cartoons/comics, and humorous stories. The seventh and eighth grade



males continued in agreement with sports books and war stories completing their lists. The girls, too, indicated their favorite subjects to be the same but ranked somewhat differently. Romantic stories were number one among all the girls. Their next four choices were: mysteries, animal stories, adventure stories, and humorous stories. In seventh and eighth grade, stories about growing up were also among their favorites. Both males and females agreed on three subjects: adventure stories, mysteries, and humorous stories. Although ranking was different, the males and females did show close agreement among their top five favorite subjects. (See next page for Table 14.)

TABLE 14

FAVORITE SUBJECTS

	Male	Female
SIXTH GRADE	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Adventure stories</li> <li>2. Mysteries</li> <li>3. Cartoons/Comics</li> <li>4. Humorous stories</li> <li>5. Hobby books</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Romantic stories</li> <li>2. Mysteries</li> <li>3. Animal stories</li> <li>4. Adventure stories</li> <li>5. Humorous stories</li> </ol>
SEVENTH GRADE	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Adventure stories</li> <li>2. Mysteries</li> <li>3. Cartoons/Comics</li> <li>4. Humorous stories</li> <li>5. Sports books, War stories</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Romantic stories</li> <li>2. Mysteries</li> <li>3. Adventure stories</li> <li>4. Animal stories, Humorous stories</li> <li>5. Stories about growing Up</li> </ol>
EIGHTH GRADE	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Adventure stories</li> <li>2. Mysteries</li> <li>3. Humorous stories</li> <li>4. Cartoons/Comics, Science Fiction, Sports books</li> <li>5. War stories</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Romantic stories</li> <li>2. Humorous stories</li> <li>3. Mysteries</li> <li>4. Adventure stories</li> <li>5. Animal stories, Cartoons/Comics, Stories about growing Up</li> </ol>

Favorite Authors

Table 15 shows the authors selected as favorites by the students. Judy Blume was chosen as the favorite author on all three grade levels and usually for all three choices. Only the eighth grade males chose J. R. R. Tolkien as their first choice. However, Beverly Cleary received many votes as did S. E. Hinton, V. C. Andrews, and Mark Twain. The students' choices were so diverse that in nearly all categories half the authors

received only one or two votes. The students at this age had many and varied favorites.

TABLE 15

FAVORITE AUTHORS

## SIXTH GRADE

- |        |   |
|--------|---|
| Male   | 1. Judy Blume (25 of 108 responses)     |
|        | 2. Beverly Cleary (9 of 74 responses)   |
|        | 3. Judy Blume (6 of 55 responses)       |
| Female | 1. Judy Blume (101 of 170 responses)    |
|        | 2. Beverly Cleary (28 of 127 responses) |
|        | 3. Judy Blume (12 of 74 responses)      |

## SEVENTH GRADE

- |        |  |
|--------|--|
| Male   | 1. Judy Blume (24 of 131 responses)    |
|        | 2. Beverly Cleary (11 of 83 responses) |
|        | 3. Mark Twain (6 of 53 responses)      |
| Female | 1. Judy Blume (100 of 168 responses)   |
|        | 2. Judy Blume (27 of 128 responses)    |
|        | 3. Judy Blume (9 of 72 responses)      |

## EIGHTH GRADE

- |        |   |
|--------|---|
| Male   | 1. J. R. R. Tolkien (9 of 86 responses) |
|        | 2. Judy Blume (7 of 59 responses)       |
|        | 3. Judy Blume (4 of 35 responses)       |
| Female | 1. Judy Blume (85 of 165 responses)     |
|        | 2. Judy Blume (30 of 115 responses)     |
|        | 3. Judy Blume (15 of 61 responses)      |

Favorite Books

Table 16 indicates what the students reported as being their favorite books. As with Favorite Authors, the students had many individual favorites that were given only one or two votes. It was decided that only their first three choices would be recorded in rank order with both male and female choices given separately.

Some of Judy Blume's books on a fairly low reading level for these grades were often chosen by these older boys and girls. The students' favorite books ranged from easy reading to adult books.

