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Reading Attitudes, Interests, and Habits and their Relation to Giftedness and Gender

by

Tanya D. Jackson 

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education

Department of Educational Psychology

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Tanya Jackson

289 Fairmont Boulevard South
Lethbridge, Alberta
T1K 7L9

Date: August 25, 1999

University of Alberta

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled Reading Attitudes, Interests, and Habits and their Relation to Giftedness and Gender submitted by Tanya D. Jackson in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education.

Dr. Jack Goldberg (Supervisor)

Dr. Carolyn Yewchuk

Dr. Joe Wu

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate reading attitudes, interests, and habits of elementary students. Comparisons were made between gifted and regular students and between female and male students. The data was gathered using the Elementary Reading Attitude Scale and two surveys developed by the researcher.

No significant differences were found between gifted and regular students in terms of reading attitudes. Significant differences between the reading interests of gifted and regular students were found for four genres: jokes, science and invention, science fiction, and sports.

No significant differences were found in reading attitudes between genders. Significant gender differences were found in reading interests for eleven genres.

The only significant finding relating to habits was that attitudes toward recreational reading were more positive in students with a higher frequency of public library visits.

Implications of the findings, their relation to previous research studies and recommendations for future research are discussed.

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Chapter 1
Introduction

This thesis centers on reading, which is the single most important subject in elementary education. A child who is having difficulty with reading will be limited in her or his ability to learn even unrelated subjects, such as mathematics, social studies, or science (Newman & Newman, 1997). The pervasive effect of reading on school performance has led to a heavy emphasis on reading instruction in the elementary classroom (Shapka, 1990).

Teachers "have always believed passionately that learning to read is more than simply being able to 'decode information' for practical purposes" (Crago, 1993, p. 277). Educators share the goal of not only teaching students how to read, but teaching them to be "active, engaged readers" (Koskinen, Palmer, & Codling, 1994, p. 176). Reading instruction cannot exist in a vacuum, lest educators produce "illiterate literates' - those who know how to read, but do not read" (Diaz-Rubin, 1996 , p. 169).

Teachers declared in a recent American national survey that they were most interested in finding out how to motivate students to engage in reading (Koskinen et al., 1994, p. 176). This has led to research exploring children's attitudes toward school and reading. In the past, student attitudes were believed to be unimportant (Haladyna & Thomas, 1979). Now, however, there is evidence that student attitudes can not only motivate students to become readers, but can also have concrete and positive effects on their achievement (Haladyna & Thomas, 1979). It has been shown, for example, that a favourable attitude can actually improve reading comprehension (Cooter & Alexander, 1984).

This widespread concern about promoting positive attitudes toward

reading in students led to a change in literacy instruction in the 1980's. Educators began to feel that capitalizing on student interests may be the most effective way to maximize intrinsic motivation and promote positive reading attitudes and habits (Halsted, 1988; Cushenbery & Howell, 1974). Hence, since the 1980's, there has been a shift in emphasis from basal reading to a whole language instructional approach emphasizing the "authenticity of literacy" (Haynes & Richgels, 1992, p. 208). The objectives of this child-centered approach are the ability of students to read relevant information and trade books, rather than "demonstrating skill mastery in workbook exercises and criterion reference tests" (Haynes & Richgels, p. 208).

Such attention to students' interests has been shown to accelerate their reading development, as well as maximize their motivation to read. When reading selections they consider interesting, students display more involvement, higher comprehension, and consider the selection easier to read than an uninteresting selection of the same difficulty (Diaz-Rubin, 1996).

Unfortunately, research has shown that teachers and parents do not have an accurate understanding of children's interests. One study found significant discrepancies between what children in grades 5 through 7 enjoyed reading and what the teachers believed their students enjoyed (Haynes & Richgels, 1992). Negin (1989) reported that parents correctly identified their children's interests less than half the time.

It is imperative that educators take an active role to improve the attitudes and expand the interests of their students (Halsted, 1988). Research revealing these attitudes and interests can assist educators greatly, since teachers' knowledge of student attitudes and interests can lead to improved reading guidance and instruction (Cooter & Alexander, 1984). Such research could also assist parents "who want their children to become

readers" (Crago, 1993, p. 278) in providing literature at home which is stimulating and motivating.

It is assumed that such research would be most useful if it took into account differences in attitudes and interests that are associated with student characteristics. However, there are few comparative studies available in the literature on this subject. The only directly comparative studies concern themselves with gender (Simpson, 1996) or with students in different countries, as in the study of Fisher and Ayres (1990) which compared English and American students.

There are separate studies investigating reading attitudes in regular students (Haladyna & Thomas, 1979) and in gifted students (Ley & Trentham, 1987). Similarly, independent researchers have also studied reading interests in regular students (Fisher & Ayres, 1990) and in gifted students (Hawkins, 1983). However, there are no studies which directly compare the interests or attitudes of gifted students with regular students.

This study endeavors to fill this gap by investigating differences in reading attitudes and interests between a group of gifted students and a group of regular students. In addition, gender differences, student reading habits, and aspects of parental attitude toward reading are explored as well.

In chapter two, previous research pertaining to reading attitudes, interests, and habits is reviewed. Chapter three outlines the method of the study, while chapter four presents the results. Chapter five contains a summary and discussion of the findings, as well as conclusions.

Definition of Terms

Gifted students are those who have been previously identified as having

exceptional intellectual ability and academic aptitude by an professionally qualified person using a standardized test (Labuda, 1974). The gifted students in this study were individually administered an I.Q. test as a prerequisite for entering their charter school, which serves only gifted students. Students scoring at or above the 98th percentile were eligible for admission.

Regular Students, then, are defined as students who have not been previously identified as being gifted (although, naturally, this does not preclude the possibility that some public school students in this study are gifted). None of the regular participants were receiving special educational services or had been identified as having learning disabilities.

Reading Attitude is defined as "a more or less stable set or disposition" of affect or opinion towards reading (Drever, 1952, p. 23).

Reading Interest is defined as a preference for reading a book about a particular topic or written in a well-recognized, distinguishable style or genre. In this thesis the words "interest" and "preference" will be used interchangeably.

Genre is defined as a type or style of book. This may refer to either a pattern of content, as in mystery or romance novels, or style, as in poetry, or type of work, as in magazines or newspapers (Rosenberg, 1986). In this thesis the terms "genre" and "subject" will be used interchangeably to denote the objects of students' reading interests.

Reading Habits are voluntary behaviors displayed by students in relation to reading outside of the school setting, such as the volume or frequency of recreational reading.

Chapter 2
Review of the Literature

This chapter will review research pertinent to the main questions raised in this study. These questions focus on three aspects of reading: attitudes toward reading, reading interests, and reading habits. Specifically, this study will investigate whether there are differences in reading attitudes or interests associated with the student characteristics of giftedness and gender. Aspects of students' reading habits will be described and correlated with their reading attitudes.

First, the literature on reading attitudes will be explored. There are two main questions in this area; namely, do gifted and regular students differ in their attitudes toward reading, and do female and male students differ in their attitudes toward reading? Since there are no studies which involve both gifted and regular students as participants, studies about the reading attitudes of gifted students will be examined first, followed by literature about the attitudes of regular students. There are comparative studies which look into differences between male and female students. These studies will be explored under the heading of gender differences.

The next questions examine whether gifted and regular students differ in their reading interests, and whether female and male students differ in their reading interests. As before, the literature on gifted students will be explored first, followed by the literature about regular students, followed by the literature pertaining to gender differences.

Reading Attitudes

Gifted Students

It is a common assumption that gifted students hold very positive attitudes toward reading. The earliest research on this subject was conducted by Terman, who found that the ability and desire to read was the most characteristic trait of the gifted (Ley & Trentham, 1987).

Ley and Trentham (1987) reviewed eleven studies and concluded that previous research on the relationship between gifted learners and reading attitude has had contradictory results. I disagree with their assessment. Of the eleven studies they reviewed, only four were actually concerned with giftedness and reading attitude. The other seven did not study giftedness per se, but rather correlated measurements of academic performance, such as "scores on a paragraph meaning subtest" (Ley & Trentham, 1987) with reading attitude.

The difficulty with this is, of course, that reading performance as defined by a mark on a teacher-created test cannot be equated with giftedness as defined by scores from an individually administered, standardized intelligence test. Therefore, studies using teacher-created school tests of unknown reliability and variability cannot possibly be assumed to indicate giftedness on the part of students who score highly on them.

Of the four studies which looked at giftedness and attitude, two of them found that gifted students did not necessarily have positive attitudes. These two studies were more than thirty years old. This is problematic because even present-day surveys often suffer from poor reliability and validity (McKenna & Kear, 1990); therefore the scientific rigor of studies from three decades ago, and their applicability to present times, is questionable. The two studies which found that gifted students did have very positive attitudes are considerably more recent, having been conducted in 1981. The recency of these studies tips the scales in their favor. This means that the research is not as

ambiguous as Ley and Trentham claim; only two studies over three decades old have found that gifted students did not have positive attitudes toward reading.

Many other researchers, who have been working on this subject since the 1970's, have found that gifted students have good attitudes toward reading. To measure attitude, researchers in this area have used questionnaires which list statements, such as "Reading is more enjoyable than watching television" (Anderson, Tollefson, & Gilbert, 1985), paired with Likert type scale responses (Link, 1984).

Link (1984) found that gifted students have "a very positive attitude toward reading" (p. 3). Cooter and Alexander (1984) also state that "gifted students in general have a highly positive attitude toward reading" (p. 100). Labuda (1974) concludes that positive attitudes toward reading are "demonstrated and documented characteristics" of the gifted (p. 4).

This generalization does not apply to every gifted student. There are, of course, individual gifted students who are best described as "resistant readers" (Halsted, 1988, p. 48). However, the research seems to concur that gifted students, in general, have positive attitudes toward reading. Of course, since these studies are not comparative in nature, we cannot conclude whether the attitudes of gifted students are in fact more positive than the attitudes of comparable regular students.

Regular Students

The research on the reading attitudes of regular children is quite limited. Much of the research attempts to determine factors which influence children's attitudes, rather than surveying or describing them (Koskinen et al., 1994).

Haladyna and Thomas (1979) conducted a study where students were asked to indicate their attitudes toward school subjects, including reading, math, physical education, art, and music. The ratings for each subject were on a scale of one to ten, with one indicating an extremely negative attitude toward the subject and ten indicating an extremely positive attitude. Reading and math were each given an average rating of five, placing them in the middle of the scale. Art and physical education were given significantly higher ratings, indicating more positive attitudes toward these subjects, while social studies was rated the lowest, indicating it is held in very low regard by students (Haladyna & Thomas, 1979). These results indicate that the students in this study displayed a neutral attitude toward reading relative to their preferences for other school subjects.

