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HOW DO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL BOYS CHARACTERIZE THEIR READING  
FAVORITES AND BEHAVIORS?

by  
Brenda J. Koonce

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Masters of Arts Degree  
of  
The Graduate School  
at  
Rowan University  
May 14, 2009

Approved \_\_\_\_\_  
Professor

Date Approved May 14, 2009

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## ABSTRACT

Brenda J. Koonce

### HOW DO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL BOYS CHARACTERIZE THEIR READING FAVORITES AND BEHAVIORS?

2009

Dr. Marilyn Shontz

Masters of Arts in School and Public Librarianship

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a boy crisis in our schools. It also looked at what the boys are interested in and what are they reading. The study investigated the latest research on young boys struggling to read, and their comparison to young girls.

The study provided evidence of their favorite books and authors. It furnished information on the boys' computer and television time. The study showed how the boys selected books and where they located new books. Percentages were presented about their personal libraries.

Overall, the study investigated how to make classrooms and libraries boy-friendly. In order to accomplish this goal educators have to re-examine, and re-shape the boys environment and the structure of the curriculum.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“I can do all this through him who gives me strength”

Phillippians 4:13 (NIV)

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Statement of the Problem

Reading is the fundamental source towards our success in everything in life. Our reading or lack thereof will determine many factors in our lives such as: socio-economic status and employment levels. There is a crisis that stems in and around the subject of reading and is occurring in the sub-culture of America. This subculture is young boys. Recent studies have shown that young boys are reluctant and struggle when it comes to reading. This crisis has caused boys to lag behind their counterpart (girls) in the educational field.

The finger of blame is being pointed in multiple directions. Is the issue solely concerning children's in socio-economic status or are there other issues that contribute to the lack of ability? This paper examined why there is such a lack of interest in reading and young boys, and what those who work with this population can do to increase reading in boys.

It also looked at some of the reasons given as to why boys are lagging or struggling in reading compared to girls. It also investigated what young boys are interested in and what they are reading.

## Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to find out the interests of boys. By finding out how boys spend their time, librarians can better be able to find interesting genres for boys to read. The focus group for this study was boys at Cadwalader Elementary School. Cadwalader Elementary is a small urban school located in the West side of the capital city of Trenton, New Jersey. In 2002 the school won the prestigious Governor's School of Excellence, and in past years the school has made AYP and students have scored fairly well on each statewide assessment that they have taken. The research presented in this thesis outlines what boys were interested in about reading. The study compared time spent on reading vs. computer and television. It also gave some innovative ideas of what can be done to ensure that our educational system is more "boy-friendly".

## Relevance of Study

The results of this study are relevant to anyone dealing with young boys and their reading habits. The information can be helpful when reviewing, selecting, and purchasing materials for the classroom and library. Knowledge of boy's interests can be incorporated into daily reading instructions, or into their visits to the library. This study can also assist in the practice of "differentiated learning" and the implementation of this type of instruction. As teachers within the classroom are guiding students in their reading, developing lessons around the reading levels and interests of students is vital. Boy's strengths and weaknesses were also being examined in this study. This study can give parents, teachers, librarians, and mentors different methods in dealing with young boys. The study confirmed relevance as to why we should be concerned



about the education of young boys, and methods that would allow us to give them the best that we have to offer when we speak of educating them.

### Research Questions

What factors did boys use in selecting recreational reading?

What titles, authors, genres and formats were boy's favorites?

What activities consumed boys' time that could be used for recreational reading?

Why did they choose them?

What role, if any, did new or electronic sources play in boys' recreational reading?

What role did video games play in selecting reading materials?

Did boys use the computer to do any e-reading?

### Definitions

A variety of terms were used through-out this study.

**Reading:** is a multi-dimensional cognitive process of decoding symbols for the purpose of deriving meaning and/or constructing meaning (Wikipedia, 2004).

**Literature:** Enduring works of poetry or prose that express ideas and emotions of universal human interest in a form and style embodying excellence (ODLIS, 2007).

**Literacy:** the ability to read and write with a minimal level of proficiency (ODLIS, 2007).

**Genre:** A category of artistic composition, as in music or literature, marked by a distinctive style, form, or content (Farlex, 2008).

**Differentiated learning:** Differentiated instruction is a way of thinking about teaching and learning. It involves providing students with different avenues to acquiring content; to processing, constructing, or making sense of ideas; and to developing teaching products so that all students within a classroom can learn effectively, regardless of differences in ability (Farlex, 2008).

**Fluency:** reading fluency is the ability to read text accurately and quickly. Fluency bridges word decoding and comprehension. Comprehension is understanding what has been read. Fluency is a set of skills that allows readers to rapidly decode text while maintaining high comprehension (Farlex, 2004).

**Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD):** is a medical condition that makes it hard for people to regulate their attention, organize themselves, and control their impulses (Massgeneral, 2006).

**Reluctant reader:** A person who, for whatever reason, chooses not to read, doing so only when necessary, usually a sign of poor reading skills or fear of being stereotyped (ODLIS, 2007).

**Boys:** A male child (Farlex, 2004).

**Elementary school:** The first four to eight years of a child's formal education, often including kindergarten (Farlex, 2004).

**SLMS (school library media specialist):** A librarian trained to deliver services to students in school library media centers on a walk-in basis or at the request of the classroom

teacher. In addition to managing daily operations, the library media specialist supports the curriculum through collection development, teaches research and library skills appropriate to grade level, assist students with reading selections appropriate to reading level, helps classroom teachers integrate library services and multimedia materials into instructional programs, establishes standards of behavior for the library, and assist students in developing information-seeking skills and habits needed for lifelong learning. Certification is required in many states (ODLIS, 2007).

**Fantasy:** A highly imaginative novel, short story, poem, etc., in which the action occurs in an unreal and nonexistent time and/or place outside the realm of possibility (ODLIS, 2007).

**Modern fantasy:** Refers to stories written by known authors in which the events, the settings, or the characters are outside the realm of possibility (ODLIS, 2007).

**Mystery:** A popular novel, short story, or drama about an unusual event or occurrence, such as a murder or disappearance, that remains so secret or unexplained as to excite popular curiosity and interest (ODLIS, 2007).

**Horror stories:** Present the struggle against evil and portray tragic and often violent events that are shocking, revolting, and terrifying (Tomlinson, 2007).

**Realistic fiction:** Refers to stories that could happen to people; that is, it is within the realm of possibility that such events could occur (Tomlinson, 2007).

**Adventure and survival:** Stories in which the young protagonist must rely on will and ingenuity to survive a life-threatening situation (Tomlinson, 2007).

Sports stories: Often present a story in which an adolescent protagonist gains success in a sport, but struggles with academics or with interpersonal relationships (Tomlinson, 2007).

Science fiction: A form of imaginative literature that projects the future of humankind based on scientific principles and discoveries, demonstrates changes in earth's environment, or depicts life on other planets (Tomlinson, 2007).

Comic books: A booklet usually printed in color on paper made from wood pulp, containing one or more stories told pictorially in a continuous strip of panels drawn in cartoon style, with dialogue or monologue enclosed in balloons or given in captions (ODLIS, 2007).

Magazines: A popular interest periodical usually containing articles on a variety of topics, written by various authors in a nonscholarly style (ODLIS, 2007).

Video games: A game that involves interaction with a user interface to generate visual feedback on a video device (Farlex, 2008).

Graphic novels: A type of comic book, usually a lengthy and complex storyline similar to those of novels, and often aimed at mature audiences. It is typically bound in longer and durable formats than familiar comic magazines (Farlex, 2008).

Recreational reading or Free Voluntary Reading (FVR): A literacy initiative in the form of a school program or curriculum designed to encourage the habit of reading for pleasure (recreational reading) by leaving children free to select their own materials for sustained silent reading (SS R) based on their personal interests, as opposed to the assignment of specific works or a reading list from which students are required to select. No book

reports or journal entries must be written or chapter questions answered in FVR, although the reader may be asked to promote the book orally to his or her peers. It is hoped that the key ingredient--lack of compulsion--will motivate students by making reading fun. The strategy is based on studies that show a positive correlation between quantity of reading and the development of literacy skills (ODLIS, 2007).

Electronic books/E-books: A digital version of a traditional print book designed to be read on a personal computer or an e-book reader (a software application for use on a standard-size computer or a book-sized computer used solely as a reading device) (ODLIS, 2007).

#### Assumptions and Limitations

It was assumed that each boy filling out the survey was honest and gave the necessary information. It was assumed that others would find this study helpful and useful. The selected participants were 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> graders and results were limited to those three grades. The study was also limited to one specific school in New Jersey.

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## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE SEARCH

#### Reasons Why Young Boys Are Struggling

The “boy crisis” is not a new phenomenon. Patricia D. Hunsader stated “As early as the late 1800s there was concern that boys were not doing as well as girls in school” (Hunsader, 2002, p.52). Hunsader also pointed out that “We are now being told that boys have fallen so far behind girls that the very fabric of our society is in jeopardy” (Hunsader, 2002, p.52). “It’s that boys themselves are falling behind their own functioning and doing worse than they did before” (Conlin, 2003, para. 6).

Parents, teachers, and others believe that this is a crisis. Michael Gurian, author, and family therapist examines some facts to confirm the crisis.

Boys today are simply not learning as well as girls.

Boys receive 70% of the Ds and Fs given all students.

Boys cause 90% of classroom discipline problems.

80% of all high school dropouts are boys.

Millions of American boys are on Ritalin and other mind-bending control drugs.

Only 40% of college students are boys.

Three out of four learning disabled students are boys. (Gurian, 1996, para. 2)

As readers “Boys will in general read what is interesting to them-what fits their hormonal, neurological, and psychological base”. “They will reject what is boring and what does not fit” (Gurian, 2005, p.138).

Patricia Hunsader found some of the same indicators.

Boys are 50% more likely to be retained than girls.

Boys report substantially less positive schooling experiences in terms of enjoyment, usefulness of the curriculum, and teacher responsiveness.

(Hunsader, 2002, p.52).

Research has shown that boys are no more in need than girls, but that their needs are different. Educators need to begin to reexamine needs of boys and develop ways and strategies to address them. This can be started by asking who reads. For the most part women read more. They read in book clubs, they read magazines, and read to their children at bedtime. The majority of elementary teachers and media specialists are women reading to their classes. On the other side of this, when do men read? One finds that men usually aren't reading books. They are engaging in physical activities, and for men reading is a chore that stops them from doing “manly” things. Children copy what they see. If boys are constantly seeing women reading, their thoughts are that it is a “woman's” thing. Without seeing their fathers or other male figures reading, then they do not read either. They do not see reading as important.

