

THESIS

A SURVEY OF RECREATIONAL READING
ATTITUDES AND INTERESTS AMONG SIXTH GRADE STUDENTS
IN THE WAPAKONETA CITY SCHOOLS

MASTER'S PROJECT

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by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES.....		iv
Chapter:		
I.	INTRODUCTION OF THE PROBLEM.....	1
	Justification of the Problem.....	1
	Problem Statement.....	3
	Assumptions.....	3
	Limitations.....	4
	Definition of Terms.....	4
II.	REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	5
	Student Attitudes toward Recreational Reading.....	5
	Developing Positive Attitudes toward Reading.....	6
	Student Recreational Reading Interests.....	10
	Factors Affecting Recreational Reading Interests..	12
	Programs to Develop Participation in Reading.....	14
III.	PROCEDURE.....	17
	Subjects.....	17
	Setting.....	17
	Data Collection.....	18
IV.	RESULTS.....	20
	Presentation of the Results.....	20
	Discussion of the Results.....	31
V.	SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	36
	Summary.....	36
	Conclusions.....	38
	Recommendations.....	38
APPENDICES.....		39
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....		41

LIST OF TABLES

1.	Recreational Reading Attitudes among All Sixth Grade Students in the Wapakoneta City Schools. Positive Attitude Statements	22
2.	Recreational Reading Attitudes among Sixth Grade Male Students in the Wapakoneta City Schools. Positive Attitude Statements	23
3.	Recreational Reading Attitudes among Sixth Grade Female Students in the Wapakoneta City Schools. Positive Attitude Statements.	24
4.	Recreational Reading Attitudes among All Sixth Grade Students in the Wapakoneta City Schools. Negative Attitude Statements	25
5.	Recreational Reading Attitudes among Sixth Grade Male Students in the Wapakoneta City Schools. Negative Attitude Statements	26
6.	Recreational Reading Attitudes among Sixth Grade Female Students in the Wapakoneta City Schools. Negative Attitude Statements	27
7.	Rank Order Listing of Recreational Reading Interests among All Sixth Grade Students in the Wapakoneta City Schools	28
8.	Rank Order Listing of Recreational Reading Interests among Sixth Grade Male Students in the Wapakoneta City Schools	29
9.	Rank Order Listing of Recreational Reading Interests among Sixth Grade Female Students in the Wapakoneta City Schools	30

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Justification of the Problem

While many sixth grade students seldom appeared to use free time at school or home for recreational reading, it was the author's concern that this apparent lack of interest in reading for pleasure was limiting the emotional, social, and experiential development of the student's education. In a qualitative analysis of adolescent leisure time preferences, Neuman (1982, p. 299) stated, "Recreational reading encourages the development of interests and provides students with opportunities to acquire self-insights, knowledge, and social awareness that are independent of their immediate environment."

A review of the literature indicated, however, that sixth grade students seldom chose reading as a leisure time activity. (McEady-Gilliead, 1989) This lack of recreational reading time was a product of competition for time and peer influences. Youth were involved in other activities such as playing the piano, dancing, playing football, studying gymnastics, swimming competitively, and playing soccer. Additionally, homework responsibilities and religious activities required more attention than in primary and middle elementary years. The importance of peer group

acceptance influenced leisure time activity choices as attending sleepovers and parties; participating in telephone talk; and taking trips to the mall impacted time usage decisions.

Yet, educators could ill afford to allow the development of recreational reading habits to stagnate during this adolescent stage. A longitudinal study by Himmelweit and Swift (1976) showed that the patterns of media preferences and tastes, including television, radio, cinema going, and reading, established by the age of 13 to 14 were highly predictive of adult use of that media. Fielding, Wilson, and Anderson (1986) found that children spent less of their free time reading as they entered preadolescence and adolescence. Even avid early readers became disinterested in recreational reading.

In her studies of fourth, fifth, and sixth graders, Neuman (1982) found that students who were light readers and chose television viewing as a leisure time activity for three or more hours daily were more likely to choose lower quality books than students who either viewed less television or spent more time reading for pleasure. Neuman (1982, p. 303) further concluded from her studies that "providing children with stimulating reading materials that are both demanding and varied during their leisure time should be a continuing concern in view of the potential implications for future reading."

In undertaking this study of recreational reading interests and attitudes of sixth grade students, the writer's intent was to explore the conceptual feelings and understandings students held toward recreational reading and the genre of literature that sparked a child's interest to choose reading as a recreational activity.