Although the research on gifted and regular students does give some indication as to the disposition of their attitudes toward reading, a direct comparison of gifted and regular students is needed to determine if their attitudes differ significantly.

Gender Differences

The research has unanimously reported that the attitudes of females toward reading are more positive than the attitudes of male students. This is true for both gifted and regular students.

Ley and Trentham (1987) found that the gifted female students in her sample had significantly more positive attitudes than male students. Anderson et al. (1985) found that the gifted female students in their studies had more positive attitudes toward reading. Although the results of this study suggested that both male and female students had generally favourable attitudes toward reading, females indicated stronger agreement than male

students with statements such as "reading is one of my favorite leisure time activities" (Anderson et al., 1995).

Howe (1993) did a study similar to the work of Haladyna and Thomas (1979) where he looked at regular students' preferences for school subjects. He found that girls liked reading significantly more than boys as early as grade one. As well, throughout the elementary school grades, math and science become increasingly popular with male students, while reading becomes less popular. The opposite is true for female students, for whom reading becomes more popular and math and science are increasingly disliked. This means that the disparity of reading attitudes between male and female students becomes larger throughout elementary school.

This study will offer the opportunity to confirm the results of previous research by comparing the attitudes of male and female students.

Reading Interests

Direct comparison between different studies is difficult because researchers have used a wide variety of methods to assess reading interests (Haynes & Richgels, 1992). These methods include book titles, fictitious book titles, and questionnaires (Fisher & Ayres, 1990). The first two methods, book title and fictitious book title surveys, list book titles which are representative of a certain genre. These may be either the titles of actual books, or titles invented by the researcher. Students are then asked to indicate, usually using a Likert type scale, how they would feel about reading those books.

For example, if a researcher wished to discover how students felt about reading science fiction books using the book title method, they might ask "How would you feel about reading a book called Keeper of the Isis Light?". This is the title of an actual science fiction book by Monica Hughes (1980). A

researcher using the fictitious book title method would invent a title, such as "The Great Spaceship Ride", and ask students to indicate their interest.

The questionnaire method generally lists actual genres (such as romance books, mysteries, etc) and asks students to indicate how they would feel about reading such books. However, even when researchers have used similar methods, such as questionnaires asking students to rate reading genres listed by name, difficulties in comparison persist. In past research, the questionnaires used have displayed a variety of categories. For example, some surveys list both fantasy and science fiction; other surveys list only science fiction because the researcher considers fantasy to be a subset of the science fiction genre.

Therefore, ratings vary simply as a function of the choices given in the survey. If one survey finds a particular genre of books to be very popular, and another survey does not, it may be because the second survey simply did not offer this category as an option. Despite this, some comparisons of findings between studies are possible (Haynes & Richgels, 1992) because a common set of popular categories are included in the majority of the studies.

As in the previous section examining attitudes, it is necessary to examine the literature on gifted and regular students separately, as no comparative studies exist. This study will contribute to this area of research by comparing gifted and regular students' interest in a comprehensive survey of genres.

Gifted Students

Sue Hawkins (1983) found the top five reading interests of gifted children, in rank order, to be fiction, mystery, fantasy, adventure, humour, and magazines. Margaret McIntosh (1983) also found fantasy to be a popular

genre with gifted students. Genres that students in Hawkins' study rated as uninteresting included history, religion, and patriotism.

Stange and Carter (1995) used a modification of Hawkins' inventory to survey gifted students. They found mystery, humour, fiction, and magazines to be high interest genres, as did Hawkins. Low interest genres included reference, health, westerns, religion, and geography.

Barbara Link (1984) found that students rated the genres of adventure, science fiction, mysteries, and comedy/jokes the highest. With the exception of science fiction, these genres were found to be popular in the research of Hawkins as well. Low interest genres included religion, social studies, world problems, and poetry.

The research seems to support the notion that "children don't respond well to books that present factual information as it is presented in textbooks" (Dysart, 1984, p. 21). This would seem to explain why factual genres such as reference, history, or religion rate much lower when compared with creatively written stories.

Although there are differences between studies, the high level of popularity of a handful of genres is apparent. Adventure, mysteries, humour, magazines, and fantasy or science fiction books are all consistently popular genres.

Regular Students

The literature on the reading preferences of regular students indicates more similarities than differences with gifted students. Simpson (1996) states that "humour, adventure, and fantasy are popular with most children" (p. 268).

The genres popular with gifted students also rate highly in Diaz-

Rubin's research on regular students (1996). The students in his study rated adventure, mysteries, humour, and fantasy in the top 10 genres.

The research of Wolfson, Manning, and Manning (1984) excluded the genres of humour and mystery but did find adventure and fantasy to be highly popular genres, and social studies the least popular. Fisher and Ayres (1990) studied the preferences of students in both England and America. The results for both countries were quite similar, with jokes, mystery, and adventure appearing high on both lists, and history at the bottom.

Throughout the literature on both gifted and regular students, adventure books, mysteries, humour and jokes, fantasy, and magazines have rated highly. Conversely, factual and social studies genres like history have consistently been given low ratings. This indicates that, although differences may still exist, there are certain types of books which have been found to be consistently popular among different populations of students.

This study will extend our knowledge on this topic by surveying both gifted and regular students with a common set of reading interests. This will allow for a direct comparison of the preferences of each group.

Gender Differences

The belief that girls and boys have different reading interests is a widespread one (Simpson, 1996) and is supported by many surveys of both gifted and regular students.

Hawkins (1983) found several differences between the reading interests of female and male gifted students. Female students preferred books about animals, fairy tales, and poetry significantly more than male students. Fisher (1988) found that females had a greater preference for six genres, including animals, fairy tales, and poetry. Females also indicated a

greater interest in poetry in Link's research (1984).

There are also genres which male students report having a greater interest in. A survey of gifted students found that reference and nonfiction materials were more popular with males than with females (Stange and Carter, 1995). Hawkins (1983) found that male students were more interested in science, science fiction, and "how-to" books than their female peers.

Link's (1984) research revealed that male students had more interest in comedy, science fiction, and sports than female students. Fisher (1988) found a male preference for history, science, and sports books. Wolfson et al. (1984) also found that male students expressed greater interest in books about machines and applied science.

These findings are remarkably stable internationally across grade level. Even very early research, conducted in 1937, found science books to be rated highly by boys, and fairy tales and poetry rated highly by girls (Lazar, 1972).

To some extent, these findings support gender stereotypes of reading interests, with males choosing more nonfiction genres and females choosing more fiction.

One interesting theory suggests that this may be because different kinds of books display "developmental aspects of growth" which correspond to the developmental stage of the reader (Lehman, 1991). Simpson (1996) claims that males and females are explicitly taught in different ways, with females being taught mostly narrative and males being taught explanation, argument, and exposition. Another explanation forwarded by Fehrenbach (1991) suggests that readers may differ in their cognitive reading processing strategies.

The most moderate view, however, is possibly to conclude that these differences may reflect the differences between male and female students as individuals, as well as the ways in which they are educated.

Reading Habits

The major finding in this area is that gifted students read more books, about more subjects, than their age peers do (Cushenbery & Howell, 1974). Several researchers have noted gifted students' need for "a profusion of reading materials" (Halsted, 1988) and their enjoyment of leisure reading (Schlicter, 1989).

Factors such as book ownership and public library access have been described in previous literature. However, these descriptions are limited to ways in which these factors might influence students' reading habits (Koskinen et al., 1994). For example, Koskinen et al. interviewed students about their reading habits and suggested that owning a personal collection of books might contribute to students' reading motivation. However, it is impossible to draw conclusions as to whether students with large personal libraries have better reading attitudes or habits than students who own few books, as their study was not comparative in nature.

Summary

The existing research can be summarized as follows. Gifted students have been found to have positive attitudes towards reading. Regular students have indicated that they rank reading in the middle of all their school subjects. No comparison of the attitudes of gifted and regular students has been previously conducted. Research comparing the attitudes of female and male students has found that female students have more positive attitudes

toward reading than males.

Research about reading interests indicates that magazines, humour, mystery, adventure, and fantasy are popular with both gifted and regular students. Again, no directly comparative studies exist, but these genres have been shown to be popular throughout a majority of the research. Reference books and books about religion and history have been unpopular in studies of gifted children as well as studies of regular children.

This study will expand on previous research by directly comparing the reading attitudes and reading interests of gifted and average students. As they have only been studied separately until this time, this study will allow for an exploration of the differences, if any, between these two groups.

In addition, the reading attitudes and interests of female and male students will be compared. Female and male students have been directly compared in previous research, so the results of this study will be compared to these previous findings. The methods used to investigate these questions are explained in the following chapter.

Chapter 3
Method

The following method was used to investigate differences in reading attitudes, interests, and habits between gifted and regular students.

Schools

Two urban schools in the same geographic area participated in the study. One school was a charter school which accepts only students who have previously been identified as intellectually gifted, based on the results of individual standardized testing. The second school was a public school with students of similar (middle-class) socioeconomic status.

Participants

Students in grades three through six were chosen to participate because by third grade, difficulties with reading comprehension have generally decreased significantly (Dysart, 1984). This means that students' attitudes and/or interests are less likely to be subject to their reading fluency.

All three classes of students in grades three through six in the charter school participated. These were split-grade classrooms and included one class of grade 3/4 students, one class of grade 4/5 students, and one class of grade 5/6 students. One class in each grade from three to six was selected by the principal in the public school, for a total of seven participating classrooms.

Consent was received to survey a total of 74 students. Three were excluded because they were absent from school on the day the survey was conducted. 38 of the participants were gifted students from the charter school, while the remaining 33 students were from the public school and had not been

previously identified as being gifted.

The response rate for the charter school was considerably higher than the response rate for the public school. Over eighty percent of the total population of the charter school were consenting participants. In comparison, only twenty-seven percent of public school students received consent to participate. This could indicate a selection problem, as it is possible that parents who chose to consent were more positive toward reading than non-consenting parents.

Table 1

Grade and Gender Distribution of Students in Classrooms Tested

Charter School							Public School			
Class	Grade	Gender		Total	Grade Total	Class Total	Grade	Gender		Total
		F	M					F	M	
3/4	3	6	3	9	9	15	3	3	4	7
	4	2	4	6	11		4	9	4	13
4/5	4	4	1	5		13	5	3	3	6
	5	3	5	8	13		6	5	2	7
5/6	5	1	4	5		10				
	6	2	3	5	5					
Total		18	20	38				20	13	33

Table 1 shows grade and gender distribution by class for each school. Student distribution was approximately equal in terms of gender and grade with two exceptions. There were more male participants in the charter school (n = 20) than in the public school (n = 13). The charter school also had twice as many grade 5 students participating (n = 13) as in the public school (n = 6).