Boys attend elementary school for at least eight years and some may never encounter a male teacher. Jawanza Kunjufu states that “Eighty-three percent of all elementary teachers are females” (Kunjufu, 1986, p.11). This is a common thread throughout the research. Blame can not be put on female teachers, but it gives us reason



to champion for more males in this particular forum. Children (especially boys) need to see themselves in a variety of roles. Kunjufu suggested courses in college where they teach about the “male culture” and “female culture” to help teachers with their interaction with students. “With a country possessing a disproportionate number of female teachers and a large number of boys doing poorly, the course could be essential” (Kunjufu, 1986, p.15).

### Factors for Failure

Patricia Hunsader has written about several factors that she thinks add to the failure of our young boys particularly when it comes to literacy. These factors may help in trying to fix the problem. She has listed these factors “As major roots of underachievement by boys” (Hunsader, 2002, p.52-53). These factors are:

- Social structure-they want to be viewed as masculine according to his peers, and this takes the form of thinking, talking, and acting in a way that they believe is masculine
- Biological-girls’ brains are more finely developed, giving them superior verbal skills. Unfortunately, the very things at which the boys brain excels in gross motor skills, visual and spatial skills, and exuberance-are qualities that are not very useful in the classroom
- Increase demands of school-based and standardized assessment for verbal reasoning and written communication skills. A majority of boys find these demands difficult to meet.
- Student attentiveness-girls are significantly more attentive than boys. The current move away from short-answer assessments and activities

to those that require extended periods of attentiveness may be exacerbating the differences in literacy achievement between boys and girls.

(Hunsader, 2002, p.52-53).

As educators we must understand how these factors add to our boys' failure.

America's leading experts Terry W. Neu, Ph.D., and Rich Weinfeld, who wrote the book entitled *Helping Boys Succeed in School*, claim the status of our boys is due to a combination of "Both the characteristics that boys are born with and the way that a variety of societal factors shape them" (Neu, 2007, p.7). While societal structures and factors shape boys, so do biological factors create differences in male and female brains.

There are other opinions about this problem. Sara Mead, author of "*The Truth about Boys and Girls*" disputes the depths of the boy crisis. Her research has found that "There's no doubt that some groups of boys-particularly Hispanic and black boys and boys from low-income homes-are in real trouble" (Mead, 2006, para. 78-79). There were not a lot of areas where it looked like "Boys' achievement was actually falling" (Mead, 2006, para. 5). Mead believes the current crisis is only a reflection of gaps that may not have existed in the past. She states that The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in 2005 in reading does not support the notion that boys' academic achievement is falling.

The controversy and research will continue as long as there are young boys who are not interested in or struggle to read.

Within the controversy, another factor must be examined. More boys are currently being diagnosis with ADHD/ADD. Boys with ADHD/ADD have impulse control issues. Sitting down and remaining still long enough to read a book is out of their zone.

“A federal survey found that nearly 1 in 10 12-year-old American boys takes a stimulant” (Hallowell, 2006, para. 2). There are many controversies over the use of drugs.

A tremendous amount of attention has been placed on the matter of increased number of children being diagnosed and taking medication, especially on the elementary level. One study found “The percentage of elementary school children taking medication for ADHD more than tripled, rising from 0.6 percent in 1975 to 3 percent by 1987”(Matlen, 2006, para.3).

Based on criteria outlined from *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fourth Edition, there are several important impairments that occur in the classroom. These are the following characteristics seen in the classroom in children that may have ADHD/ADD:

- difficulty getting started
- difficulty regulating attention to task or to people
- difficulty organizing or following through on instructions, school work, chores and/or classroom duties
- easily distracted and forgetful
- constantly on the go and into everything, or, for adolescents, a constant feeling of restlessness or lethargy
- often very verbal and impulsive

- often require more supervision than age peers, particularly in unstructured settings
  - often display highly erratic production in terms of quality and quantity of work completed from day to day and at different times in the same day
  - difficulty dealing with change, such as moving from one activity to the next
- ( British Columbia, 2008, para. 18).

As teachers and educators we must realize that the presence of some of the symptoms does not allow some boys to be able to focus on our lessons or our classroom routines. A wide range of possibilities should be explored to make sure that we properly assess the needs of our students and assist each student to their reach their full potential.

#### Fixing the Problem

Our goals as educators are to reach all of our students, identify where they are and move them to the next level. As educators we want to institute the love of reading in our children. The question before us now is how do we motivate boys to read within the confounds of the structured school day. Marie Carbo uses these strategies for schools to help struggling readers achieve high gains in literacy.

- Help students become familiar with rich, well-written language  
Have your teachers read a variety of literature aloud to their classes for 10 minutes or more, two or three times daily.
- Help students associate reading with pleasure
- Encourage teachers and parent-support groups to provide cozy reading areas with lots of high-interest books, soft furniture, rugs, and pillows.

- Support the development of a library of specially recorded books (slowed pace, special phrasing, small amounts per tape side).  
Encourage struggling readers to listen to an audiotape and follow along with the text a few times before reading aloud.
- Provide recorded textbooks and a tape dubber in the media center
- Provide blank tapes that students can purchase to record and take home chapters of texts. This procedure enables struggling readers to become familiar with the content and can raise reading levels substantially.
- Become familiar with a variety of reading methods  
when one method isn't working, teachers need to try an alternate method.
- Encourage teachers to allow students choices  
such as accepting different ways of completing a book report (dioramas, rap, games), or allowing students to decide with whom they wish to read.
- Make skill practice fun
- Allow students to work with peers and provide some skill practice in the form of hands-on games.

(Carbo, 2003, para. 8)

Stephen Krashen, author of *The Power of Reading* believes in “Free Voluntary Reading (FVR)”. Krashen contends that “FVR means reading because you want to: no

book reports, no questions at the end of the chapter” (Krashen, 2004, p.1). Krashen admits that “It will not, by itself, produce the highest levels of competence; rather, it provides a foundation so that higher levels of proficiency may be reached” (Krashen, 2004, p.2). Krashen’s in-school programs have provided some clear evidence that these programs are useful if part of the school day is completely set aside for unrestricted reading. Krashen suggested three types of in-school free reading programs:

- Sustained silent reading

In sustained silent reading, both teachers and students engage in free reading for short periods each day (from 5 to 15 minutes)

- Self-selected reading

Free reading is a large part of the language arts program, with teachers holding conferences with students to discuss what was read.

- Extensive reading

A minimal amount of accountability is required, for example, a short summary of what was read.

Krashen’s focus is on helping students develop richer vocabularies, understand complex oral and written language, and become proficient writers and reasonably accurate spellers” (Krashen, 2006, p. 43). In other words we want our children especially young boys to move into higher levels of literacy. Differentiated Instruction is another option to promoting reading. “Differentiating instruction is doing what’s fair and developmentally appropriate for students” (Wormeli, 2005, p. 29). This approach requires us to do different things for different students. Wormeli says that “It’s a collection of best practices strategically employed to maximize students’ learning at every turn including

giving them the tools to handle anything that is undifferentiated” (Wormeli, 2005, p. 29). This approach is designed to advance the students and it can be a highly effective way of teaching.

Research has been more frequent in the last five years on this subject, trying to guide parents and teachers on how to handle this serious problem. It is important that we read all the material coming out and try to adjust our way of teaching and handling young boys that best suit their needs.

As librarians we also play a role in our boys’ success. According to Patrick Jones and Dawn Cartwright Fiorelli in *“Overcoming the Obstacle Course: Teenage Boys and Reading”* there are some immediate steps we can take to improve the attitude towards reading. These include:

- planning programs aimed just at boys
  - doing book talks in the classroom that include a lot of nonfiction
  - buy American Library Association Read posters that feature males
  - encourage coaches of boys’ sports teams to participate in a Guys Read program such as having athletes read to younger children
  - increase the number of periodicals, magazines, comic books, and newspapers in the library
  - actively recruiting boys to work in the library
  - survey boys about their reading
  - put books where the boys are: next to the computers, copy machines, and study tables
- (Jones, Fiorelli, 2003, para. 13).

America's leading experts on school success for boys Terry W. Neu, Ph.D., and Rich Weinfeld, gave a list of tools that can be used immediately to help our young boys such as:

- Mentoring
- Outlets for emotions
- Recognizing strengths
- Multiple ways to demonstrate understanding
- Need for self-actualization
- Overcoming limitations
- Building trust

As people dealing with young boys librarians have to remember that some of them have difficulties. We must work through these challenges by using alternative strategies we, can reach more students. When working with boys teachers must be creative and non-conforming. With this boys will feel more comfortable and a trust will be built.

Nue and Weinfeld have listed a checklist to help determine if your child is in trouble. They state, "These are typical observable warning signs of a boy in trouble" (Neu, 2007, p. 233).

- Lack of cooperation with authorities
- Does not follow up on school assignments and with homework
- Oppositional behavior
- Not fitting in with school or community groups
- Begins hanging with incongruent group (or pack) of peers
- An amalgam of sorts, displays different behaviors and attitudes in different



settings

- Withdrawal from family members and friends
- Refuses to communicate with teachers
- Lethargic behavior

These warning signs must be recognized by a multitude of sources such as parents, teachers, librarians, and community. All groups play an important role in assisting our boys to become better readers. Educators do not want any of their students to begin life with a deficit, with this educator may need to step back and re-examine their roles. They need to consider what is happening within the classroom, evaluate it and reshape their approach to teaching basic skills. They may need to teach in an active way in order to reach and connect to the boys' needs and interests. As they begin to incorporate innovative avenues to reach boys, this will help them feel comfortable within the school community. By finding the clues and creating solutions to the problems boys encounter, all can assist our children in enlightening themselves, and have them ready for their futures.

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## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

It is vital to use accurate methods in order to collect data. The method that was used in this research was the use of questionnaires. Third, fourth and fifth grades were surveyed by questionnaires.

A questionnaire according to *The American Heritage Dictionary* is defined as “A printed form containing a set of questions, esp. one addressed to a statistically significant number of subjects by way of gathering information, as for a survey.” Listed in *Basic Research Methods for Librarians* there are some advantages and disadvantages to using a questionnaire.

Advantages:

- The characteristics of the questionnaire that help to produce frank answers also eliminate interviewer bias.
- The fixed format of the questionnaire tends to eliminate variation in the questioning process.
- Questionnaires can be constructed so that quantitative data are relatively easy to collect and analyze.

- Questionnaires can facilitate the collection of large amounts of data in a relatively short period of time.
- Questionnaires are relatively inexpensive to administer (Powell, 2004, p.124-126).

With young boys, a questionnaire was determined to be the best way to collect the data. The boys can read and respond to the questions without any constricts to manner or time. However, if there was a question that was not understood, then it could be reread and possibly discussed with the boy. The questionnaire was easy to administer and collect. The young boys answered to the best to their ability and as honestly as they could. This proved to be the best solution for gathering the information needed.

There were also some disadvantages in the data collection technique. Listed below were some of the disadvantages.

Disadvantages:

- Studies have shown that persons who are highly opinionated regarding the subject of a questionnaire are more likely than others to be motivated enough to complete and return it.
- Questionnaires may be more difficult for uneducated participants to complete, again possibly resulting in a biased return.
- If the questionnaire is distributed electronically, it will reach only those who have access to and are comfortable using e-mail and Web technology (Powell, 2004, p.124-126).