Problem Statement

The purpose of this study was two fold: first, to analyze the attitudes of sixth grade students toward recreational reading, and second, to determine the genre of literature sixth grade students chose for recreational reading.

Assumptions

In order to conduct this study, two surveys were used: a Likert-type scale to measure attitudes and a rank order literature genre interest scale. The writer assumed that the answers given by the students reflected their personal attitudes toward and interests in recreational reading. A second assumption by this writer was that the results of the survey group may be generalized to the entire population of sixth grade students with 95 percent accuracy.

Limitations

Several limitations affected the outcome of this study. One limitation was that the survey was conducted near the end of the academic school year as subjects of the study approached a higher grade level. A second limitation was possible varied interpretations of the questions. A third limitation was the limited availability of literature on sixth grade student attitudes toward recreational reading.

Definition of Terms

Recreational Reading. is reading as a leisure activity outside the required reading for an academic course.

Attitude. is a student's conceptual feelings and understandings about reading resulting from the student's past reading experiences and cultural group influences.

Interest. is the type of reading materials, or genre of literature, preferred for recreational reading.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Student Attitudes toward Recreational Reading

The research addressed student attitudes toward recreational reading in relation to academic achievement, selection of reading materials, and teaching model employed in middle school and junior high school classroom recreational reading programs.

Many students reading far below grade level had positive attitudes toward reading. In a study by Russ (1989) comparing the reading attitudes of students in a gifted education program with those of students in three regular classrooms both groups of students, gifted and low achieving, displayed positive attitudes toward reading. Because the gifted students displayed a slightly more positive attitude toward reading, it may indicate that where success in reading achievement already exists, there may be a stronger association between achievement and attitude. Yet, the positive attitudes displayed by low achieving students indicated a lack of correlation between the variables of attitude and low achievement in relation to reading at the junior high school level.

Low achieving students escalated negative attitudes toward recreational reading by choosing books at their frustration level. Stockton (1982) stated because low ability students tended to choose books from the shelves with little consideration of their ability to read them, a lack of

success with the materials they chose fostered the development of negative attitudes toward reading. Conversely, high ability students chose books they could read and thus manifested the development of positive reading attitudes.

Students involved in a peer-interaction model or a teacher-student conference model of recreational reading had more positive attitudes toward reading than students involved in a sustained-silent reading model or no model of recreational reading. In a study by Manning and Manning (1984), in the peer-interaction model students read self-selected materials at their own pace. They interacted with other students throughout the reading experience and participated in various paired or small group activities. The teacher-student conference model, which also provided for self-selection of materials and student imposed pacing, included individual weekly conferences 3 to 10 minutes in length. The focus of the conference was the current book being read by the student and plans for further reading.

As well as studying existing student attitudes toward recreational reading, researchers analyzed ways in which teachers impacted student attitudes through teaching behaviors and practices.

Developing Positive Attitudes toward Recreational Reading

Positive attitudes toward recreational reading among sixth grade students can be developed in the context of the classroom.

A positive attitude toward recreational reading can be achieved through proper selection of materials and activities in the classroom. Greaney and Hagarty (1987) recommended the focus of such selections should emphasize reading for pleasure rather than reading for utilitarian purposes. Activities must reinforce recreational reading as a satisfying and rewarding experience. However, recreational reading activities should not emphasize the attainment of cognitive skills when the goal of such a program is to develop favorable attitudes toward recreational reading. As a result of developing an improved attitude toward recreational reading, the improvement of reading skills will continue naturally when the student chooses to spend more time reading recreationally.

In a related study by Fredericks (1982) he concluded that a positive attitude toward recreational reading can be enhanced through careful planning of appropriate activities in the classroom. Such planning must include providing reading materials that meet the interests of the students. Encouraging children to become experts in their areas of interest and sharing their expertise through presentations and displays aids in the development of positive attitudes toward reading. Other activities suggested to develop positive recreational reading attitudes included creative book reporting, student publication and sharing of their own writing, monthly book parties, and a class "Reading Newsreport" periodical publication. Planning such activities will aid students in understanding how they can participate fully in the process of recreational reading.

A third study by Cothorn and Collins (1992) suggested that teachers can influence attitude toward recreational reading positively by using four

teaching behaviors: planning regular discussion of reading material, highlighting the relationships which exist between reading events and life events, use of bibliotherapy, and increasing student involvement in decisions made regarding learning. The first of these, planning discussion, reinforces with students that there may exist many different but appropriate interpretations of reading materials depending upon the prior knowledge each reader brings to the reading experience. Knowing the importance of each student's opinions, ideas, and interpretations encourages each child to invest more time and effort in the reading experience.