Instruments

Attitude towards reading was measured using the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey. The remaining two instruments were constructed and incorporated adaptations of previous research.

Elementary Reading Attitude Survey

The Elementary Reading Attitude Survey or ERAS (see Appendix A) was developed by McKenna and Kear (1996). It is a norm-referenced instrument used to assess attitudes of elementary students towards academic and recreational reading.

There are two subscales in the test, which measure (a) attitude toward recreational reading and (b) attitude toward academic reading. There are ten items in each subscale, for a total of 20 items. Each item is followed by four sketches of the cartoon character Garfield, in poses ranging from very happy to very upset.

An example of an item from the recreational reading subscale is "How do you feel about reading during summer vacation?" (Item #7), (McKenna & Kear, 1990, p. 631). An example of an item from the academic reading subscale is "How do you feel when it's time for reading class?" (Item #16), (McKenna & Kear, p. 633). Each item begins with identical wording ("How do you feel. . .") to "establish a consistent, appropriate expectation on the part of the students" (McKenna & Kear, p. 627).

This instrument was chosen for several reasons. First, the survey is appealing to children due to its use of the Garfield drawings to portray the Likert-style responses. It is also short, requiring only 10 minutes to administer, and is suitable for group administration, minimizing demands on

participants and school personnel.

Second, there is a "large-scale normative frame of reference" (McKenna & Kear, 1990, p. 627). The test was normed on more than 18,000 students from 38 states, with gender and ethnic stratification.

Third, the survey is a reliable and valid instrument. Internal reliability coefficients for the grade levels surveyed in this study range between .80 and .87 for the subscales, and .88 and .89 for the total scale (McKenna & Kear, 1990). Construct validity was gathered by correlating the results to several outside criteria, such as possession of a public library card, television viewing, and reading ability (McKenna & Kear, 1990).

Each item is given a score from one to four points, depending on the response chosen. If the very upset Garfield is circled, the score is counted as one point. The mildly upset Garfield is counted as two points, the mildly happy Garfield as three points, and the very happy Garfield as four points. Three scores for each student can be obtained, including a recreational reading total (the total score for the first 10 items), an academic reading total (the total score for the second 10 items), and a composite total (the total score for all items). All three raw scores (recreational, academic, and composite) can then be directly converted to percentile ranks using the table provided by McKenna and Kear (1990).

Student Reading Interests Survey

A two-part reading interest survey (see Appendix B) was constructed by the author. In the first part, students are asked how they would feel about reading books about 26 subjects or genres. Beside the list of subjects are presented four response choices, ranging from "Dislike very much" to "Like a lot." Each item is given one point for a response of "Dislike very much," two

points for "Dislike a little," three points for "Like a little," and four points for "Like a lot."

The genres and subjects used in the first part of the survey were an expansion of surveys and categories listed in previous research (Arbuthnot, Clark, & Hadlow, 1979; California State Department of Education, 1981; Diaz-Rubin, 1996 ; Haynes & Richgels, 1992; Landsberg, 1986; Rosenberg, 1986; Wolfson et al., 1984).

A consistent problem with previous instruments of this type has been low reliability. Cronbach's alpha for this scale based on this sample was .85, indicating that this scale is a reliable measure. Previous surveys of this type have had internal consistency coefficients ranging from .65 to .90 (Fisher, 1988).

The second half of the survey explores students' reading preferences and habits in greater detail. Two open-ended questions ask students to list their favorite books and authors. There are also questions asking how students find out about books they want to read, whether they have a public library card, and how many books they have read for fun in the past month. These questions were adapted from the "Pupil Background Record" developed by May Lazar (1972).

Parent Survey

A brief survey (see Appendix C) was sent out to the parents of the participants as well as a letter explaining the nature and purpose of the research (see Appendix D) and a consent form (see Appendix E). The survey included three questions. The questions asked about the parent's belief of the importance of reading for fun, frequency of the child's visits to the public library, and the number of books in the home suitable for the child's reading

level. There was also space provided where parents were invited to comment about their child's reading interests and habits.

Procedure

Testing was conducted by the researcher. Students at the charter school were surveyed in May of 1999. Each classroom was surveyed in a separate session. Students at the public school were surveyed in June of 1999. Students from the third, fifth, and sixth grades were combined into one group administration. The fourth grade classroom was surveyed separately.

The teachers assisted the researcher in identifying students whose parents had not returned the parental consent form in each classroom. In accordance with ethical guidelines, these students were removed from the classroom or assigned other activities by the teachers.

Administration

The teachers introduced the researcher in each classroom. The children were told that they were going to be given two questionnaires to find out what they thought about reading. Each class was told that they did not have to do the surveys, and if they chose not to they were free to excuse themselves or to sit quietly until the administration was complete. All of the students participated willingly.

Testing sessions averaged twenty minutes per group. Students were told that their teachers would not see their answers so they should be as honest as possible. The ERAS was administered first, following exact testing procedures as outlined in the "Directions for use" written by McKenna and Kear (1990).

The Student Reading Interests survey was administered next. The administration was conducted in accordance with a protocol developed by the researcher prior to testing. This protocol is explained in detail in Appendix F.

Research Questions

Differences between Gifted and Regular Students

1. Is there a difference between gifted and regular students in regard to their attitudes toward reading?
2. Is there a difference between gifted and regular students in regard to their recreational reading interests?
3. Is there a difference between gifted and regular students in the number of books read per month?
4. Is there a difference between gifted and regular students in the number of books at home which are suitable for the child's reading level?

Gender Differences

5. Is there a difference between female and male students in regard to their attitudes toward reading?
6. Is there a difference between male and female students in regard to their recreational reading interests?

Reading Interests and Habits

7. What are the most popular reading interests of students?
8. What are the most popular books reported by students?
9. Who are the most popular authors reported by students?
10. Is there a relationship between students' attitudes toward reading and

the number of books they reported reading in the past month?

11. Is there a relationship between students' attitude toward recreational reading and the number of books at their home which are suitable for their reading level ?

12. Is there a difference in reading attitude in students who do or do not have access to a public library card?

13. Do students with different frequencies of public library visits differ in their attitudes toward recreational reading?

14. Is there a relationship between a parent's opinion of the importance of recreational reading and their child's attitude towards recreational reading?

15. How do children report finding out about books they read recreationally?

Chapter 4
Results

Data Analysis

All data were entered into SPSS 6.1 in order to test for statistical significance. An alpha level of .05 was used for all statistical tests. Each research question will be examined in sequence. The numbers used for analysis vary because not all questions were answered by all students.

Differences between Gifted and Regular Students

1. Is there a difference between gifted and regular students in regard to their attitudes toward reading?

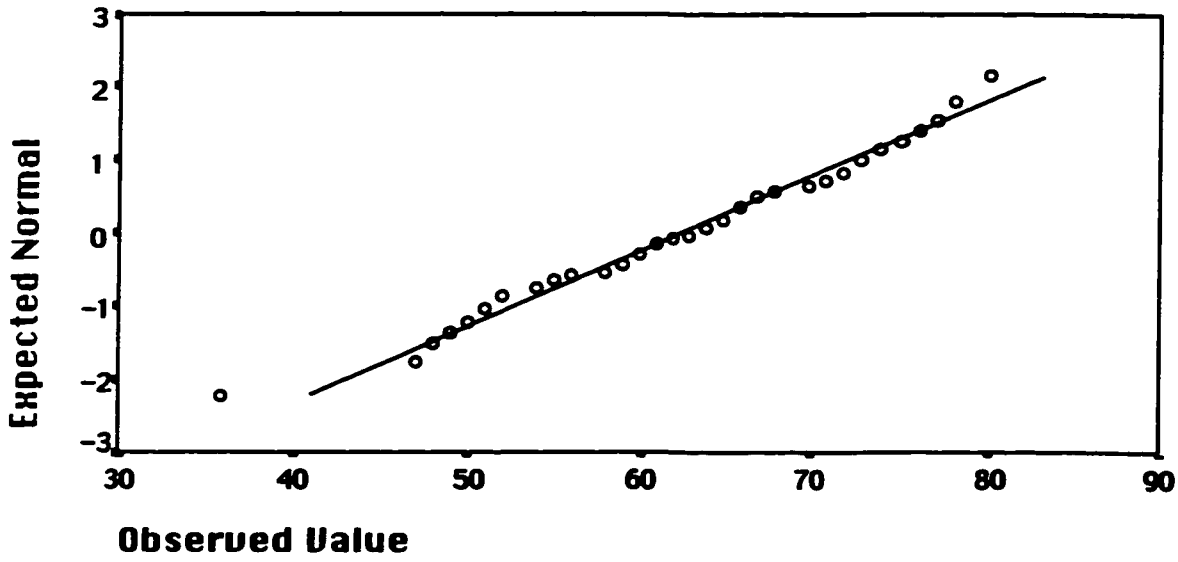

Figure 1. Q-Q normal probability plot for ERAS composite total scores.

Overall Attitudes

A Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was done to determine whether the total composite scores for the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey were normally distributed. Figure 1 shows a plot of the distribution of scores.

The results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test ($K\text{-}S$ (69) = .835, $p > .200$) indicate that the composite total ERAS scores are normally distributed. Descriptive statistics of the ERAS composite total scores are reported in Table 2.

Table 2.

Mean, Standard Deviation, and Standard Error of the Mean of ERAS Composite Total Scores for Gifted and Regular Students.

Students	Number of Cases	Mean	SD	SE of Mean
Gifted	37	63.03	10.04	1.65
Regular	32	60.91	9.15	1.62

Levene's test for equality of variances indicated that the variances of scores for each group were equal ($F = 1.102$, $p = .298$). An independent-samples t-test was performed to determine whether a significant difference (mean difference = 2.12) exists between the overall attitudes of gifted students and the attitudes of regular students.

The t-test for equal variance indicated that the difference in overall reading attitude between students from the charter school for the gifted and regular students from the public school was not significant (t (67) = .91, p = .365).

Recreational Reading Attitudes

An independent-samples t-test was performed to determine whether gifted and regular students differ significantly in regard to their attitudes toward recreational reading. This was measured with the recreational reading subtest of the ERAS. The descriptive statistics of the recreational reading subtest scores are presented in Table 3.

Table 3.

Mean, Standard Deviation, and Standard Error of the Mean of ERAS Recreational Reading Scores for Gifted and Regular Students.

Students	Number of Cases	Mean	SD	SE of Mean
Gifted	37	33.24	4.91	.81
Regular	32	32.16	4.89	.86

Levene's test for equality of variances indicated that the variances of scores for each group were equal ($F = .071$, $p = .790$). The mean difference between the groups of students in their scores on the recreational reading subscale of the ERAS was 1.09. The t-test for equal variance ($t(67) = .92$, $p = .361$) indicated that this difference was not significant.