This questionnaire gave the chosen boys a chance to voice their opinion about what they were reading or would like to read. The questionnaires were paper produced, not electronically due to the limited access to computers in the homes of those interviewed.

### Conducting the Questionnaire

Before conducting the questionnaire, a letter was given to the principal explaining the process and the project. (see Appendix A). After which, a letter accompanied each boy parental approval. This letter explained the project, and asked for parental permission to survey their boys.

Each boy who received parental permission to participate was called into the library for an explanation about the project. The directions were read aloud to assure that they understood the questionnaire. They completed the survey at the school ensuring that every question was understood and if there were any questions they were addressed. The area was quiet so the boys were able to concentrate on their answers.

The school where the survey took place was Cadwalader Elementary in Trenton, New Jersey. The school is a typical urban neighborhood school. The student population is 98% African-American and 2% Hispanic or other. This is a low to moderate income community. A large number of households are single parent homes. The majority of the student body receives free lunch making this an Abbott District.

The school has established a block of time during the morning that is dedicated to reading and writing only. During this time there are no interruptions from anyone. The students work on their own reading levels through guided reading programs. The school uses a variety of differentiated learning methods. The students work in small groups daily and meet with the teacher often regarding their reading and writing. Every student

reading level is tested using DRA testing. The result of this assessment gives the teacher information on the individuals reading level. Each class room houses their own collection of books leveled according to the student's reading level. The classroom also houses a class library where books are read for enjoyment. Cadwalader has participated in the literacy block for several years and it has proved to be a successful approach for the students. One great aspect during this block time is everyone reads. When the students witness adults reading, they are more inspired to read. The staff at Cadwalader has received extensive professional development on reading, and is continuously seeking new ways to improve their approached to reading. The staff is committed to finding what works for their student body.



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## CHAPTER 4

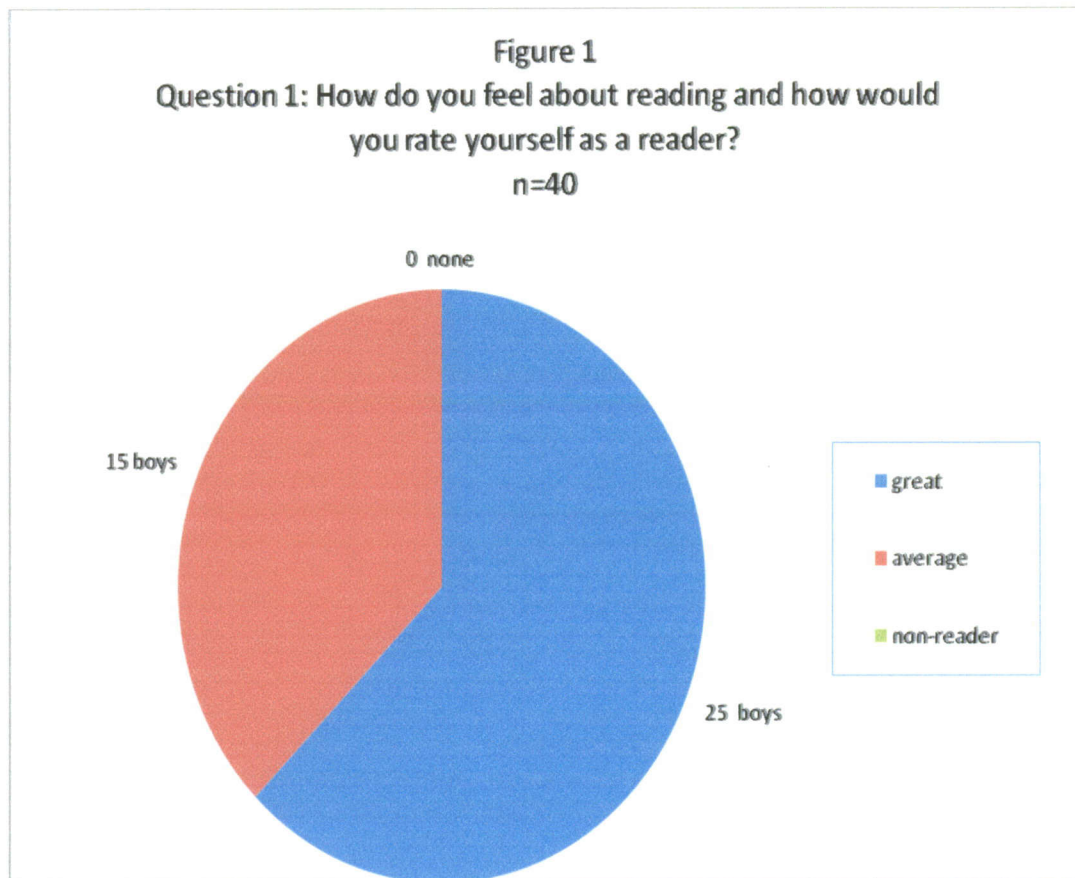
### DATA ANALYSIS

#### Responses

This chapter presents the findings from the questionnaire. Several of the responses are presented in the form of graphs and charts; by using graphs and charts it gives the reader a clear understanding of the boys responses. This chapter also includes several lists as a form of responses to some of the questions. There were forty young boys from grades 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> grades that were surveyed. Some broad conclusions can be drawn from the graphs. The charts list specific information given by the young boys of Cadwalader Elementary.

## Question 1

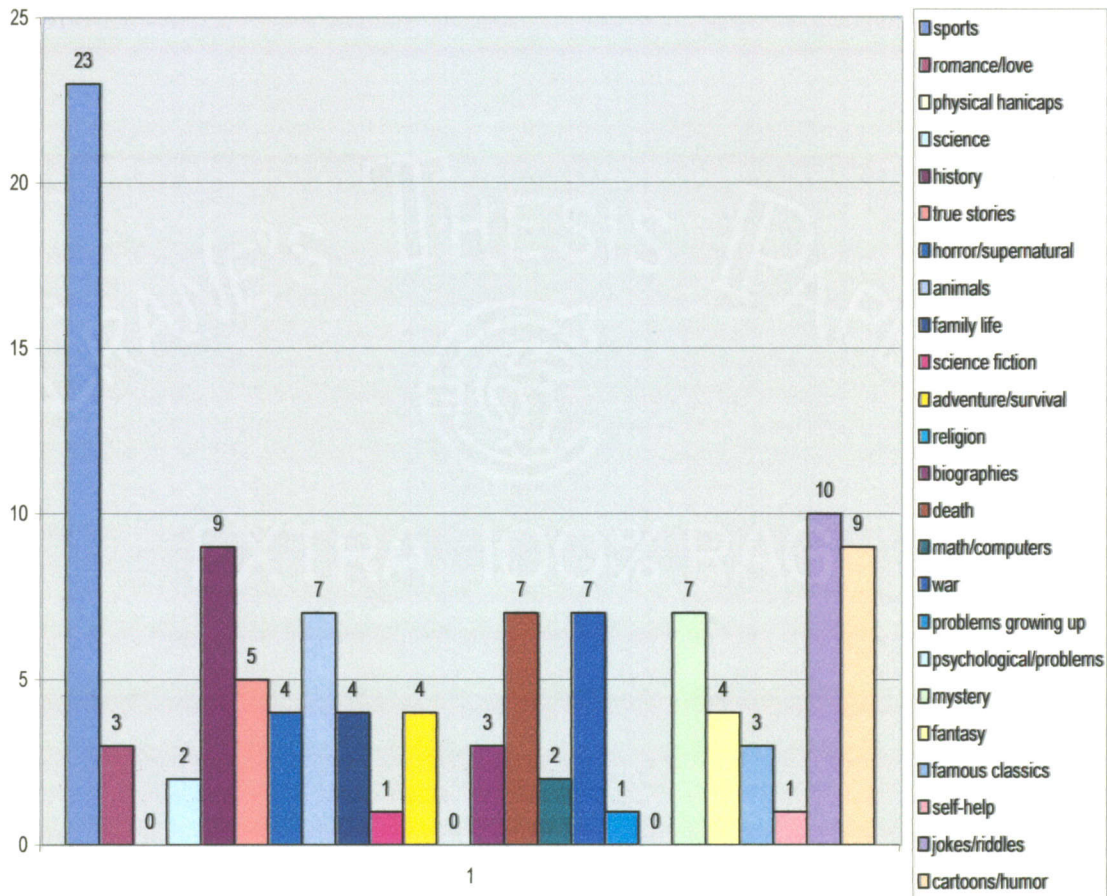
A majority of boys saw themselves as great readers. Their view of themselves was a positive reflection but perhaps not accurate. It should be noted that none of the boys saw themselves as non-readers (see Figure 1).



## Question 2

The boys selected several topics as their top choices. Sports were the popular pick; this supported the theory that boys are interested in action. If they are not out doing, then they certainly seem to want to read about sports. The boys also selected humor and history as their next selections. Next, the boys selected animals, death, and mystery as other favorite topics. Their responses indicate that books with these various in the topics should be found in the library and in the classroom (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2**  
Question 2: Topics that you are most interested in reading about.



### Question 3

Question 3 asked boys to list their most recently read books. Some of the boys gave similar titles, those titles were recorded once. Some boys could not come up with a recent book and left the answer blank. The majority of the books listed were on grade level. The ones that were not grade level appropriate were likely selecting books that came to mind. The young boys seemed to be reading a variety of books, their responses were mostly titles.

Books titles listed as recently read by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade boys:

*Goosebumps*

*Barack Obama*

*The Story of Rosa Parks*

*Ms. Jackson Wants Your Teeth*

*Cam Jansen: The Mystery of the Babe Ruth Baseball*

*A Bug's Life*

*We'll Never Forget You, Roberto Clemente*

*The Boxcar Children*

*The Cat in the Hat*

Book titles listed as recently read by 4<sup>th</sup> grade boys:

*26 Fairmount Avenue*

*Harriet Tubman*

*Goosebumps*

*Tuck Everlasting*

*Arthur's Nose Trouble*

*What It's Like to Be a Grown-up*

*Tarzan*

*Wrestling*

*Spider-man 3*

*Sports book*

*James and the Giant Peach*

*X-men: Age of Apocalypse*

Book titles listed as recently read by 5<sup>th</sup> grade boys:

*Harry Potter and The Deathly Hallows*

*Friends and Foes*

*Tuck Everlasting*

*The Tale of Despereaux*

*Song of the Trees*

*Captain Underpants*

*Abner and Me*

*Football books*

*Goosebumps*

*Marley and Me*

#### Question 4

Question 4 asked the boys to list their three favorite books that they read in the past year. The books are categorized according to their Dewey placement on library shelves, in order to show the topics and types of books they read.