TABLE 16

FAVORITE BOOKS

## SIXTH GRADE

- Male
1. Superfudge (15 of 128 responses)
  2. Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing (4 of 107 responses)
  3. Choose Your Own Adventure (4 of 89 responses)

- Female
1. Superfudge (13 of 173 responses)
  2. Superfudge (8 of 161 responses)  
Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing (8 of 161 responses)
  3. Blubber (6 of 139 responses)

## SEVENTH GRADE

- Male
1. The Hobbit (7 of 135 responses)
  2. Superfudge (7 of 111 responses)
  3. The Hobbit (4 of 75 responses)

- Female
1. The Outsiders (17 of 168 responses)
  2. Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing (10 of 170 responses)
  3. Are You There, God? It's Me Margaret. (8 of 135 responses)

## EIGHTH GRADE

- Male
1. The Hobbit (9 of 97 responses)
  2. Lord of the Rings  
The Outsiders  
Rumble Fish (all had 3 of 85 responses)
  3. Soup's Drum  
The Hobbit  
The Outsiders  
Rumble Fish (all had 2 of 59 responses)

- Female
1. The Outsiders (16 of 169 responses)
  2. The Outsiders  
Superfudge (both had 8 of 152 responses)
  3. Forever (7 of 175 responses)

Recommendation for the Library

Table 17 records by rank-order the reading material that the students recommended as additions to their school libraries. The students' first five choices were recorded as were ties if they occurred. The only agreement among males and females from all three grades was their request for more mysteries. The list suggested by the seventh and eighth grade males differed only in their placement of science fiction which was the first recommendation of the seventh grade males. The sixth graders' list included war stories but not sport stories among their top five choices. It should be noted that the sixth and seventh grade girls asked for exactly the same type of books but in slightly different order with mysteries and humorous stories ranked higher among the sixth graders. The eighth grade girls replaced humorous stories with science fiction in their top five. Grade level seemed irrelevant but preferences according to sex became evident in the students' recommendations. (See next page for Table 17.)

TABLE 17

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE LIBRARY

	Male	Female
SIXTH GRADE	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Cars/Motorcycles</li> <li>2. War stories</li> <li>3. Adventure stories, Mysteries</li> <li>5. Science Fiction</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Romantic stories</li> <li>2. Mysteries</li> <li>3. Humorous stories, Animal stories</li> <li>5. Stories about Growing Up/Teenagers</li> </ol>
SEVENTH GRADE	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Science Fiction</li> <li>2. Cars/Motorcycles, Mysteries</li> <li>4. Sports books</li> <li>5. Adventure stories</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Romantic stories</li> <li>2. Stories about Growing Up/Teenagers</li> <li>3. Animal stories</li> <li>4. Humorous stories, Mysteries</li> </ol>
EIGHTH GRADE	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Cars/Motorcycles</li> <li>2. Mysteries</li> <li>3. Sports</li> <li>4. Adventure stories, Science Fiction</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Romantic stories</li> <li>2. Stories about Growing Up/Teenagers</li> <li>3. Mysteries</li> <li>4. Animal stories</li> <li>5. Science Fiction</li> </ol>

Number of Books Read Monthly

Table 18 indicates the average number of books that the middle school student reported that they read monthly. This was recorded according to grade level as well as according to sex. The sixth graders found time to read the most books per month. There was quite a decrease between sixth and seventh grade. Seventh and eighth graders read approximately the same number of books per month. The second part of the table shows the difference between male and female readers. The females

read more on every grade level. There was a substantial decrease between sixth and seventh grade girls as well as boys. The seventh and eighth graders remained about the same. However, the girls were still reading more books than boys but not nearly as many books as they had read in sixth grade.

TABLE 18

NUMBER OF BOOKS READ MONTHLY

	Monthly Average	
SIXTH GRADE		
Male (177)	4.0	
Female (191)	4.9	
Total (368)	4.5	
SEVENTH GRADE		
Male (206)	2.4	
Female (197)	3.3	
Total (403)	2.9	
EIGHTH GRADE		
Male (198)	2.3	
Female (225)	3.3	
Total (423)	2.8	
	Male	Female
SIXTH GRADE	4.0	4.9
SEVENTH GRADE	2.4	3.3
EIGHTH GRADE	2.3	3.3
Total students surveyed - 1194		

## CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusions and Recommendations

Although this survey was conducted at only two middle schools in the Midwest with approximately 1300 responses recorded and studied, much more was gleaned from the carefully chosen statements than was originally anticipated. The results of this survey indicated that middle school students deserved their own reading interest survey. There were some variances noted in covering the sixth grade reader just entering the middle school to the eighth grader preparing for high school, yet there was much common ground which these students shared that teachers and librarians could use to build strong reading habits for now and the future.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions were drawn from closely related statements on the survey rather than drawing conclusions from each individual statement.

There was a positive attitude toward reading in the majority of the students' homes, but library usage at both the public and school libraries showed a decline as the students grew older. This could be attributed to the fact that the sixth grader still had the time to



read due to less time spent on school assignments and social activities.