Academic Reading Attitudes

An independent-samples t-test was performed to determine whether gifted and regular students differ in regard to their attitudes toward academic reading. Academic reading attitudes were measured with the academic reading subtest of the ERAS scale. The descriptive statistics of the academic reading total scores are presented in Table 4.

Levene's test for equality of variances indicated that the variances were

equal (F = 2.276, p = .136). The t-test for equal variance (t (68) = .82, p = .415) indicated that there was no significant difference (mean difference = 1.09) between the groups of students in their academic reading scores.

Table 4.

Mean, Standard Deviation, and Standard Error of the Mean of ERAS Academic Reading Scores for Gifted and Regular Students.

Students	Number of Cases	Mean	SD	SE of Mean
Gifted	37	29.84	5.98	.97
Regular	32	28.75	4.99	.88

Lastly, a paired-samples t test was performed to determine whether there was a significant difference between students' attitudes toward recreational reading and students' attitudes toward academic reading. Descriptive statistics about the recreational and academic total scores are presented in Table 5.

Table 5.

Mean, Standard Deviation, and Standard Error of the Mean of ERAS Recreational and Academic Reading Scores.

Scale	N	r	2-tailed sig.	Mean	SD	SE
Recreational	69	.69	.000	32.74	5.57	.67
Academic				29.30	4.89	.59

The t value obtained (t (68) = –6.87, p = >.000) indicates that the recreational reading scores are significantly higher than the academic reading

scores (mean difference = 3.43).

Reading Interests

2. Is there a difference between gifted and regular students in regard to their recreational reading interests?

This question was investigated using the Student Reading Interests Survey. This survey provided a list of 26 reading subjects or genres. Students rated their interest in reading books about these subjects on a scale of one (dislike very much) to four (like very much). Mean ratings for each genre were computed and compared between groups.

Independent-samples t-tests were performed to determine whether differences in reading interests existed between gifted and regular students. Significant differences were found between the groups in respect to four reading subjects: jokes, science and invention, science fiction, and sports. The descriptive data of the average ratings for each genre are presented in Table 6.

"Jokes" was the first genre appearing on the survey for which a significant difference between the groups was found. Levene's test for equality of variances indicated that the variance of the scores for each group were unequal ($F = 10.001$, $p = .002$). The t test for unequal variances found that the regular students preferred to read joke books significantly more than gifted students ($t(69) = -2.40$, $p = .019$). The mean difference was .35 points.

The next genre for which mean ratings differed significantly between groups was science and invention. Levene's test indicated that the variances of scores for each group were equal ($F = .140$, $p = .709$). The results of the t test were significant ($t(69) = 2.65$, $p = .01$). Gifted students reported preferring science and invention books significantly more than regular students (mean

difference = .67).

Significant differences were also found for the science fiction genre. Levene's test indicated that the variances were unequal (F = 2.976, p = .089). The results of the t test for unequal variances were t (61.93) =3.09, p = .003. Gifted students reported preferring science fiction books significantly more than regular students (mean difference = .71).

Sports was the last genre where significant differences were found. Levene's test indicated that the variances were equal (F = 2.785, p = .10). Gifted students reported preferring sports books significantly less than regular students (t (69) = –2.74, p = .008). The mean difference was .68 points.

Table 6.

Mean, Standard Deviation, and Standard Error of the Mean of Interest Ratings for Reading Genres by Gifted and Regular Students.

Genre	Gifted Mean Rating	Regular Mean Rating	*t*	*p*
Adventure	3.71	3.79	–.69	.493
Animals and Nature	3.24	2.88	1.66	.101
Biography	2.57	2.42	.56	.576
Computers	2.43	2.24	.68	.500
Fantasy	3.16	3.06	.45	.655
Food and Cooking	2.08	2.45	-1.41	.162
Health and Medicine	1.86	1.85	.06	.949
History	2.57	2.30	1.01	.263
Hobbies and Crafts	2.92	3.00	–.33	.741
Jokes	3.32	3.67	-2.40	.019
Law and Crime	2.78	2.67	.44	.661
Magazines	3.16	3.45	-1.42	.160
Music	2.25	2.48	–.87	.390
Mystery	3.45	3.59	–.73	.466
Myths and Legends	3.32	3.27	.19	.850
Newspapers	2.45	2.39	.21	.833
Novels	3.57	3.38	1.0	.321
Poetry and Plays	2.56	2.67	–.54	.588
Religion	2.26	2.00	1.04	.300
Romance	2.32	1.84	1.58	.119
Science and Invention	3.21	2.55	2.65	.010
Science Fiction	3.50	2.79	3.13	.003
Sports	2.71	3.39	-2.74	.008
Thriller	3.50	3.64	–.78	.437
Travel	2.45	2.33	.45	.651
Westerns	2.50	2.33	.66	.514

Reading Habits

3. Is there a difference between gifted and regular students in the number of books read per month?

Table 7 displays descriptive statistics for the average number of books gifted and regular students reported reading per month.

Table 7.

Mean, Standard Error of the Mean, Standard Deviation, and Range of Books Read Per Month for Gifted and Regular Students.

Students	Number of Cases	Mean	SD	SE of Mean	Range
Gifted	38	24.29	24.7	4.01	0 - 101
Regular	33	19.82	30.17	5.25	1 - 150

Levene's test for equality of variances indicated that the variances were equal ($F = .126$, $p = .723$). The t-test results indicated that this difference (mean difference = 4.47) was not significant (t (69) = .69, $p = .495$). Gifted and regular students, therefore, do not differ significantly in the number of books they report reading for leisure in an average month.

4. Is there a difference between gifted and regular students in the number of books at home which are suitable for the child's reading level?

Parents were asked to indicate how many books they had at home which were suitable for the reading level of the child participating in the survey. Five response options were provided, ranging from "less than 10" to "more than 200". Table 21 displays the number of parents of gifted and regular students choosing each response option. An independent means t-test

for equal variances (F = .454, p = .503) showed insignificant results (t (68) = .1.40, p = .166). There is no statistically significant difference in the number of books at home between parents of gifted children and parents of regular children.

However, it is interesting to note that twelve parents of gifted students indicated there was a home library of more than two hundred books suitable for their child's reading level, compared to only five parents of public school students.

Table 8.

Number of Books in the Homes of Gifted and Regular Students.

Number of Books	Gifted Students	Regular Students
< 10	0	1
10 - 50	7	6
50 - 100	8	11
100 - 200	10	10
> 200	12	5

Gender Differences

Attitudes

5. Is there a difference between female and male students in regard to their attitudes toward reading?

Table 9 displays descriptive statistics for the composite total scores of female and male students.

Table 9.

Mean, Standard Deviation, and Standard Error of the Mean of ERAS Composite Total Scores for Female and Male Students.

Gender	Number of Cases	Mean	SD	SE of Mean
Female	38	63.39	9.36	1.52
Male	31	60.39	9.83	1.77

Levene's test for equality of variances indicated that the variances were equal ($F = .971$, $p = .328$). The t-test results indicated that this difference (mean difference = 3.0) was not significant ($t(67) = 1.30$, $p = .199$). Therefore this group of students did not differ significantly in terms of their overall reading attitude as a function of gender.

Interests

6. Is there a difference between male and female students in regard to their recreational reading interests?

Independent-samples t tests were performed to determine whether differences in reading interests existed between female and male students. Significant differences were found between the groups in respect to eleven reading genres. Average ratings for each genre by female and male students appear in Table 10.

Eight genres were preferred significantly more by females. The first genre appearing on the survey which female students preferred more was animals and nature (mean difference = .47). Female students also preferred fantasy more than male students (mean difference = .62).

The next genre female students reported preferring more than males is food and cooking, with a mean difference of .82. Music was another genre

rated significantly higher by females (mean difference = .68).

Table 10.

Mean Interest Ratings for Reading Subjects by Female and Male Students, *t*, and *p*.

Genre	Female Mean	Male Mean	*t*	*p*
Adventure	3.79	3.7	.83	.412
Animals and Nature	3.29	2.82	2.17	.034
Biography	2.71	2.25	1.84	.07
Computers	1.92	2.84	-3.57	.001
Fantasy	3.41	2.79	2.82	.007
Food and Cooking	2.63	1.81	3.28	.002
Health and Medicine	1.87	1.84	.10	.923
History	2.48	2.44	.04	.97
Hobbies and Crafts	3.11	2.78	1.34	.185
Jokes	3.39	3.58	-1.17	.246
Law and Crime	2.71	2.75	–.15	.883
Magazines	3.32	3.27	.20	.840
Music	2.68	2.00	2.59	.012
Mystery	3.68	3.33	1.71	.092
Myths and Legends	3.55	3.00	2.43	.019
Newspapers	2.45	2.39	.21	.833
Novels	3.72	3.21	2.72	.009
Poetry and Plays	3.05	2.13	3.96	.000
Religion	2.37	1.88	1.98	.051
Romance	2.68	1.45	4.48	.000
Science and Invention	2.58	3.27	-2.78	.007
Science Fiction	2.87	3.51	-2.81	.006
Sports	2.84	3.24	-1.55	.125
Thriller	3.55	3.58	–.13	.895
Travel	2.55	2.21	1.37	.174
Westerns	2.42	2.42	–.01	.990

Myths and legends were also preferred more by the female students, with a mean difference of .55 points. Female students rated novels, another genre with significant differences, an average of .51 points higher than male students. Poetry was also rated higher by females by almost a full point (mean difference = .93). Finally, females reported having a greater preference for romance books (mean difference = 1.22).

Three genres were preferred significantly more by males. Males rated science and invention books an average of .69 points higher than females. Ratings for the genre of science fiction displayed a mean .65 points larger for male students. The last genre which male students preferred over females (mean difference = .92) was computers.

Table 11 displays the rank orders of genres by the mean ratings for females and males, respectively. These make apparent the relative popularity of subjects that had significant genre differences, such as computers and romance.

Table 11.

Rank Orders of Reading Subjects by Interest Rating Means of Females and Males.

Genre	Female Rank Order	Male Rank Order	Genre	Female Rank Order	Male Rank Order
Adventure	1	1	Mystery	3	5
Animals and Nature	9	12	Myths and Legends	4	10
Biography	14	19	Newspapers	22	18
Computers	25	11	Novels	2	9
Fantasy	6	13	Poetry and Plays	11	21
Food and Cooking	18	25	Religion	24	23
Health and Medicine	26	24	Romance	17	26
History	21	16	Science and Invention	19	6
Hobbies and Crafts	10	14	Science Fiction	12	4
Jokes	7	3	Sports	13	8
Law and Crime	15	15	Thriller	5	2
Magazines	8	7	Travel	20	20
Music	16	22	Westerns	23	17

Reading Interests and Habits

Popular Reading Interests

7. What are the most popular reading interests of students?

Table 12 shows the genres rank-ordered by the mean rating of each. The top five genres, which include adventure, thriller, mystery, jokes, and novels, correspond to previous research where these genre were found to have a high level of popularity. Various combinations of these genres have been found to be popular in previous research by Diaz-Rubin (1996), Hawkins (1983), Link (1984), and Stange and Carter (1995).