Analyzing this data gives a bird's eye view into the male reading choices at Cadwalader Elementary School. The data is a resourceful method in which to check on the various sections being appreciated by these young boys. It can also show areas that are not being utilized, thus creating some teachable moments.

Book titles are listed by Dewey name/class by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade boys as their favorite reads in the last year:

*The Cat in the Hat (E)*

*The Taste of Colored Water (E)*

*If I Ran the Zoo (E)*

*Goosebumps (FIC)*                      *If I Ran the Circus (E)*                      *Superman Returns (GN)*  
*Sharks (597)*                      *Tarzan of the Apes (FIC)*                      *The Other Side(E)*  
*It's Still a Dog's New York (E)*    *A Dog's Life (FIC)*                      *Duke Ellington (BIO)*  
*The Story of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (BIO)*                      *The Story of Rosa Parks (BIO)*  
*Lion King (398)*                      *Lion King II (398)*                      *X-men (GN)*  
*The School Story (FIC)*                      *A Bug's Life (E)*                      *Star Wars (GN)*  
*We'll Never Forget You, Roberto Clemente (BIO)*                      *The Boxcar Children (FIC)*  
*Dwayne, "The Rock" Johnson (BIO)*                      *The Case of the Class Clown (FIC)*  
*Out of Control (FIC)*

Book titles are listed by Dewey name/class by 4<sup>th</sup> grade boys as their favorite reads in the last year:

*Sonic the Hedgehog (GN)*                      *The Tale of Despereaux (FIC)*                      *Helen Keller (BIO)*  
*Little Red Riding Hood (E)*                      *26 Fairmount Avenue (FIC)*                      *Goosebumps (FIC)*  
*Clifford, the Big Red Dog (E)*                      *Because of Winn-Dixie (FIC)*                      *White Socks Only (E)*  
*Pirates of the Caribbean (FIC)*    *Tuck Everlasting (FIC)*                      *Batman (GN)*  
*Sharks (597)*                      *Cat in the Hat (E)*                      *Tarzan (FIC)*  
*Green Eggs and Ham (E)*                      *Captain Underpants (FIC)*                      *Wrestling (796)*  
*Jackie Robinson (BIO)*                      *Transformers (GN)*                      *Superfudge (FIC)*



*Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing (FIC)*     *Tiki and Ronde Barber:Teammates (E)*

*Arthur's Vacation (E)*     *Jackie Robinson: Breaking the Color Barrier (BIO)*

*The BFG (FIC)*     *Do Tornadoes Really Twist (551)*     *Volcanoes (551)*

*Active Volcanoes (551)*

Book titles are listed by Dewey name/class by 5<sup>th</sup> grade boys as their favorite reads in the last year:

*The Cat in the Hat (E)*     *Totally Crushed (FIC)*     *The Shaggy Dog (FIC)*

*Jack Sparrow (FIC)*     *Camp Rock (GN)*     *Captain Underpants (FIC)*

*The Kid Who Ran for President (FIC)*     *Goosebumps (FIC)*     *Ben and Me (FIC)*

*The Homework Machine (FIC)*     *To the Extreme (796)*     *Satch and Me (FIC)*

*Harry Potter (FIC)*     *Judy Moody (FIC)*     *Black Beauty (FIC)*

*Matilda (FIC)*     *Harry Potter: Goblet of Fire (FIC)*     *Obama (BIO)*

*Animorphs (FIC)*     *Magic Tree House (FIC)*     *Tuck Everlasting (FIC)*

*The Audacity of Hope (973)*     *Bone: Rock Jaw (GN)*     *Harry Potter and the Order of*

*Phoenix (FIC)*     *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows (FIC)*

*The Name of this Book is Secret (FIC)*

## Question 5

Question 5 asked the boys to give the name(s) of their favorite author(s). The author(s) are listed according to grade level. It is clear that third grade boys knew less about authors than any other grade. On the third grade level there were more blank responses than any other level. The number of author responses increased with grade level. Overall, the boys seemed to prefer male authors. Possibly they maybe looking at the cover and seeing something of interest.

Authors named as their favorites by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade boys:

Dr. Seuss	Marc Brown	Chris Raschka
Jack Gantos		

Authors named as their favorites by 4<sup>th</sup> grade boys:

Ayano Morio	Dr. Seuss	Jeff Brown
R. L. Stine	Natalie Babbit	Marc Brown
Patricia Polacco	Tomie DePaola	Dav Pilkey
Judy Blume		

Authors named as their favorites by 5<sup>th</sup> grade boys:

Lizzie McQuire	Jane Goodall	Jerry Spinelli
Dan Gutman	Gary Soto	Dav Pilkey
Bill Cosby	R. L. Stine	Katherine Applegate

Virginia Hamilton

J. R. Rowling

Question 6

Question 6 asked the boys to list the title of the worst book they had ever read. The boys listed their least favorites, and some omitted the question. The books are categorized according to grade level. Some boys on each level chose to give no responses to the question. This question could lead into some interesting discussion about their choices or lack of choice.

Books listed by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade boys as the worst book they had ever read:

*If I Ran the Zoo*                      *Arthur's Reading Tricks*                      *The Tooth Fairy*

*The Old Woman Who Named Things*    *Please, Puppy, Please*    *X-man*

Books listed by 4<sup>th</sup> grade boys as the worst book they had ever read:

*Sesame Street*                      *The Little Red Riding Hood*                      *10 Apples on Top*

*Narnia*                      *Tooth Trouble*                      *Cat in the Hat*

*Air Mail to the Moon*                      *Cinderella*                      *Sharks*

*Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*

Books listed by 5<sup>th</sup> grade boys as the worst book they had ever read:

*Sharks*                      *Snowy Day*                      *Souder*

*Ben and Me*

*Rainbow Magic*

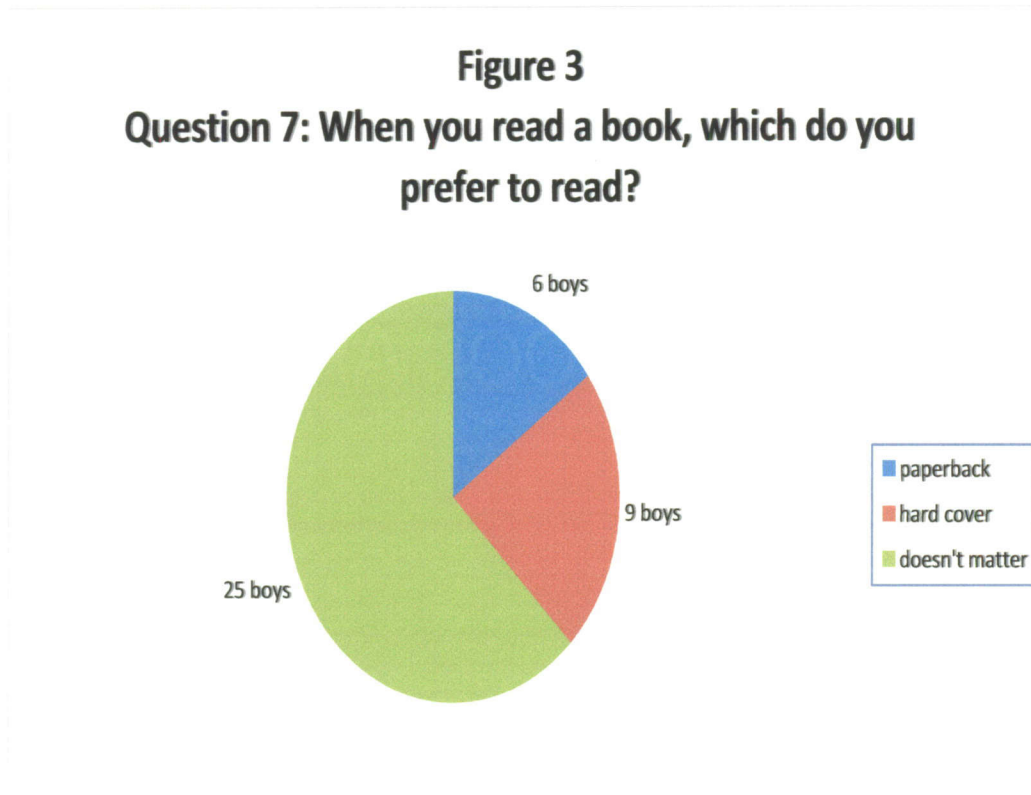
*The Meanest Thing to Say*

*Stone Soup*

*Stuart Little*

### Question 7

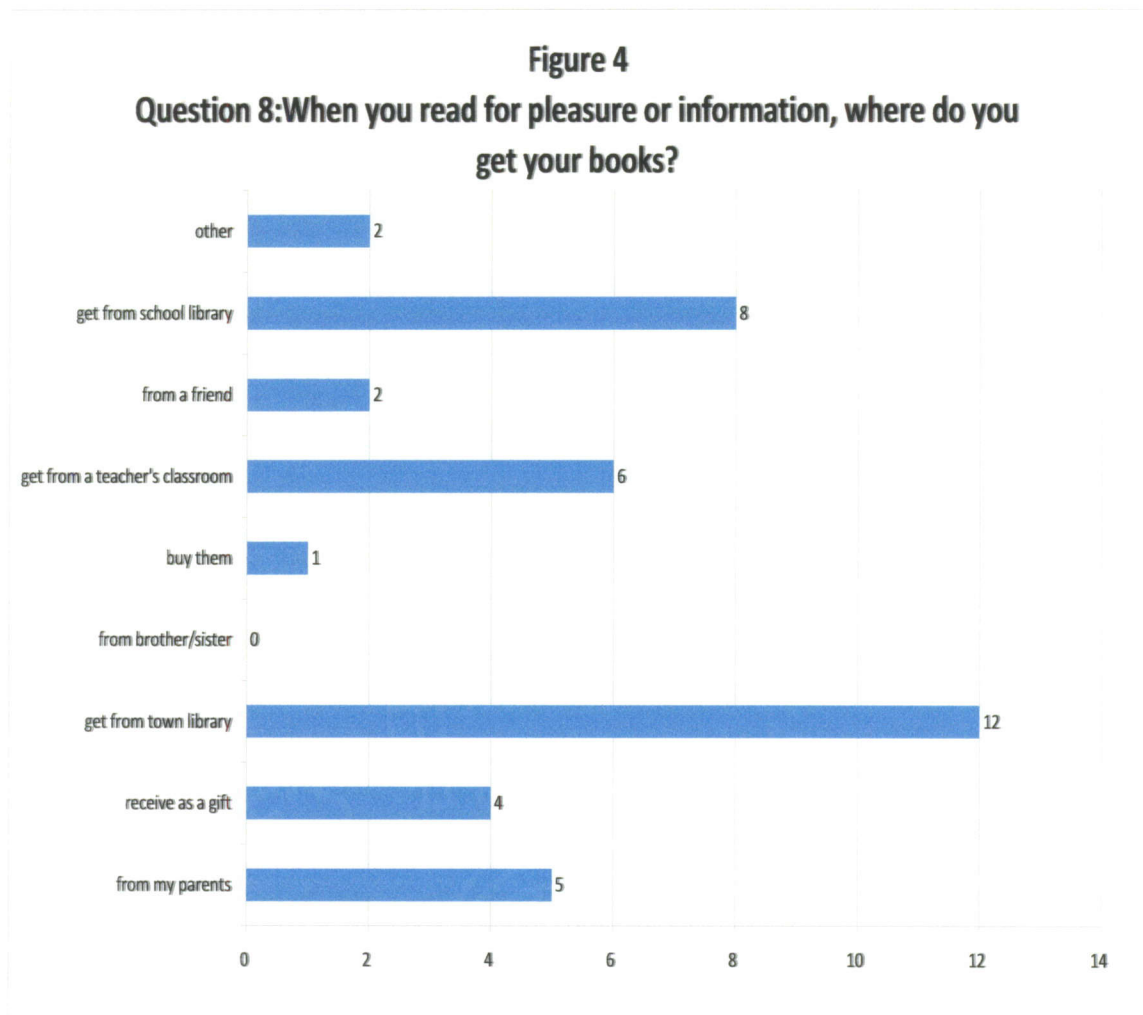
Question 7 asked the boys if they had a preference for the covering of a book (see Figure 3).