The survey showed there might be additional factors that contributed to this decline. Both parents and students were reported to have spent significantly smaller amounts of money on books as the students grew older. Tables 4 and 5 indicated that girls and their parents reported slightly more spent on books than did boys and their parents. Several publishers, such as Bantam, Dell, Simon and Schuster, and Scholastic, have viewed this age group as a new and lucrative market for paperback books and have begun intense campaigns especially aimed at the girls and their interest in romantic stories. However, this survey revealed that only 10% of students on all grade levels buy books "often". This could be the percentage of students that purchase books monthly from the paperback book clubs found in the schools. Another explanation could be the popular practice of a few students purchasing the paperbacks and sharing them with their friends or having them handed down from older brothers and sisters. It would seem that this age group would just be beginning to purchase such books, yet Table 5 showed a steady decline in buying books from sixth to eighth grade.

Students, as in the past, still preferred TV to reading. However, it was encouraging to note that a

large majority on all grade levels indicated that they did read in their spare time. Many commented on the survey that their preference depended on the TV program and the book. It could be concluded that they gave considerable thought to their TV selections and that often a good book won out over a mediocre TV program. It would be very unrealistic to believe that most students preferred a book to certain TV shows since so many shows are aimed at this age group.

A very significant conclusion was revealed by the responses to questions eight and nine. If school time was not allotted for visiting the library, the majority of students in this age group did not find the time for weekly or even bimonthly visits to the library in their busy schedules. The survey results indicated that some seventh and most eighth grade classes did not have a scheduled library time. Library usage from sixth to eighth grade dropped off severely. Educators should reevaluate the wisdom of not having scheduled library times for older students.

Students preferred to select their own library books. The teachers and librarians' influence combined was 10% or less at all grade levels. This data indicated that teachers and librarians had minimal influence on these students' selection of books. This disheartening conclusion can only be changed when

librarians and teachers become knowledgeable about the books their students read.

The title and the summary were very close in percentages as being first in attracting students to books. Although Judy Blume was the runaway winner in author preference, the students stated that only 4% or less of them were attracted to a book because of the author. This writer found this to be contradictory. If Judy Blume is so popular, then it should follow that the students are attracted to a book by the author. The students need to be made more aware of other authors that also write their favorite books since many stated they could not remember any authors. This writer felt that Judy Blume's name is the one most often heard so that the student automatically remembered it and wrote it down even when some did not name any of her books as their favorites.

Magazines, fiction, and paperbacks were reported as the favorites among various reading materials. Poetry was always last with very small percentages. One has to wonder if poetry was read more often to the students if this could not be altered. Shel Silverstein's Where the Sidewalk Ends and A Light in the Attic are the only children's books that are consistently on the best seller lists.

Questions 14 and 17 were perhaps the most

enlightening to this writer. The similarities of the students' favorite subjects among all three grades and their almost identical recommendations for future purchases for the library added substance to the writer's conviction that this is a cohesive group. All three grades indicated adventure stories, mysteries, and humorous stories among their five favorite subjects. Of course, the girls on all grade levels named romantic stories as their favorite reading subject. This coincided with the predictions of publishers found in Bunting's (1984) article, "What's New in Children's Books?". Problem novels or realistic novels no longer had top priority among this group of girls. They wanted romantic stories which explained the tremendous number of these books now being published. This trend corresponded with the boys' preference for the Choose Your Own Adventure series. Both are non-demanding, escape reading, very similar to the books found so popular in the 1950's.

A surprising conclusion from this survey was that the majority of these students did not care if the protagonist was male or female. This was contrary to the data in many other studies that emphasized that boys preferred "boys' books" and girls preferred "girls' books". One can conclude that these students judged their books on their own merit not labeling them as only

for boys or girls. However, it should be noted that many books for this age level have both a boy and a girl as the main characters so that the students can identify with whichever one is of their own gender.

It was difficult to draw a clear-cut conclusion concerning the favorite authors or books of the middle school student. Although Judy Blume and her books appeared to be the definite favorites in both categories, the numerous authors and books written down as favorites showed the tremendous diversity representative of this age group. There were at least fifty authors and titles given as first choices by both males and females at all grade levels. Most received only one vote. This writer feels this is very healthy for it indicates the wide range of physical and mental growth within the middle school. These students have minds of their own and strong opinions about what they truly like. When one considers that Charlotte Bronte, Alexander Dumas, Edgar Allan Poe, Jack London, C. S. Lewis, and James Herriot received votes for favorite authors on the same grade level as Jim Davis, author of Garfield, Stan Lee, comic book author, and Johnny Hart, the author of the "B. C." comic series in the newspaper, one has to admit that reading tastes stretched over a very wide reading range. Titles ranged from Superfudge, Ramona the Pest, Freckle Juice, and Heathcliff to The Battle of the Bulge, the