Table 12.

Reading Subjects Rank-Ordered by Interest Rating Means of All Students.

Rank	Subject	Mean Rating	Rank	Subject	Mean Rating
1	Adventure	3.75	14	Law and Crime	2.76
2	Thriller	3.56	15	Poetry and Plays	2.62
3	Mystery	3.51	16	Biography	2.50
4	Jokes	3.48	17	History	2.44
5	Novels	3.48	18	Newspapers	2.42
6	Myths and Legends	3.30	19	Westerns	2.42
7	Magazines	3.30	20	Travel	2.39
8	Science Fiction	3.17	21	Music	2.36
9	Fantasy	3.11	22	Computers	2.34
10	Animals and Nature	3.07	23	Food and Cooking	2.26
11	Sports	3.03	24	Religion	2.14
12	Hobbies and Crafts	2.96	25	Romance	2.10
13	Science and Invention	2.90	26	Health and Medicine	1.86

8. What are the most popular books reported by students?

Students were asked to write the titles of their favorite books in the interest survey. These titles were tallied and appear in Appendix G. In cases where students were clearly referring to different editions or versions of the same book (e.g. "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer" and "Tom Sawyer"), these responses were combined.

The most popular books were Archie comics and Garfield comics, with 11 mentions each. Goosebumps books were also popular, with 10 students listing this series as favourites. The Babysitters' Club series and the Sweet Valley High series (including Sweet Valley High, Sweet Valley Kids, Sweet Valley Twins, and Sweet Valley University) tied for third place with 9 responses each. Several students also mentioned Star Wars books (7 responses) and the Nancy Drew series (5 responses).

9. Who are the most popular authors reported by students?

Students' responses to this question were tallied in the same fashion as the previous question and appear in Appendix H. Robert Munsch was the most popular author, with eleven responses. R. L. Stine, the author of the Goosebumps series, garnered seven responses. Other popular authors included Ann M. Martin (5 responses), Jim Davis (4 responses), and Francine Pascal (4 responses). K.A. Applegate, Martin Godfrey, Carolyn Keene, and Gordon Korman were all listed by three students.

Reading Habits

10. Is there a relationship between students' attitudes toward reading and the number of books they reported reading in the past month?

The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated to measure the relationship between the number of books students reported reading in the past month and their attitude toward reading as measured by the ERAS composite total score. The results (r (69) = .165, p = .175) indicated that there was no significant relationship between the number of books read in the past month and students' overall attitude toward reading.

11. Is there a relationship between students' attitude toward recreational reading and the number of books at their home which are suitable for their reading level?

The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated to measure the relationship between a student's attitude toward recreational reading as measured by the ERAS recreational total score, and the number of books their parents reported having in the home which were suitable for the child's reading level. The results (r (68) = .096, p = .437) indicated that there was no significant relationship between the number of books read in the past month and students' attitude towards recreational reading.

12. Is there a difference in reading attitude in students who do or do not have access to a public library card?

The descriptive statistics of the reading attitude total scores for students with and without access to a public library card are presented in Table 13. An independent-samples t test was performed to determine whether students who do or do not have access to a public library card differ in regard to their attitudes toward reading.

Levene's test for equality of variances indicated that the variances were equal (F = .025, p = .874). The t-test for equal variance (t (66) = –.19, p = .846)

indicated that there was no significant difference (mean difference = .48) between the groups of students on the composite reading score of the ERAS. There appears to be no relationship between a student's having access to a public library card and his or her overall attitude toward reading.

Table 13.

Mean, Standard Deviation, and Standard Error of the Mean of ERAS Reading Total Attitude Scores for Students With or Without Access to a Public Library Card.

Library card	Number of Cases	Mean	SD	SE of Mean
Yes	45	61.73	9.59	1.43
No	23	62.21	9.88	2.06

13. Do students with different frequencies of public library visits differ in their attitudes toward recreational reading?

This question addresses the relationship between an item on the parent survey to the student attitude surveys. The second question on the parent survey asked "How often do your children visit the public library?". Three response options were given: Often (1), Sometimes (2), and Rarely (3). It was necessary to combine the Sometimes and Rarely groups to obtain sufficient numbers in each group for statistical analysis. These data were then correlated with students' recreational total scores. Descriptive statistics for these scores are displayed in Table 14.

Table 14.

Mean, Standard Deviation, and Standard Error of the Mean of ERAS Recreational Reading Scores for Students with Different Frequencies of Public Library Visits.

Library visits	Number of Cases	Mean	SD	SE of Mean
Often	43	33.79	4.37	.67
Sometimes or Rarely	26	31.00	5.29	1.04

Levene's test for equality of variances indicated that the variances were equal ($F = 2.740$, $p = .103$). The t-test for equal variance (t (67) = 2.37, p = .021) indicated that there was a significant difference (mean difference = 2.79) between the groups of students on the composite reading score of the ERAS. Students whose parents reported that their children visited the public library "often" scored significantly higher on the recreational reading scale of the ERAS than students whose parents reported that they visited the public library "sometimes" or "rarely".

14. Is there a relationship between parents' opinions of the importance of recreational reading and their child's attitude towards recreational reading?

The first question on the parent survey asked "Do you think reading for fun is very important (1), slightly important (2), or not important (3). All parents (n = 70) who responded to this question indicated that they believed reading for fun to be very important. Therefore no meaningful correlation can be drawn with this variable.

15. How do children report finding out about books they read recreationally?

The student interest survey asked "How do you find out about books you want to read?" Students were asked to indicate whether or not they used each method listed to select books to read recreationally.

These options included choosing books on the recommendations of teachers, friends, parents, or librarians, as well as selecting books based on the cover or author. Table 15 displays the number of students indicating they chose books with each method.

The most popular method of book selection was for students to choose books by authors they were already familiar with. 65% of students also indicated they were likely to choose books recommended by friends. A smaller percentage (54%) indicated that they chose books based on the cover. Several students spontaneously added comments in the margin for this option which explained that the synopsis or blurb on the back cover of a book was more influential than the cover art when they were choosing a book.

Table 15.

Number of Students Endorsing Methods of Book Selection.

Reason for Selection	N
Student is familiar with author	59
Recommended by friend	46
Selected on basis of book cover	39
Recommended by parent	36
Recommended by librarian	28
Recommended by teacher	26
Other reasons	4

Chapter 5
Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to determine if there are differences in reading attitudes, interests, and habits between gifted and regular students. Secondary goals included exploring gender differences in reading attitudes and interests, as well as exploring reading interests and habits of students as a whole. The results are summarized and discussed in this chapter.

Reading attitudes were measured using the Elementary Reading Attitude Scale, which provides scores of overall attitude as well as recreational and academic subtest scores. Gifted students displayed higher mean attitude scores for their overall attitude as well as their recreational and academic attitudes, but these differences were not statistically significant (see Tables 2, 3, and 4).

This is somewhat surprising. Since gifted students are described as fluent and voracious readers in the literature (Greenlaw & McIntosh, 1986), it would seem that their academic reading attitudes, at least, could be expected to be more positive than the attitudes of their regular peers. Perhaps larger sample sizes would have afforded the statistical power needed to attain significant results.

Gifted and regular students differed significantly in regards to interest in four reading genres. Gifted students reported liking science fiction and science and invention books more than regular students, while regular students preferred joke books and sports books significantly more than gifted students. Causal factors contributing to these differences cannot be determined from this data, but would provide fertile ground for future

research.

There was no significant difference between gifted and regular students in the number of books read in the past month (see Table 7) or in the number of books owned at home (see Table 8).

No significant difference was found between the attitudes of male and female students (see Table 9). This is an unexpected finding, as previous research in this area had indicated that females have more positive attitudes toward reading than males (Howe, 1993). The females in this study did display higher attitude scores ($\underline{M}$ = 63.39) than male students ($\underline{M}$ = 60.39). The lack of significance could be due to the fact that the sample size in this study is considerably smaller than the samples of studies reviewed in Chapter 2.

However, it is interesting to note that the norms for the instrument used, the Elementary Reading Attitude Scale, are not differentiated by sex, but only by grade. This would suggest that differences between male and female students were not seen to be significant during the development of this instrument, although this is not explicitly stated (McKenna & Kear, 1990).

There were significant differences between the reading preferences of female and male students in eleven reading genres. Eight genres were preferred more by females, while the remaining three were preferred more by male students. Genres preferred significantly more by girls included animals and nature, fantasy, food and cooking, music, myths and legends, novels, poetry, and romance. These preferences are consistent with the work of Hawkins (1983) and Fisher (1988). Males in this study showed a greater preference for science fiction books and books about science and invention and computers. This is also consistent with the work of Hawkins (1983), Fisher (1988), and Wolfson et al. (1984). As before, although the relationship is clear,

the causes of this are as yet unexplained.

The next research questions explored the favorite genres, books and authors of students. Comparisons between gifted and regular students and female and male students were not performed for these questions, as the purpose was to determine the most popular books and authors of all students. The Student Reading Interest Survey included two open-ended questions which asked students to list the titles of their favorite books and the names of their favorite authors.

The most popular genres were adventure, thriller, mystery, jokes, and novels. These findings are consistent with previous research (Stange & Carter, 1995) where these genres have shown consistent popularity. Archie and Garfield comics were the most popular books reported by students. The Goosebumps series was the third most popular book title listed. The author of this series, R.L. Stine, was listed as the second most popular author. These results were consistent with the most recent relevant research, which was conducted by Diaz-Rubin in 1996. He stated that "pre-adolescents are voraciously reading the R.L. Stine series of Goosebump books". Series books, such as the Babysitter's Club series, Sweet Valley High, and Nancy Drew, were also very popular. This popularity is common in students at these grade levels (Howe, 1993).

Previous research has not mentioned comics such as Archie and Garfield, because cartoons and comics have not been included as possible options in previous research on reading preferences. This is, presumably, because such material is not seen as 'real' literature. However, the popularity of Garfield was apparent to McKenna and Kear (1990), who selected it to portray the response options in the ERAS for this reason.

Students' reading attitudes were not related to the number of books

they reported reading in the past month (r (69) = .165, p = .175). There are several possible explanations for this lack of significance. First of all, the number of books students reported reading per month ranged from a low of 0 to a maximum of 150. The latter figure seems implausible and therefore may not be accurate or reliable. An improved measure would verify this by having students keep a 'reading log' for a month, or by asking parents to estimate their child's volume of reading as well.