A total of 25 (62%) of the 40 boys did not have a preference.

## Question 8

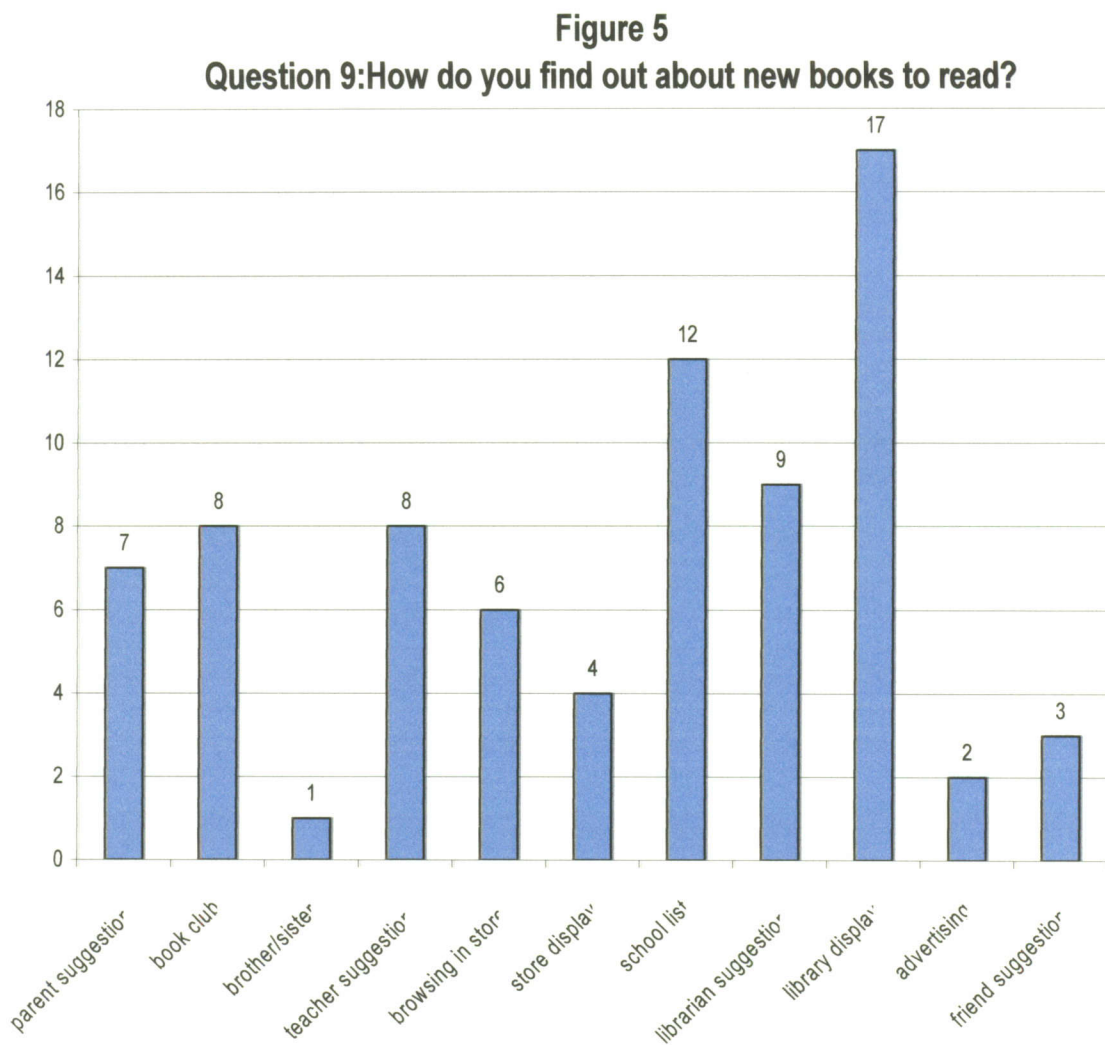
Question 8 asked the boys about their sources of reading materials. The results in Figure 3 show a clear indicator that boys are depending on libraries and classrooms as their suppliers of books. This reinforces the need for schools and libraries to make sure that there are materials available to meet their interest (see Figure 4).



Only one boy indicated the ability to actually buy a book. Books received from parents or as gifts were the only other sources.

### Question 9

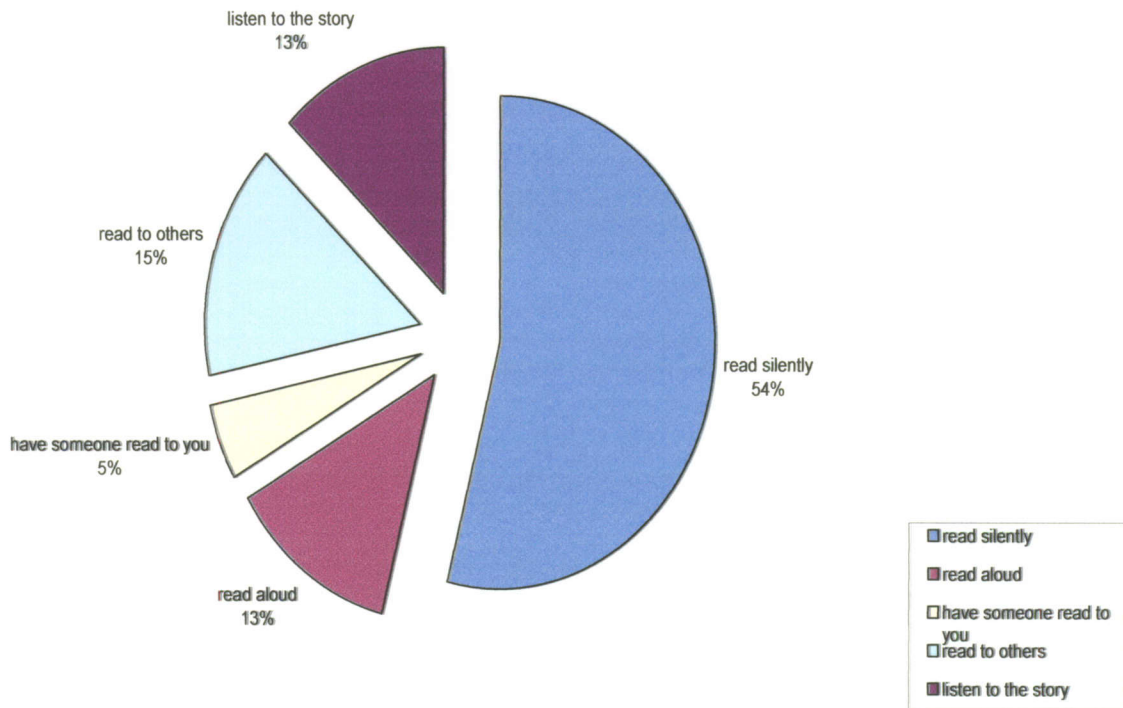
Question 9 asked how the boys found out about new books to read. Figure 5 shows the highest choices of locating new books were library displays and school lists. Again, it is shown that the boys depend on their libraries and school to help expose them to new material available (see Figure 5).



## Question 10

Question 10 asked how boys preferred to read a book. A total of 54% of the young boys liked to read silently. Reading to others and listening to stories held high percentages also (see Figure 6).

**Figure 6**  
**Question 10: How do you like to read?**





## Question 11

Question 11 asked the boys how many books they personally owned. This is an important question to gain some knowledge about home and whether books are available to the boys outside of school. The number of books were counted in each grade, then divided by the number of respondents; to give an average per home.

With the third grade boys, several misread the question. Their answers were not among the calculations. The total number of books owned by third grade boys was 205. There were 9 boys that responded correctly, making the average of books 22.7 per boy.

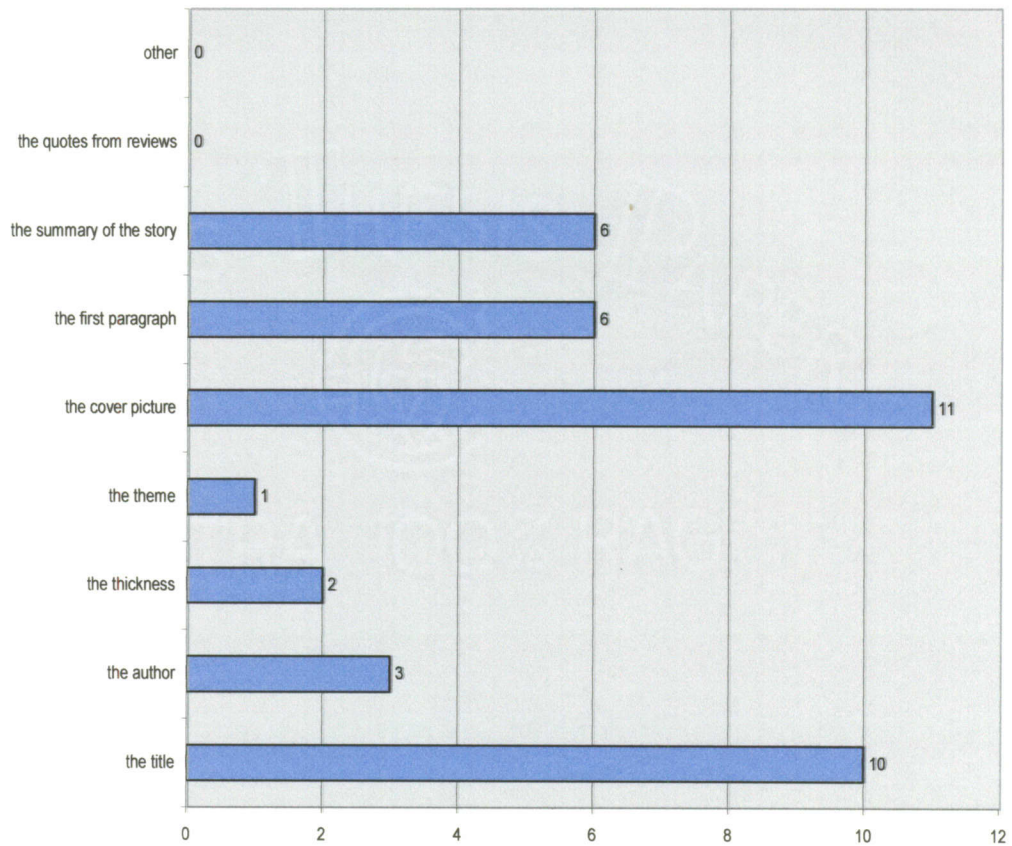
With the fourth grade boys, all responded to the question. There were 14 boys to respond giving a total of 153 books owned by them and in the home. This resulted in an average of 10.9 books per boy.