Narnia Chronicles, To Kill a Mockingbird, and Murder on the Orient Express. Stephen King's and V. C. Andrews' books were mentioned at all grade levels but especially in the seventh and eighth grades. Although many students did not fill out statements 15 and 16, several stated that they had no favorites or that they liked nearly all the books they read. One conclusion that this writer made was that the student, himself, can be reading on several different reading levels at the same time. A second conclusion was that the middle school students' choices are as individualistic as they themselves are. Therefore, the librarian or teacher who is trying to meet the needs of all students must have available multi-level materials that will appeal to and fill the needs of all the middle schoolers.

The final conclusion based on Table 18 was that recreational reading gradually decreased from sixth to eighth grade. This conclusion should lead to the questions: "Why?" and "Can we halt this trend?". This writer feels that the reading interest survey is the answer to both questions. Know your students and their reading preferences. Capitalize on their interests and direct them to other books that they will enjoy based on your observations.

#### Summary of Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following

recommendations seemed appropriate for the middle school.

1. Reading interest surveys should be used to assess the reading interests of this unique age group with their own special needs. It is obvious that the librarian would want to know the information revealed by such a survey. However, the use of the survey should also be of special interest to the English and remedial reading teacher. The survey that they would use need not be as long and as inclusive as the one used in this study. Short reading inventories can be easily composed based on what the teachers want to learn about their students.

2. Make use of the positive attitudes toward reading still found at this age level. Teachers who enjoy reading should share their interests with their students. Students should be asked to share titles and authors which have become their favorites. Teachers should read some of the students favorites. This will make a great impression on the students and will lead to some worthwhile discussions. The teacher, who reads and uses the school library, expects the students to do so, also. He becomes an excellent role model. The librarian might at first need to diplomatically encourage the teachers to use the school library. If there is a positive relationship established between the teacher and the librarian, then the teacher will

encourage students to become frequent visitors to the library.

3. Librarians should try to set up scheduled library times for all students in the middle school. This is difficult as the teachers have much material to cover and sometimes do not view regular library periods as a priority. But Tables 8 and 9 of this study showed what happens when the students did not have scheduled times. The student of ten to fourteen years of age did not find the time on his own to go to the library. Therefore, the librarian needs to use many means to convince the faculty and students of the importance of the library and reading. Some of these are: initial orientation for all new students, book displays, book talks, innovative ways to use reference materials, and the imparting of information to teachers on material found in the library that corresponds to their curriculum.

4. Use TV as a tie-in to reading instead of a rival for the students' leisure time. Be aware of the special programs on TV and make displays that coordinate with their topics. Make use of the programs that are based on children's books, such as the ABC After School Specials. Display other books by the same author or on the same subject as that specific program.

5. Read to your students no matter what their age.



Start the day or period with a poem. Ask them to read their favorite Shel Silverstein poem to the class. You might end up laughing or crying together but these are the moments that will live in their memories.

6. Don't label books as for boys or for girls. You will discourage more reading than you encourage. A good book is a good book regardless of the sex of the students. Instead pick out books you think an individual student will enjoy. You can only do this if you truly know your students.

7. Set aside time each day for the students and faculty to read. Let the students see teachers reading during this time.

8. As a librarian, consider student recommendations for future purchases. They will be surprised to see you are interested in their input. If you listen to them, they will listen to your suggestions also. From the survey, it appears that we, as teachers and librarians, are going to have to show the students that they can rely on us for some good recommendations.

9. More research needs to be addressed to the reading interests of the middle school student since this study was limited to a specific area. Due to the lack of research found on the middle school reader, studies that are conducted should be shared so that other educators will benefit from the results.

In summary, books should be savored, then shared, and finally remembered. We should build an enthusiasm for books and a love of reading that will last a lifetime. The middle school might be our last chance to do this.

As a graduate student at the University of Chicago, I have had the opportunity to study the interests of the public. I have been particularly interested in the work of the Federal Reserve Board.

Appendix

The following is a list of the documents which have been examined in connection with the above mentioned work. The documents are arranged in chronological order.

The documents are as follows:

1. Report of the Federal Reserve Board on the work of the Board during the year 1934.

## LETTER TO PARTICIPATING PRINCIPALS

March 6, 1984

Dear

As a graduate student at Lindenwood College, I am doing my Master's Project on a survey of Middle School Reading Interests. From my previous research, I have not found one interest survey devoted exclusively to the middle school student.