Attitudes were also not related to the number of books suitable for the child's reading level which parents reported owning at home (r (68) = .096, p = .437). Previous research conducted by Koskinen et al. (1994), found that book access positively influenced students' motivation to read. Therefore one might expect that students with larger home libraries would display better attitudes toward reading. However, it is possible that other avenues of book access, such as classroom or public libraries, are used more often by students who own few books. If students are obtaining a comparable number of books from other sources, home book ownership may be irrelevant.

No relationship was found between possession of a library card and students' mean overall attitude scores (see Table 13). McKenna and Kear (1990) compared the attitude scores of students with and without public library cards as part of their research on construct validity and found statistically significant results. It is possible that the validity of the Elementary Reading Attitude Scale for this population is questionable, as the majority of comparisons between attitude and reading behaviors were not significant.

The only significant result in the area of reading habits is that students who report visiting the public library often have a significantly higher attitude toward recreational reading than students who visit the

library less frequently (see Table 8). There are two possibilities why this could be so. The first is that visiting the public library improves students' attitudes toward recreational reading; therefore, students who visit the library more often will have more positive recreational reading attitudes. The second possibility is that students who have more positive attitudes toward recreational reading desire to visit the library more often than students with less positive attitudes.

As this study was not experimental in nature, it is not possible to isolate the causal factors responsible for these results. More research is needed to determine the exact nature of this relationship.

Finally, it was found that students were most likely to choose books by authors they knew, or books which had been recommended by their friends. This concurs with previous research which indicates that students are likely to choose books based on previous experience (as when they have read other books by the same author) or books they have heard about from their friends (Koskinen et al., 1994).

In summary, only one finding in regard to students' reading attitudes was significant. This finding indicated that students who visited the public library frequently had more positive attitudes toward recreational reading than students who were less frequent library patrons. No differences were found between gifted and regular or female and male students in regard to attitudes toward reading.

Several significant differences were found in regard to reading interests. Gifted students preferred science fiction and science and invention books more than their peers, and were significantly less interested in joke and sports books. Eleven significant differences in reading interests were found between genders; these were consistent with previous research. Students'

favorite books and authors were also consistent with previous research on reading interests at these grade levels.

Limitations

This was an exploratory comparative study designed to investigate differences in reading attitudes and interests between gifted and regular students, and male and female students. This study is limited to students in grades 3 through 6 in a suburban school district in Alberta. Previous research has suggested that differences exist between students in different geographical areas (Fisher & Ayres, 1990), so future research may be enlightening in regards to other school systems in other areas or provinces. As well, since reading interests narrow and attitudes become less positive when students advance throughout junior high and high school (Stange & Carter, 1995), research involving students in the upper grades would be very useful.

One limitation of the study is that the regular students were negatively rather than positively identified. That is, they were defined as 'regular' because they had not been previously defined as gifted, or selected for any acceleration or enrichment programs designed for gifted students. This does not preclude the possibility that some regular students are in fact of "gifted" intelligence. A more stringent experimental design would obtain verification of regular students' status as non-gifted by means of IQ scores.

Another limitation is that this study is only descriptive; it cannot result in any inferences about causation. Future researchers may wish to design an experimental study of the effects of different curricula or library programs on the reading attitudes or interests of gifted and regular students respectively.

Implications for Instruction

The description of students' reading interests can be used by teachers and parents who wish to encourage students to read, by recommending or providing popular genres and authors. As well, the knowledge that females are less likely to prefer science and invention books, and computer books, may lead teachers to purposely recommend good books of this type to female students as a way of promoting gender equity. As well, the awareness that there are a large number of genres eschewed by males could lead to promotion of these forms of literature to male students.

As well, the results of the attitude survey could be considered as a type of 'local norm', for district educators to measure their students in reference to this, albeit small, Canadian sample, as opposed to the American norms provided by McKenna and Kear (1990).

The fact that students reported reading books recommended to them by their friends could make a project such as a classroom "book catalogue" valuable. At the very least, educators can attempt to promote social interaction about books between students, or provide time for classmate recommendations during free reading or Language Arts period.

Ultimately, however, it will be desirable to take a multi-faceted approach to promoting better reading attitudes and widen reading interests in students. These may include but are not limited to: public library access, cogent recommendations by teachers and parents, home book ownership, a relevant and vital use of trade books in the language arts curriculum, and modeling of reading behaviors in the home.

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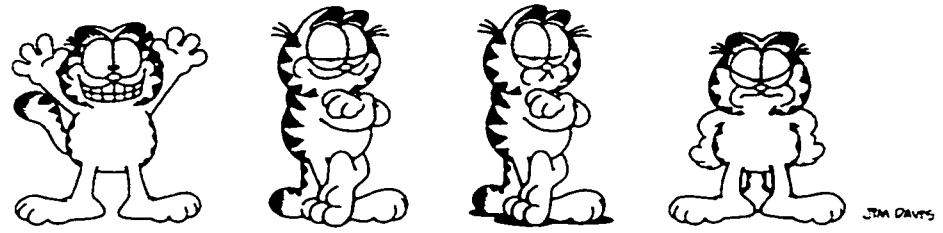
Appendix A
Elementary Reading Attitude Survey

ELEMENTARY READING ATTITUDE SURVEY

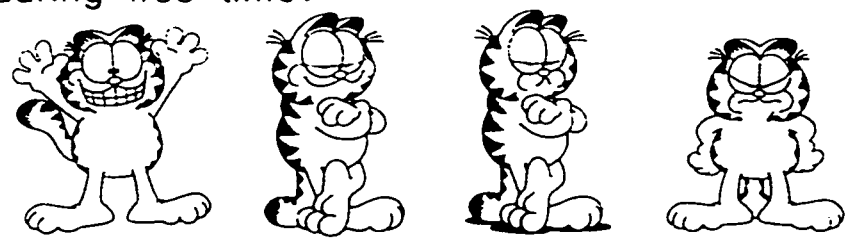
Name _____

Grade____ Teacher _____

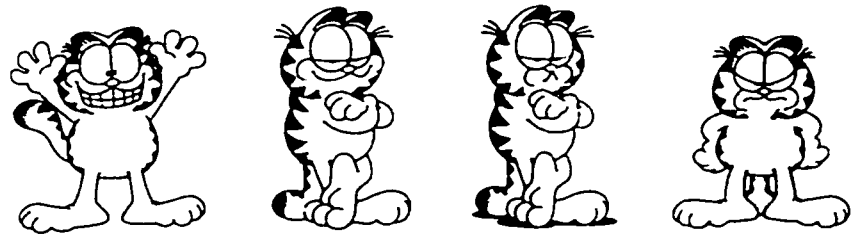
1. How do you feel when you read a book on a rainy Saturday?



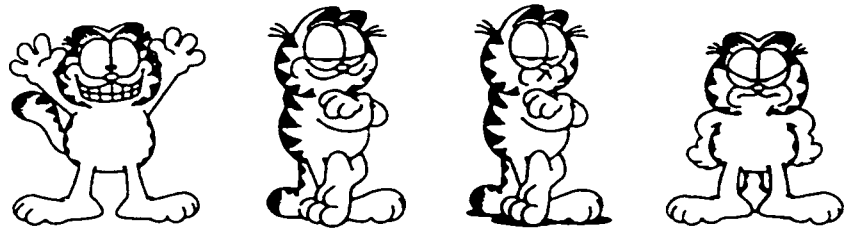
2. How do you feel when you read a book in school during free time?



3. How do you feel about reading for fun at home?



4. How do you feel about getting a book for a present?



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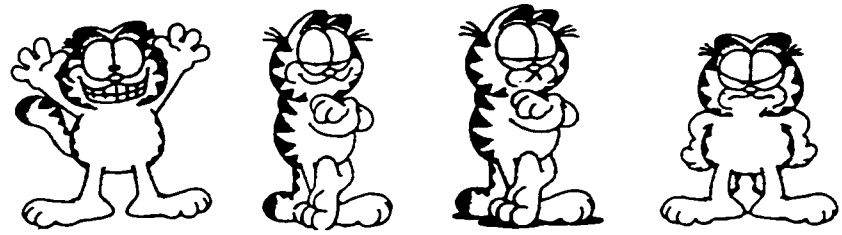
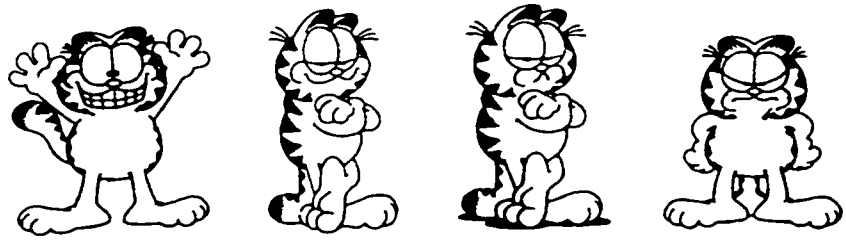
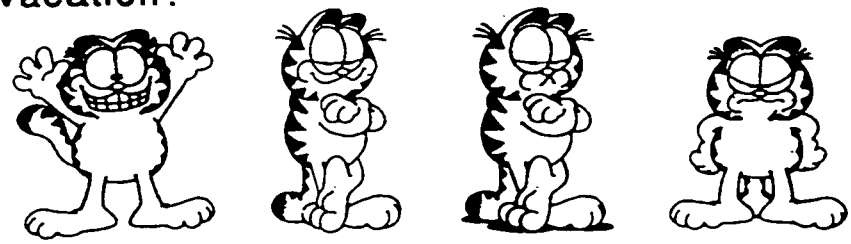
5. How do you feel about spending free time reading?



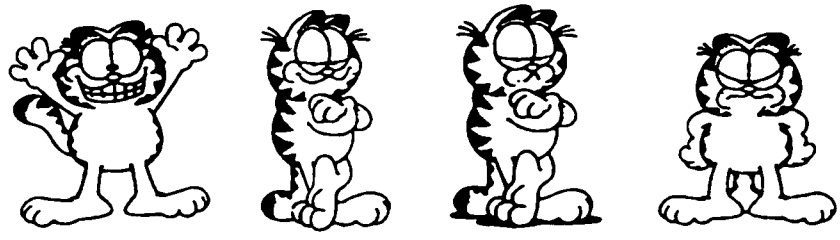
6. How do you feel about starting a new book?