With the fifth grade boys, 7 responded correctly to the question. The 7 responses gave a total of 221 books owned by them and in their homes. Using the information given, there was an average of 31.4 books per boy. There were 5 boys that did not respond or responded incorrectly.

## Question 12

Question 12 asked boys what book characteristic encouraged them to read a book. The boys tended to use the cover and title as a basis for selecting. Using just the title and the cover picture can short-change the boys from venturing into some wonderful reads. Librarians and teachers should focus on teaching other methods to use in the selection process (see Figure 7).

**Figure 7**  
**Question 12: If you are browsing in a library or store, what characteristic of a book encourages you to read it?**



### Question 13

Question 13 asked the boys about how many hours they watched television. The hours were added and then calculated by the number of boys to give an average of time boys watched television.

Third grade:

Third grade boys watched a total of 113 hours of television. With 13 boys on this level, the average is 8.7 hours per boy.

Fourth grade:

Fourth grade boys watched a total of 81 hours of television. With 14 boys on this level, the average amount of television watched was 5.8 hours per boy.

Fifth grade:

Fifth grade boys watched a total of 50 hours of television. There were 3 boys that did not respond to the question. The average, without the 3 boys added in, was 5.5 hours per boy.

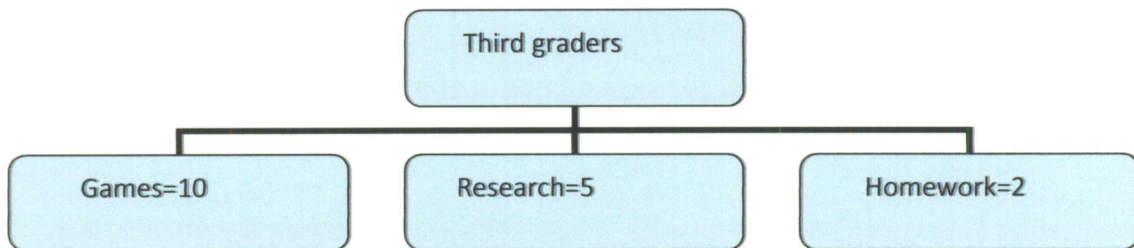
Using the information given on this question, it can be assumed that the boys are watching less television as their grade level and perhaps homework increased.

## Question 14

Question 14 asked the boys about what they used the computer for. Boys in the various grades should have a multitude of uses for their computers. The boys at all levels were honest in selecting play games as their primary use for the computer (see Figure 8).

Figure 8

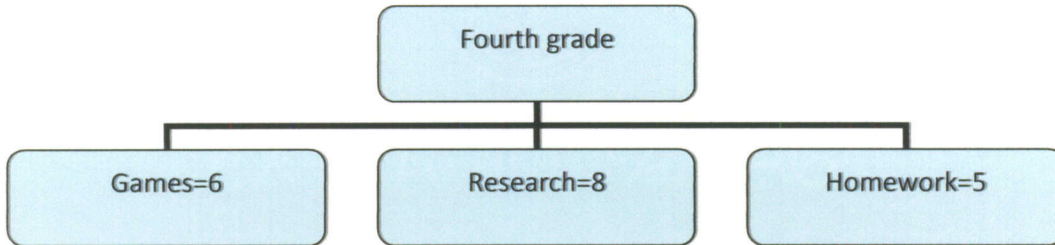
Question 14: Third grade computer use



The fourth grade boys seemed to have a balance in their computer time. They did do some research work, whether it was for class or pleasure (see Figure 9).

Figure 9

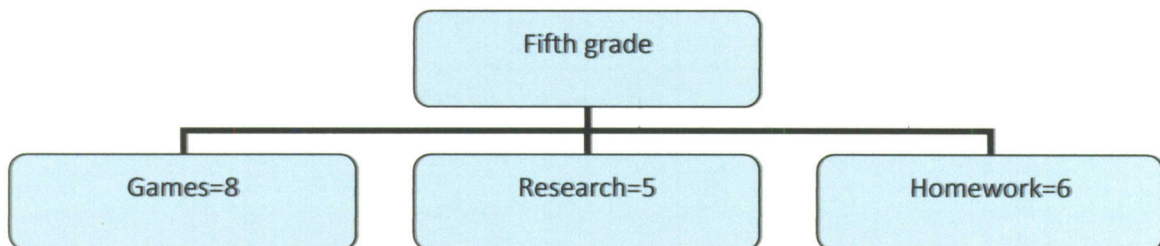
Question 14: Fourth grade computer use



Fifth grade boys balance out their computer time also. There were still a high number of boys just playing games. But, if research and homework were combined, there was a higher number of times spent constructively on the computer (see Figure 10).

Figure 10

Question 14: Fifth grade computer use

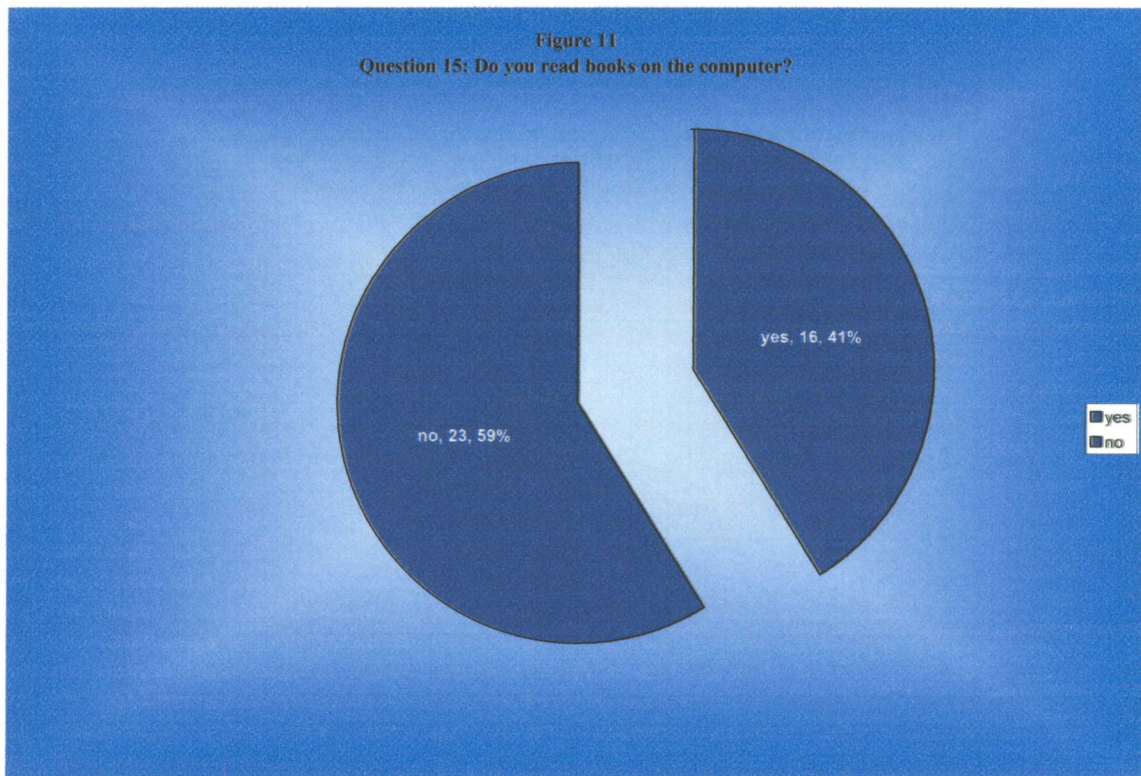


There were a few miscellaneous answers such as reading, downloading music, and watching movies, that were not included in the charts. These few items are mentioned to show that there were some other usages of the computers. It may be that boys needed more direction as to purpose of the computer.

## Question 15

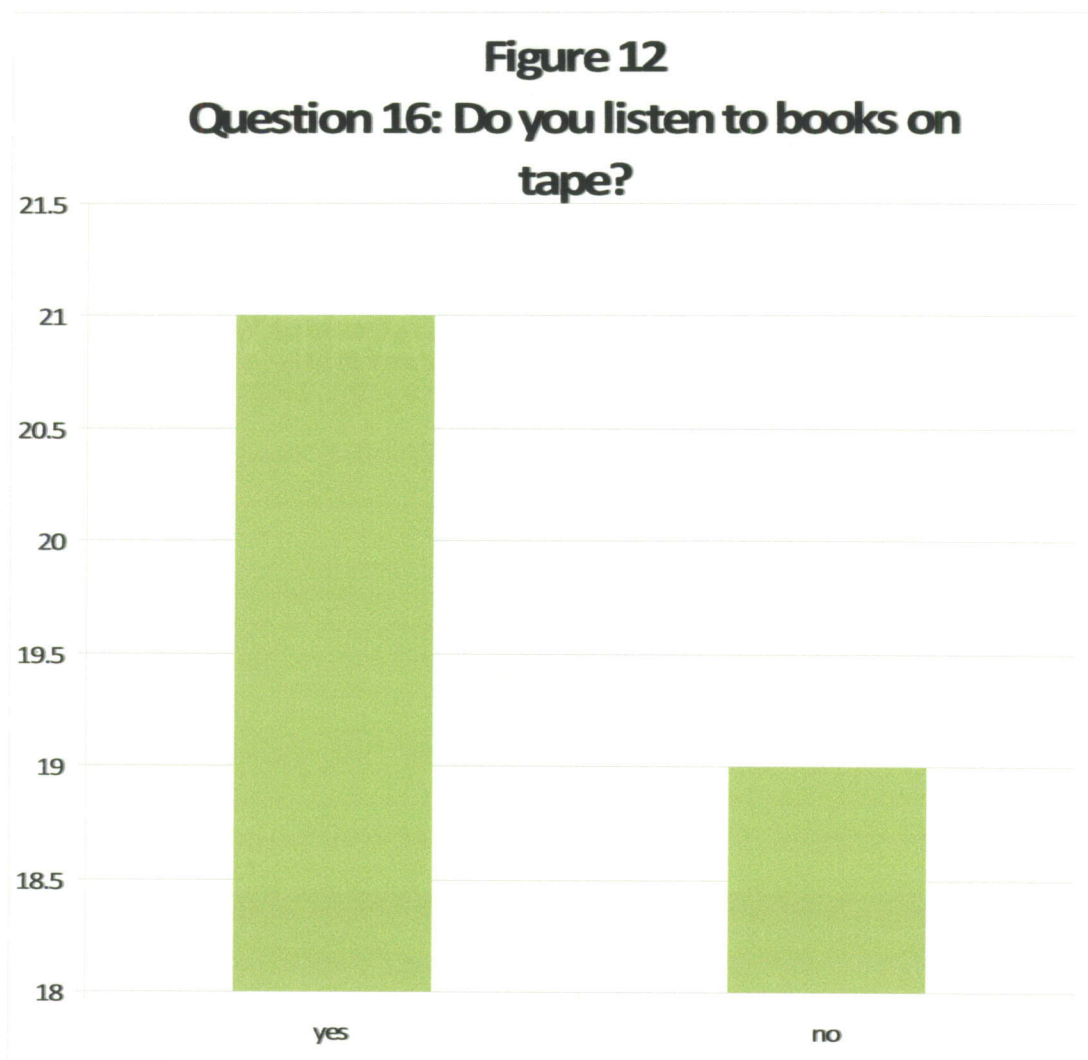
Question 15 asked the boys if they ever read a book on the computer. The results show that 16 of 39 (70%) of the boys at all levels were reading on line. This is an initiative that can be easily incorporated into their reading experiences in the classroom or in the library (see Figure 11).