I know as a principal of a middle school, you will share my desire to find and meet the reading needs of your students. Your assistance in asking the English and the sixth grade teachers in your school to have their students complete the enclosed questionnaire will make available information necessary for my study. I hope the results will provide teachers and librarians with valuable knowledge for selection of reading materials and also open up new avenues for understanding and helping students during these special years.

Although grade levels will be indicated, no personal identification will result from answering this survey. Please tell the teachers that the students may feel free to ask them to explain the directions if there is any confusion and to add any pertinent comments if they so desire.

I will pick up the completed forms by March 31, 1984.

Your cooperation will be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

K. Irene Hettich  
Teacher - Grade 6  
Jefferson Middle School

DIRECTIONS FOR TEACHERS ADMINISTERING THE SURVEY

Teachers,

Feel free to explain the directions if your students seem to be confused. They may make comments if they so desire on the open-ended statements. Even though the survey is anonymous, the students may still choose not to participate or may choose only to complete those statements they can.

Eighth graders should use the questionnaire on white paper, seventh graders the blue paper, and sixth graders the buff paper.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Irene Hettich

Jefferson Middle School

## MIDDLE SCHOOL READING QUESTIONNAIRE

Male \_\_\_\_\_  
 Female \_\_\_\_\_  
 Age \_\_\_\_\_

The purpose of this questionnaire is to find out your reading interests as middle school students. Your attitude toward reading and the library will also be covered. Since there are few surveys on the middle school reader, I feel your opinions are very valuable and request your cooperation in completing this form.

Directions: Place a check by the response that applies to you.

1. I use the public library.  
 weekly \_\_\_\_\_ every two weeks \_\_\_\_\_ occasionally \_\_\_\_\_ never \_\_\_\_\_
2. I have a public library card.  
 yes \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_
3. My parents like to read.  
 yes \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_
4. My parents buy books for me.  
 often \_\_\_\_\_ sometimes \_\_\_\_\_ never \_\_\_\_\_
5. I spend my own money to buy books.  
 often \_\_\_\_\_ sometimes \_\_\_\_\_ never \_\_\_\_\_
6. I like to read books in my spare time.  
 yes \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_
7. I prefer TV to reading a good book.  
 yes \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_
8. I use the school library.  
 weekly \_\_\_\_\_ every two weeks \_\_\_\_\_ occasionally \_\_\_\_\_ never \_\_\_\_\_
9. My class has a regular library time.  
 weekly \_\_\_\_\_ every two weeks \_\_\_\_\_ no scheduled time \_\_\_\_\_
10. I prefer the main character of a book to be  
 male \_\_\_\_\_ female \_\_\_\_\_ doesn't matter \_\_\_\_\_
11. I read the following:
 

	often	seldom	never
magazines	_____	_____	_____
newspapers	_____	_____	_____
comics	_____	_____	_____
paperbacks	_____	_____	_____

11. I read the following (cont.):

	often	seldom	never
fiction	_____	_____	_____
non-fiction (books based on facts)	_____	_____	_____
poetry	_____	_____	_____

12. I mostly read books  
 suggested by the librarian \_\_\_\_\_ suggested by a friend \_\_\_\_\_  
 suggested by a teacher \_\_\_\_\_ found on my own \_\_\_\_\_

13. I am first attracted to a book by  
 the cover \_\_\_\_\_ the author \_\_\_\_\_ the title \_\_\_\_\_  
 the summary inside the book cover \_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Indicate your top ten choices. Place a 1 in front of your first choice, a 2 in front of your second choice, and so on through 10 for your tenth choice.

14. I like to read:

_____ Adventure stories	_____ Mysteries
_____ Animal stories	_____ Poetry
_____ Biographies	_____ Romantic stories
_____ Car/Motorcycle books	_____ Science/Nature books
_____ Cartoons/Comics	_____ Science Fiction
_____ Career books	_____ Sports books
_____ Folk Tales/Fables	_____ Supernatural stories
_____ Geography/History books	_____ Stories about Growing Up
_____ Hobby books	_____ Stories about the Past
_____ Humorous stories	_____ War stories

Directions: Complete the following.

15. My favorite authors are:

First \_\_\_\_\_  
 Second \_\_\_\_\_  
 Third \_\_\_\_\_

16. My favorite books are:

First \_\_\_\_\_  
 Second \_\_\_\_\_  
 Third \_\_\_\_\_

17. If it were possible, I would like to have more books on

---

in my school library.

18. I read approximately \_\_\_\_\_ books for pleasure in a month.





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