7. How do you feel about reading during summer vacation?



8. How do you feel about reading instead of playing?



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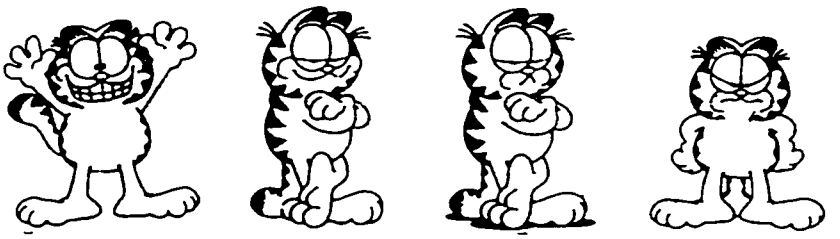
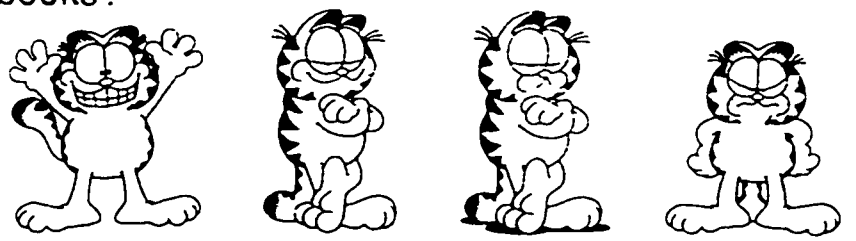
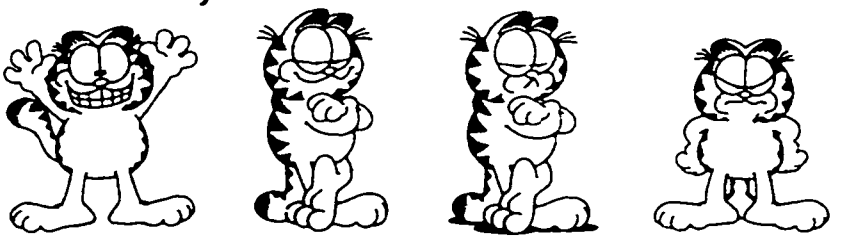
9. How do you feel about going to a bookstore?



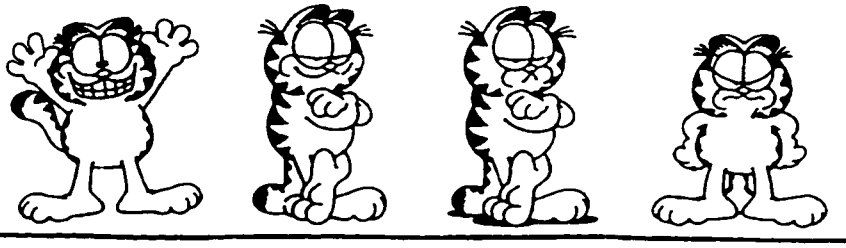
10. How do you feel about reading different kinds of books?



11. How do you feel when the teacher asks you questions about what you read?



12. How do you feel about doing reading workbook pages and worksheets?



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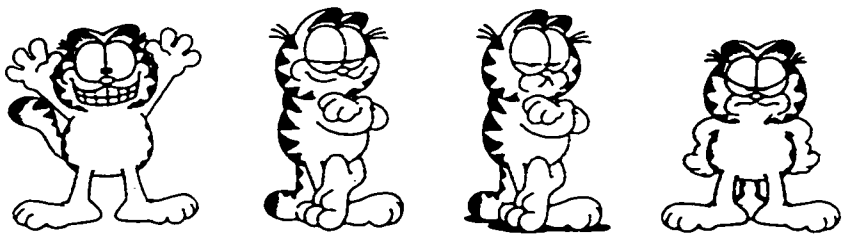
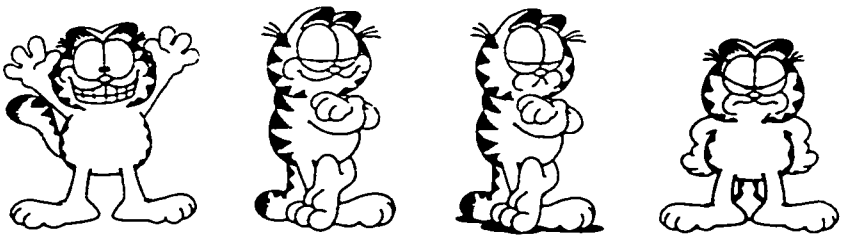
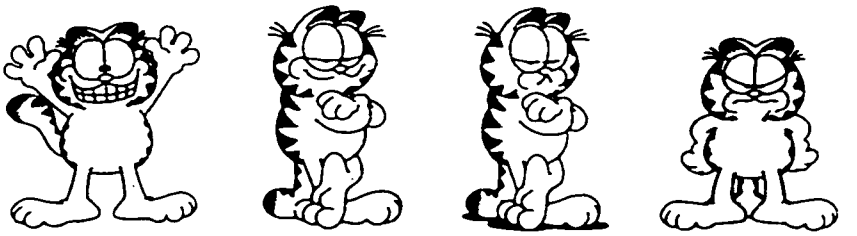
13. How do you feel about reading in school?



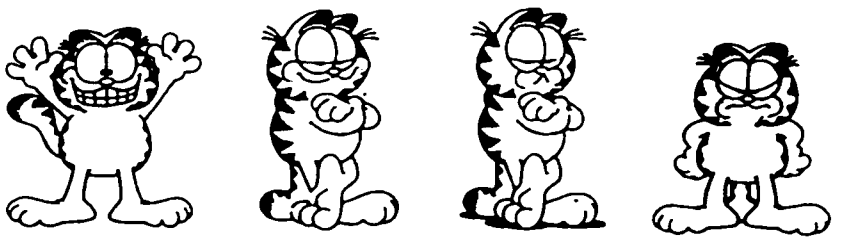
14. How do you feel about reading your school books?



15. How do you feel about learning from a book?



16. How do you feel when it's time for reading class?



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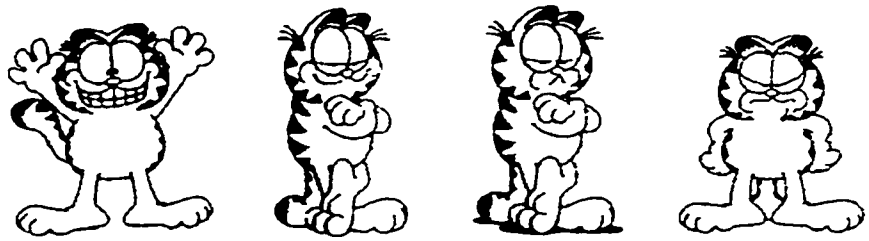
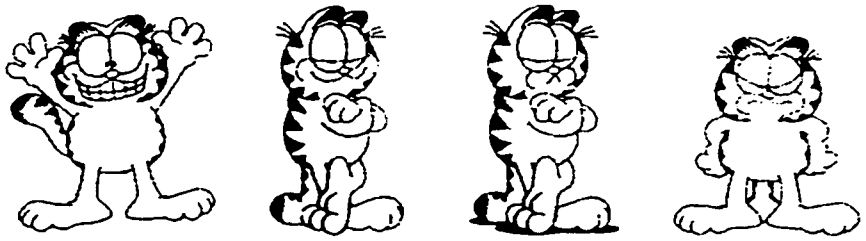
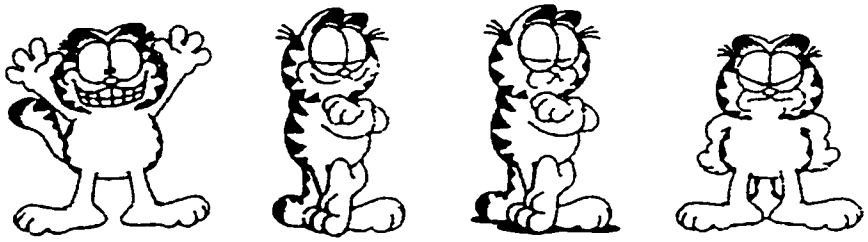
17. How do you feel about the stories you read in reading class?



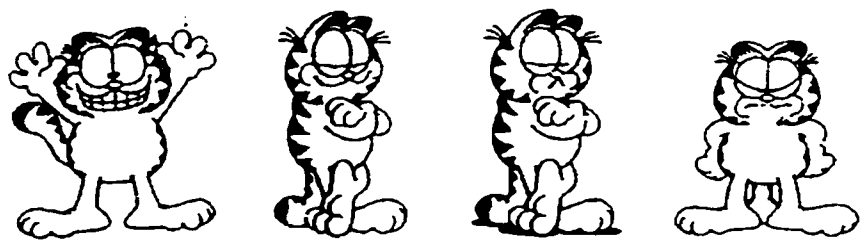
18. How do you feel when you read out loud in class?



19. How do you feel about using a dictionary?



20. How do you feel about taking a reading test?



Appendix B

Student Reading Interests Survey

Instructions: After you have read each subject, please circle the number that best tells how you feel about reading books about that subject.

	(1) Dislike very much	(2) Dislike a little	(3) Like a little	(4) Like a lot
Adventure	1	2	3	4
Animals and Nature	1	2	3	4
Biography	1	2	3	4
Computers	1	2	3	4
Fantasy	1	2	3	4
Food and Cooking	1	2	3	4
Health and Medicine	1	2	3	4
History	1	2	3	4
Hobbies and Crafts	1	2	3	4
Jokes	1	2	3	4
Law and crime	1	2	3	4
Magazines	1	2	3	4
Music	1	2	3	4
Mystery	1	2	3	4
Myths and Legends	1	2	3	4
Newspapers	1	2	3	4
Novels	1	2	3	4

	(1) Dislike very much	(2) Dislike a little	(3) Like a little	(4) Like a lot
Poetry and Plays	1	2	3	4
Religion	1	2	3	4
Romance	1	2	3	4
Science and Invention	1	2	3	4
Science Fiction	1	2	3	4
Sports	1	2	3	4
Thriller	1	2	3	4
Travel	1	2	3	4
Westerns	1	2	3	4

1. Please list your favorite books:

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

2. Please list your favorite authors:

_____ _____

_____ _____

3. How do you find out about books you want to read? **(check all that apply)**

I read books my teacher recommends _____

I read books my friends recommend _____

I read books my parents recommend _____

I read books my librarian recommends _____

I read books by authors I know I like _____

I choose books with a cover I like _____

Other (please explain) _____

4. Do you have a public library card? Yes _____ No _____

5. How many books have you read for fun in the past month? _____

Appendix C

Parent Survey

Parents' Survey *(please check one)*

Do you think reading for fun is: Very important_____

Slightly important_____

Not important_____

How often do your children visit the public library: Often_____

Sometimes_____

Rarely_____

How many books are in your home which are roughly suitable for your child's reading level? Less than 10_____

10 – 50_____

50 – 100_____

100 – 200_____

More than 200____

Please make any comments about your child's reading interests and habits here: _____

_____

_____

_____

Thank you again for your help!