Figure 11



## Question 16

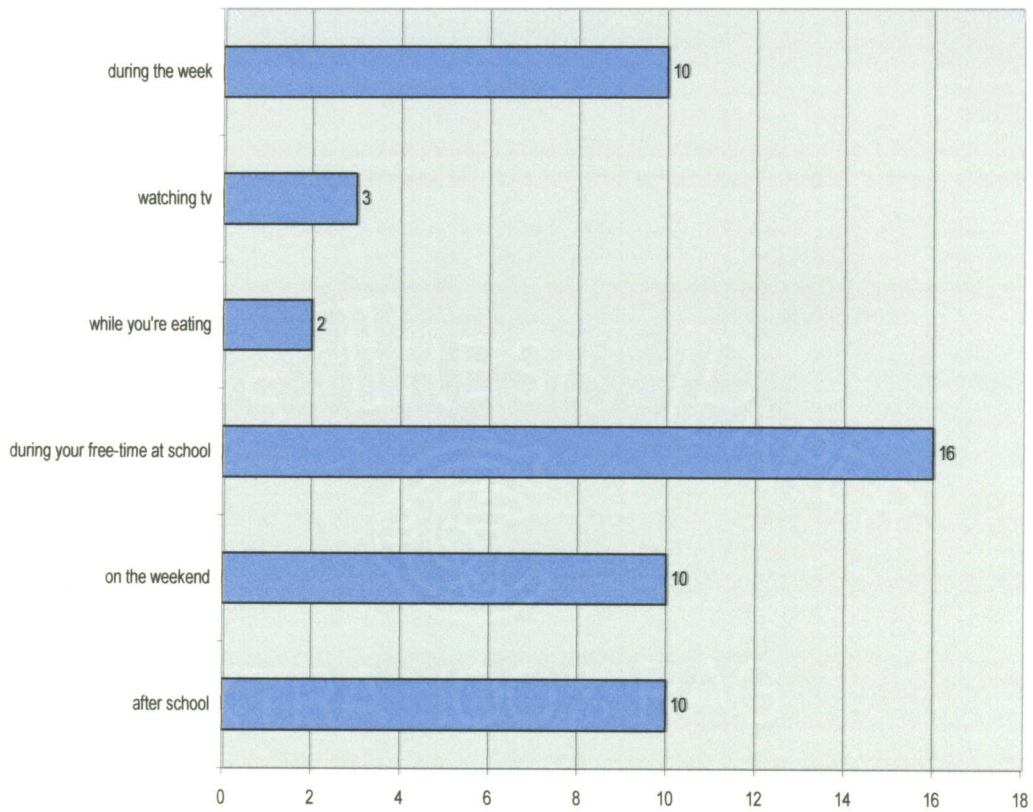
Question 16 asked the boys if they listened to tapes on books. They had to respond yes or no to this question. The boys at all grade levels were doing some listening to books. This is another area where exposure can be greatly increased. The more children (boys) hear the printed word, the more they may be encouraged to do more reading on their own (see Figure 12).



### Question 17

Question 17 asked when the boys read for pleasure. The boys seem to enjoy reading during their free-time at school. This would seem to fit with where the boys look for and select their books. There is a continuous demand for the schools and libraries to supply the boys with not only books, but the time to experience them (see Figure 13).

Figure 13  
Question 17: When do you read for pleasure?

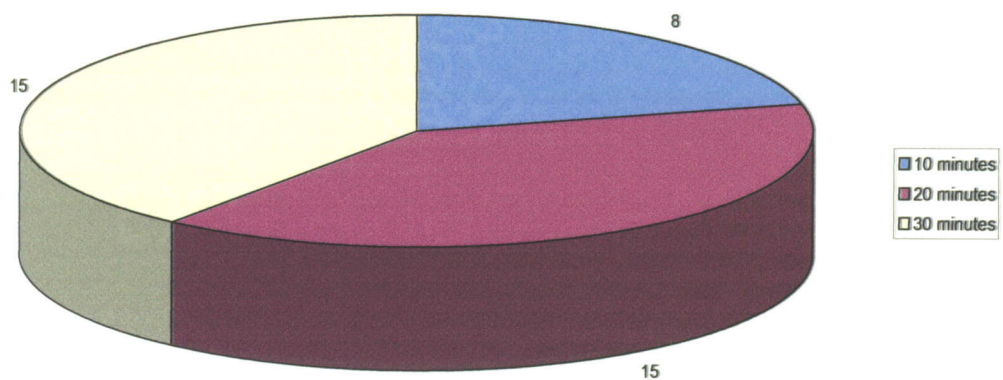




## Question 18

Question 18 asked about the amount of time they spend reading each day. The boys were each reading at least 20 to 30 minutes daily. Several of the boys wrote in answers of a hour of reading time. Boys should be encouraged to read at least 20 minutes each day, and they seem to be on the right track (see Figure14).

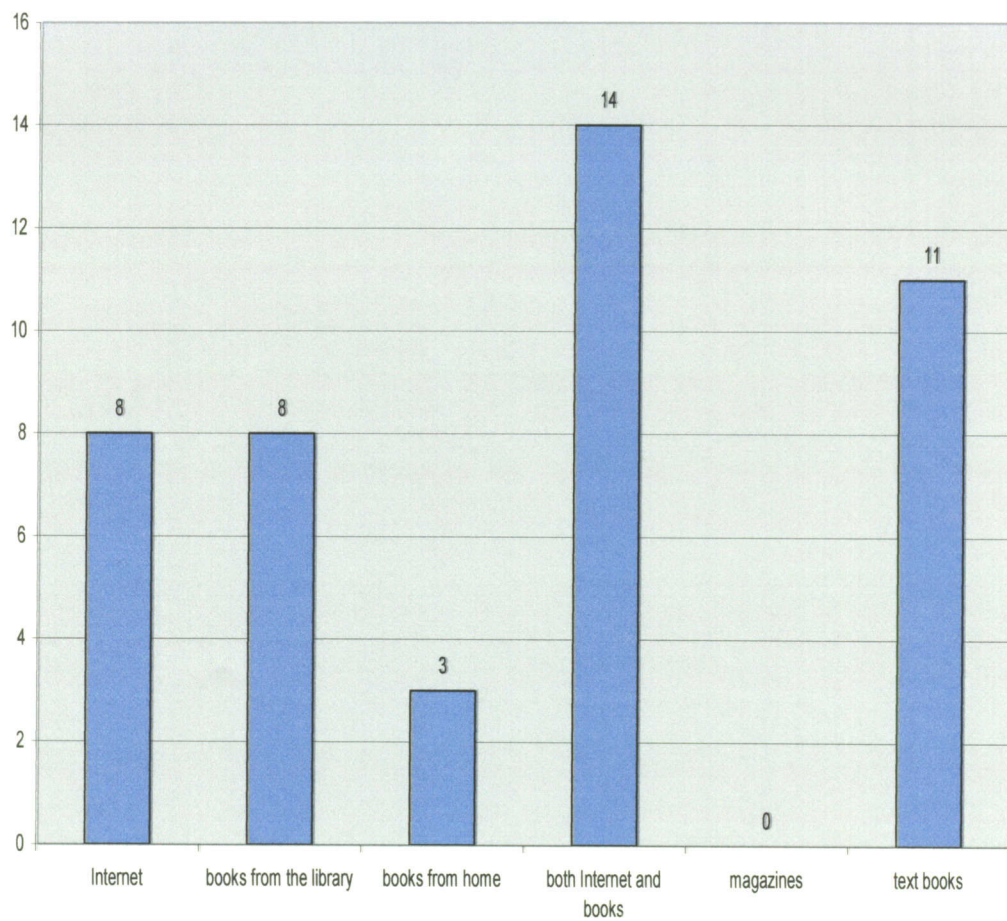
**Figure 14**  
**Question 18: How much time do you spend reading?**