Appendix D
Parent Letter

Dear Parents:

I am a student at the University of Alberta working on my master's degree in educational psychology. I am interested in the reading interests of elementary school children, since reading is a very important skill for a child's academic success.

I would like to study what differences exist in the reading preferences of children in grades 3 through 6. To find out, I would like permission from you to administer two surveys to your child during class time. One of these surveys is designed to tell me about your child's reading attitudes and habits; the other is designed to tell me about your child's reading preferences. They will take about twenty minutes to complete.

This survey is not a 'test'; the results will not be divulged to your child's teacher, and will in no way affect his or her class work or grades. In my final report, your child and _____ School will remain anonymous.

Your consent is required to allow me to administer these surveys to your child. However, you may withdraw your consent at any time, without penalty.

At any time you may address questions to myself, your child's teacher, or my supervisor, Dr. Goldberg. Dr. Goldberg may be reached at 492-3740 in

the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Alberta.

If you consent to allow your child to take this survey, please sign the attached form and return to your child's teacher before _____. Your co-operation is very much appreciated by me and helps to further research in education.

There is also an optional short quiz below, so you can tell me a bit about your attitudes towards reading, if you wish. We know that family participation is very important in the development of literacy and, as parents, you have important knowledge and insight to contribute. Thank you very much for your help!

Tanya Jackson
Department of Educational Psychology
University of Alberta

Appendix E
Parent Consent Form

University of Alberta

Research Consent Form

I, _____ , hereby consent for

(print your name here)

_____ to be surveyed by Tanya Jackson.

(print your child's name here)

I understand that:

- my child may withdraw from the research at any time without penalty
- all information gathered will be treated confidentially and discussed only with Tanya Jackson's supervisor
- any information that identifies my child will be destroyed upon the completion of this research
- my child will not be identifiable in any documents resulting from this research

I also understand that the results of this research will be used only in the following:

- research thesis
- presentations and written articles for other educators

_____

signature of parent/legal guardian

Date signed: _____

For further information concerning the completion of the form, please contact:

Tanya Jackson
450-8881
6-123 #33 Education North
University of Alberta

or

Dr. Jack Goldberg
492-3740
6-119L Education North
University of Alberta

Appendix F
Administration of Reading Interest Survey

Instructions for Administering First Half of Survey (Genre Ratings)

"When you get a copy of this survey, please put your name and your teacher's name at the top. This survey is similar to the one which you have just completed, except this time, instead of circling pictures of Garfield, you'll circle numbers to show how you would feel about reading different sorts of books.

Look at the top of the first page, where you see these numbers with circles around them. I am going to read this list of subjects that you see on the left-hand side of the page, and you are going to circle a number to tell me how you would feel about reading books about that subject. Let's look at the first topic, for example, which is Adventure.

If you think you would dislike reading adventure books very much, you would circle the number 1. If you think you would like reading adventure books a lot, you would circle the number 4. If you think you would dislike it a little bit, or like it a little bit, you would circle the number 2 or 3. Does everyone understand? So now I will read the list of subjects on the left-hand side of your page, and after I read each subject, you circle the number that best tells how you would feel about reading a book about that subject."

Each subject was then presented in the form of "How do you feel about reading adventure books?" or "How do you feel about reading books about animals and nature?"

Each reading subject was presented in this manner without elaboration with two exceptions. When asking "How do you feel about reading biography books?" the examiner explained that "a biography is a book about a person, or a story about people's lives". When asking "How do you feel about reading

books about myths and legends?" the examiner explained that myths and legends were "like fairy tales". This was done to ensure comprehension.

Instructions for Second Half of Survey (Open-Ended Questions)

When all students had completed the first half of the survey (the genre ratings), the following instructions were presented:
"The rest of the questions are 'fill-in-the-blanks', so I will explain them to you a little bit and then you can fill them out at your own pace. The first question asks about your favorite books, so write down the titles of your favorite books, or if you have a favorite series, you can write down the name of the series.

The second question asks you to list your favorite authors. If you know the name of a particular writer that you like, put it down here. If you can't think of anyone, you may leave this question blank.

The third question asks 'How do you find out about books you want to read?'.' There are several answers below. Do you read books your teacher recommends, your friends recommend, your parents recommend, or your librarian recommends? Do you read books by authors you know you like, or do you choose books with a cover you like? Or do you have another reason for picking books you want to read? Put a check mark next to any of the answers that are reasons you choose books to read. You can check off as many of the answers as you want to. If you have another reason for choosing books, there is a space for you to write down that reason.

The next question, number 4, asks if you have a public library card. If you do have a library card of your own, or your parents have one you can use, check 'Yes'. If you don't have a library card, check 'No'.

The last question, number 5, asks how many books have you read for fun in the past month. So put down about how many books you think you read in a month. It doesn't have to be an exact number. If you're not sure, you can

guess and put down about how many you think you read last month.

Go ahead and complete the rest of the questions now. When you are finished, raise your hand and I will come around to get your surveys."

Appendix G

Students' Favorite Books

Book Title	Number of Cases
A Crack in the Sidewalk	1
Adventure at Holes Castle	1
Archie comics series	11
Alien Ate My Homework	1
Alien war games	1
Animorphs series	5
Anne of Green Gables series	2
Arthur	1
Awake and Dreaming	1
Baby	1
Babysitters' Club series	9
Bailey School Kids	2
Berenstain Bears series	1
Best Horse Stories	1
Bila Ballerina	1
Black Beauty	1
The Black Pearl	1
Black Water Swamp	1
Blitz	1
Boxcar Children Superspecial	1
Brook, Crystal, Raven, Butterfly	1
Bubblemania	1
Buried in Ice	1
Cages	1

Call of the Wild	3
Calvin and Hobbes series	1
The Cat in the Hat	1
Charlotte's Web	2
The Cherry Pit Princess	1
Chronicles of Narnia	1
Comics	2
The Complete Horse Book	1
Conan the Guardian	1
Cooper Kids	1
Cyberquest	1
David Copperfield	1
Dealing with Dragons	2
Diary of Anne Frank	1
Dove and Sword	1
Dragon Lance	2
Ella Enchanted	2
Emily of New Moon	1
Encyclopedia of the Horse	1
Extreme books series	1
Far Side	1
Five on T.V.	1
Fyona Campbell: Trip Across Africa	1
Garfield series	11
Girls' Life	1
The Giver	1
Godzilla	1
The Golden Compass	2
Goosebumps	10

The Great Gilly Hopkins Adventure	1
Hardy Boys	2
Help! I'm Trapped in Santa's Body series	1
The Hobbit	2
Horsepower	1
How to Draw	1
Huckleberry Finn	1
I'll Love You Forever	1
Indian Captive	1
Island of the Blue Dolphins	1
I Want to Live	1
Jacob Have I Loved	1
Kingdom of the Horse	1
Lego series	1
Lightning on Ice	1
Little Big Book of Knock-Knocks	1
The Littles	1
Little House on the Prairie series	3
Little Mermaid	1
Lord of the Rings	2
Lyddie	1
Magic Tree House	1
Mainey and Mugee	2
The Man who Listens to Horses	1
Mary Kate and Ashley Olson	1
Misty of Chencuteque	1
Moby Dick	1
Murmel, Murmel, Murmel	2
My Friend Flicka	1

Mystery at Loon Lake	1
Nancy Drew series	5
National Geographic	1
Nintendo Power	1
No Time to Cry	1
One Last Wish series	1
Orp	2
Pack O' Fun	1
Peter Lundy	1
Piccolo Factbooks	1
Pigs Might Fly	1
PJ Funny Bunny	1
Puzzlemania	1
Rebecca of Sunny Brook Farms	1
Robin Hood	1
Romeo and Juliet	1
Running Out of Time	1
Running Wild	1
Sabrina the Teenage Witch	2
Saddle Club series	2
Sarah Plain & Tall	1
Scream	1
Screech Owls series	1
The Secret of Grandfather's Diary	1
Secret Seven	1
Sherlock Holmes series	2
Silverwings	1
Six Months to Live	1
The Skiing Trip	1

The Sky Is Falling series	3
Sonic the Hedgehog	1
Stardusts	1
Star Wars series	7
Stormy, Misty's Foal	1
The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde	1
Summer Sisters	1
Sweet Valley High series	9
Thoroughbred series	1
Titanic	3
Tom Sawyer	2
The Town that Floated Away	1
Tuck Everlasting	1
Two of a Kind	1
Underground to Canada	1
The Unicorn Club	1
Upchuck & Willy	1
Upside Down Bird Dog	1
Vampire Lestat	1
War with Mr. Wizzle	1
Weet	1
Wester Winds	1
When Happily Ever After Ends	1
When I Dream I Hear Hoofbeats	1
White Fang	1
Wild Cat	1
Wind in the Willows	1
Winds of Light series	1

Wishbone	1
Wizard of Oz	1
Wolfbay Wings series	1
Wringer	1
X-Files series	1
X-Wing Rogue Squadron	1
Zombies	1
Magazines	
BMX / stunt biking	1
Fan magazines (e.g. Teen Beat)	1
Military	1
National Geographic	1
Nintendo Power	1
Owl	1
P.C. Gamer	1
Popular Science	1

Appendix H

Students' Favorite Authors

Author	Number of Cases
V.C. Andrews	1
K.A. Applegate	3
Elizabeth Atwood	1
Frank Baum	1
Owen Beatty	1
Dr. Sandra Birdsell	1
Judy Blume	2
Enid Blyton	1
Sigmund Brower	2
Mark Brown	1
Beverly Cleary	2
Bruce Collins	1
Patricia Cowrede	1
Debbie Dadey	1
Jim Davis	4
Franklin W. Dixon	1
Martin Godfrey	3
Marguerite Henry	2
Bonny Bryant Hiller	1
Carolyn Keene	3
Gordon Korman	3
C.S. Lewis	2
Jack London	1
Lois Lowry	1
Ann M. Martin	5

Patricia Maclachlan	1
Lurlene McDaniel	2
Herman Milfield	1
L.M. Montgomery	2
Robert Munsch	11
Scott O'Dell	1
Francine Pascal	4
Katherine Pearson	2
Frank Peretti	2
John Peterson	1
Tamara Pierce	1
Philip Pullman	1
Anne Rice	1
Monty Roberts	1
Lawrence Scalan	1
Dr. Seuss (Theodore Geisel)	1
Ann Sewel	1
Dick King Smith	1
R.L. Stine	7
Todd Strasser	1
Mark Twain	2
Bill Wallace	1
Gertrude Chandler Warner	1
Lyle Weis	1
E.B. White	1
John Whitman	1
Laura Ingalls Wilder	2
Mary Woodbury	1