## Question 19

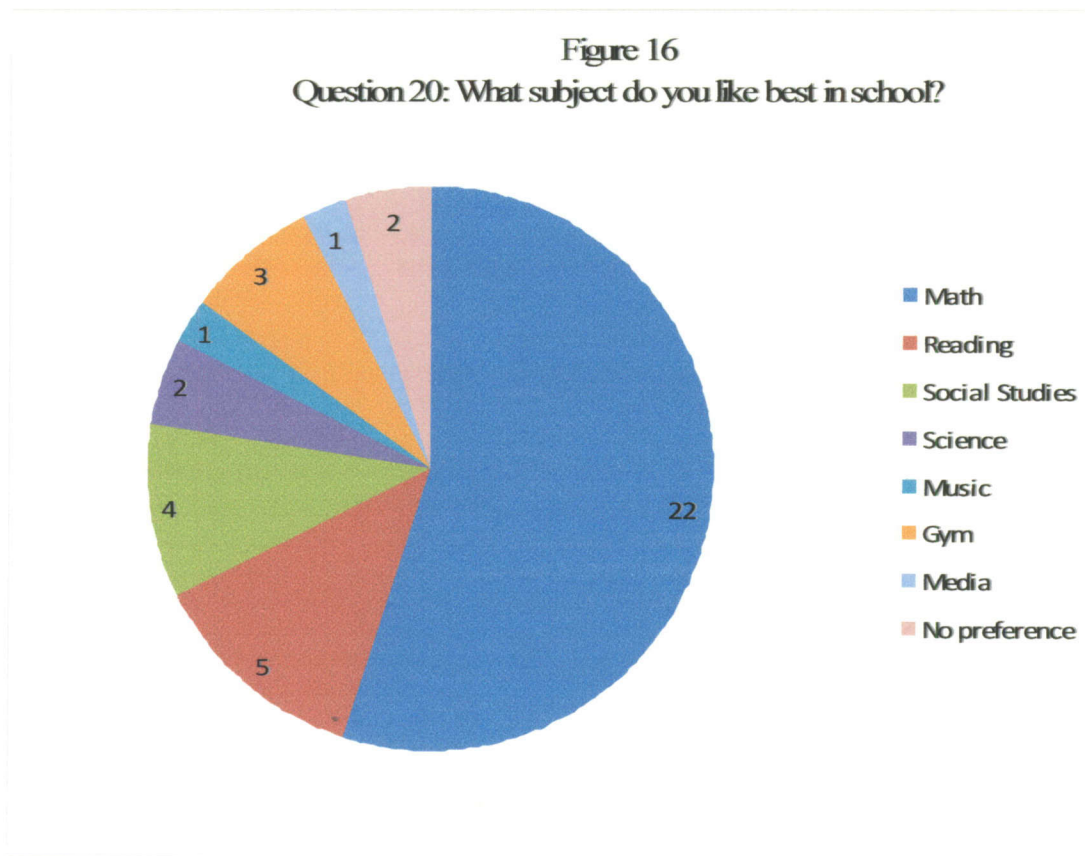
Question 19 examined the resources boys use for class assignments. The chart shows that the boys indicate their use of the Internet and books to complete assignments. There is also a strong use of text books for assignments. This again reinforces the importance of the school and library in the roles of the boys reading lives (see Figure 15).

**Figure 15**  
**Question 19: Resources used in assignment completion.**



### Question 20

In Question 20 the boys were asked to identify their favorite subject in school. This question was left open for the boys to write in their answers. Math received the highest write in with 55%. A few boys selected two subjects, which made the count higher than forty responses. Several electives were written in as a subject (music, gym, and media). A couple of the boys had no favorite, so they left it blank. For years math was the subject that boys reigned in, and it continues to be one of their favorite subject (see Figure 16).



## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS

Using the data collected from the young boys at Cadwalader Elementary School shows boys are reading. The majority of boys see themselves as great readers. These boys according to the data are reading a variety of books, with sports being their favorite topic. Most of the boys were able to list their favorite book and author.

It is certain that the school and library play an important role when it comes to being a supplier of books. They have indicated that the list supplied by their teachers and the displays in the library helps in their decision making about books. However, an assumption can be made that there are also books in their homes.

There is some information about hours spent reading, and hours spent watching television that needs some clarification. The computer usage shows a high amount of time used for playing games. Some computer time is being used for reports and research, and they did note a favorite subject which was math. Several of the boys wrote in that they would go to several math sites, such as First in Math. They are also using the Internet, books, and text books to get information and complete homework assignments.

## Summary

As the librarian at Cadwalader Elementary School I am familiar with the young boys. There have been plenty of opportunities to observe these boys in the library. Some of the information collected did not give a true picture of some of these boys. For instance, several of the third graders are low readers, but classified themselves as great readers. This is typical of young boys not wanting to feel inferior to their peers. I really wanted the boys to be honest in their responses.

There are several areas where some more effort by the teachers and librarian could make a difference. We need to expose the boys to other types of books available to them within the classrooms and library. We can introduce and emphasize reading on-line as well as audio books to the boys. The boys can work or read at their own pace without embarrassment. I can see that more free time to read during the school hours is a necessity. They would have access to books in a quiet environment with the aid of the teacher or librarian if needed. These data have provided the school with some new avenues to investigate in helping our young boys.

The question still remains are our boys reading less well today than years past? Basal-reader authors would probably say no. They would cite such evidence as the increase in book sales, greater use of the libraries, and more wide spread reading in general. It seems that reliable evidence is truly hard to obtain, such as the case with this study. I have found in this study that no one thing is consistent. There are lots of variables to content with in order to make a constructive decision. Is there a “boy crisis” in reading or not?

I believe we have to look at each environment separately then collectively in order to answer this question. Using a questionnaire alone without observations will continue to leave the question as vague. We need specific tools to measure the efforts of our young boys and the tools need to be the same regardless of environment, geographic area, or grade level.

Reading is such an important skill; I believe that we can expose children to a variety of reading in a variety of ways. It is important to enrich our student's lives with rich literature. We want our boys and girls to have equal footing in the world and it should begin in our classrooms. Yes, boys are different and we have to learn to adapt our learning institutions to meeting some of their needs. Change is imperative if we want our students to grow, we must grow too. Our classrooms and libraries are in serious need for change, physically, and instructionally.

This study has given me a new outlook on young boys and reading. There will be some profound changes within my library. I want to begin by setting the example at my school.

#### Recommendations

Suggestions for further research would be to expand the sample, which could include private schools, parochial schools, and charter schools. This would give us a wider breath of the study.

Another suggestion would be to expand the geographical areas, suburban, urban, and rural. We can look for similarities and differences within these areas. We may find huge differences, which will prove to be helpful too.

I would like to see a comparison completed between the boys and girls of the same school and see how the boys fare. Then we will be able to help bring equity to their learning. Before conducting any further study, the questionnaire would have to be made clearer for the students. A few of the questions were a bit vague. Regardless, reading is an inseparable part of education and an invaluable part of each student's life.

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APPENDIX A

Principal Request Form

## APPENDIX A

### Principal Request Form

Mrs. Jeannette Harris  
501 Edgewood Ave  
Trenton, NJ 08618

Dear Mrs. Harris,

My name is Brenda Koonce. I am a Librarian with the Trenton Board of Education, and a graduate student in the School and Public Librarianship program at Rowan University. I will be conducting a survey of young boys in the following grades, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup>, trying to pinpoint their opinions about literature and how they view reading in the larger scheme of life. This survey will help us as educators to make sure that we're doing our part in making reading materials accessible to our young boys.

I am requesting permission to survey students of the various grades. My intentions are to hear from these young boys and try to understand where we can improve and in what areas. I also want to make sure that reading materials within classrooms and libraries are boy-friendly, gearing this materials towards their interest. The students will be asked to have a permission form signed by their parents and all information will be kept confidential. I have attached a copy of the permission form and the survey for your convenience. If you need any more information or have any concerns please contact me at 656-4661 or [bkoonce@trenton.k12.nj.us](mailto:bkoonce@trenton.k12.nj.us). Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Brenda Koonce

**APPENDIX B**

**Parent Letter**

## APPENDIX B

Brenda J. Koonce  
Cadwalader Elementary School  
501 Edgewood Ave  
Trenton, NJ 08618  
(609) 656-4661

Dear Parent/Guardian:

I am a graduate student in the School and Public Librarianship program at Rowan University as well as a Librarian/Media Specialist at Cadwalader Elementary School. I will be conducting a research project under the supervision of Dr. Marilyn Shontz as part of my master's thesis. The purpose of this study is to find out what genres boys are reading and if boys are reading, why or why not. I want to determine how much time is dedicated to recreational reading by 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> grade boys and what are the topics and genres that interest them. Questionnaires will be administered to each boy regardless of reading level. Also, these questionnaires will be anonymous. The results of this study will help in gearing reading materials towards their interest. Additionally, it will be used as a basis for analyzing library and classroom resources. The data will be useful in the purchasing of certain materials as a result of this survey.

Your decision whether or not to allow your child to participate in this study will have absolutely no effect on your child's standing in any of his/her classes. At the conclusion of this study, a summary of the group results can be made available to you. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at (609) 656-4661 or you may contact Dr. Marilyn Shontz at (856) 256-3500 ext. 3858.  
Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Brenda J. Koonce

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Please indicate whether or not you wish to have your child participate in this study by checking the appropriate statement below and returning this letter to your child's librarian by March 9-13, 2009.

I grant permission for my child \_\_\_\_\_ to participate in this study.

I do not grant permission for my child \_\_\_\_\_ to participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Parent/Guardian signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

## APPENDIX C

### Survey

## APPENDIX C

### Survey

#### What Do You Read???

DEAR STUDENT: This survey is being conducted in Cadwalader Elementary, in 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> grade. I would like to find out about your interest and your experience with books. Please answer each question honestly and accurately. If you're not sure of a question, please ask. **Do not** put your name on this form.

Name of School \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

Your Grade (circle) 3 4 5

1. How do you feel about reading and how would you rate yourself as a reader?  
(circle an answer)  
great    average    non-reader

2. Topics that you are most interested in reading about: (circle three)
- |                        |                 |                        |           |
|------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|-----------|
| sports                 | romance/love    | physical handicaps     | science   |
| history                | true stories    | horror/supernatural    | animals   |
| family life            | science fiction | adventure/survival     | religion  |
| biographies            | death           | math/computers         | war       |
| problems of growing up |                 | psychological/problems |           |
| mystery                | fantasy         | famous classics        | self-help |
| jokes/riddles          | cartoons/humor  |                        |           |

3. What's the title of the most recent book you've read?

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4. List your three favorite books that you've read in the past year.

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5. Give the name(s) of your favorite author(s).

---

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6. What's the title of the worst book you've read?

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7. When you read a book, which do you prefer to read? (circle)

paperback    hardcover    doesn't matter

8. When you read for pleasure or information, where do you get your books? (circle one)

from my parent(s)    receive as a gift    get from the town library

from brother/sister    buy them    get from a teacher's classroom

from a friend    get from the school library    other (specify):

9. How do you find out about new books to read? (circle two)

parent suggestion    book club catalog    brother/sister suggestion

teacher suggestion    browsing in store    store display



school list                      librarian suggestion    library display  
advertising                      friend suggestion      browsing library

10. Do you like to: (circle one answer)

read silently    read aloud    have someone read to you  
read to others    listen to the story

11. How many books do you personally own? \_\_\_\_\_

12. If you are browsing in a library or store, what characteristic of a book encourages you to want to read it? (circle one)

the title                      the author                      the thickness  
the theme                      the cover picture                      the first paragraph  
the summary of the story    the quotes from reviews      other (specify):

13. How many hours do you watch television? \_\_\_\_\_

14. When you're on the computer, what do you use it for?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

15. Do you ever read books on the computer? (circle)

yes      no

16. Do you listen to tapes on books? (circle)

yes      no

17. When do you read for pleasure?

after school      on the weekend      during your free-time at school  
while you're eating    watching tv      during the week

18. How much time do you spend reading? (circle one answer)

10 minutes      20 minutes      30 minutes

19. When you have to complete an assignment do you use (circle your answer(s))

Internet      books from the library      books from home  
both internet and books    magazines    text books

20. What subject do you like best in school? \_\_\_\_\_