A second teaching behavior serves to intertwine reading events and real life events. According to Cothorn and Collins, a teacher's willingness to share personal interpretations of reading events and the prior experiences leading to those interpretations will encourage students to do likewise. Maintaining a respectful atmosphere for all participants is also important to encourage student sharing. Additionally, assessing student interest and guiding reading selections toward those interests also helps to relate reading to real life.

Another teaching behavior Cothorn and Collins suggested to increase a student's personal rewards from reading and thereby develop positive attitudes toward recreational reading is bibliotherapy. By comparing how book characters handle difficult decisions with the options available in similar real life situations, this method aids the reader in developing problem solving skills.

The final behavior outlined by Cothorn and Collins stressed the importance of student participation in the learning process. A teacher should guide the reader toward proper reading materials selection and establish timelines for completing reading and related response projects

based upon the reader's expressed reading preferences and opinions. In this way, the student becomes a participant in the planning process.

Two studies reviewed by this writer emphasized the importance of assisting reader selection of books as a means of developing positive attitudes toward recreational reading.

Matching students with appropriate books, as recommended by Lesesnes (1991b), helps to encourage lasting positive attitudes toward recreational reading. To do so, a teacher must know books and students' interests in reading materials. Secondly, a teacher must be committed to reading books that students like. Finally, a teacher must believe students are able to develop literary tastes and skills through their own reading materials.

To develop positive attitudes toward recreational reading among reluctant readers a teacher should avoid the characteristics of a book that may cause difficulties and look for those features which enhance the possibilities of enjoyment. Beckman (1984) found the reluctant reader prefers a book with an efficient beginning, avoiding details of setting and quickly getting to the plot of the story. A story with few characters and much dialogue helps a reluctant reader maintain interest in a book. Characteristics to avoid include flashbacks and use of dual narrators, which confuse understanding of plot development.

In addition to studying recreational reading attitudes and the development of positive attitudes toward recreational reading, researchers have also studied the genre of literature, book titles, and authors that

interest students for recreational reading purposes.

Student Recreational Reading Interests

Three studies reviewed by this writer identified specific genre, authors, and titles which interested students for recreational reading.

Middle school students' recreational reading interests included books with the characteristics of humor; mystery and suspense; and real life situations. Specific humorous books of interest to young adolescents included *Aliens for Breakfast* by Spinner, *Maniac Magee* by Spinnelli, *Losing Joe's Place* by Korman, and Myers' *The Mouse Trap*. Books cited as interesting which contained the characteristics of mystery and suspense included Avi's *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle* and *The Man Who was Poe*, and Paulsen's *Canyons*. A final category which Lesesne (1991a) suggested was especially appealing to adolescents included real life situational books such as *The Face on the Milk Carton* by Cooney, and Pfeffer's *The Year without Michael*.

In a related study by Isaacs (1990), she indicated the recreational reading interests of middle school students included suspense and horror, real life situations, fantasy, mystery, sports, humor, animals, short stories, death and dying, romance, and survival. Popular suspense and horror books included *Ransom* by Lois Duncan. Real life situations were reflected in Judy Blume's books *Deenie*, *Then Again Maybe I Won't*, and *Tiger Eyes*, and Cynthia Voigt's *Izzy, Willy-Nilly*. Appealing books of fantasy included *Crewel Lye*,

On a Pale Horse, and *Split Infinity* by Piers Anthony, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis, and E.B. White's *Stuart Little*. A preferred humor author was Paula Danziger. Other books and authors of interest included *The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton, *Souder* by William Armstrong, romance books by Barbara Cohen, and Robert Cormier's *The Chocolate War* and *Beyond the Chocolate War*.

A third study found recreational reading interests of sixth grade students to include mysteries, adventure, scary stories, humor, romance, and sports. Coy-Shaffer and Pettit (1989) found preferred authors in these categories included Judy Blume, Beverly Cleary, and Stephen King. Moderate interest was expressed for the classics, science fiction, nature and science books, fantasy and folklore, famous people books, and animal stories. In contrast, literary genre which had little appeal to these students included historical fiction and informational geography and history books.

A final study of recreational reading interests reviewed by this writer explored the varied preferences in genre across achievement levels.

The recreational reading interests of high, average, and low achieving sixth grade students are similar. According to Anderson, Higgins, and Wurster (1985), all three achievement groups showed a high preference for tall tale and fantasy books. High and average achievers also preferred books with adventure, mystery, and realistic situations. Average and low achievers shared an interest in informational books.

The recreational reading interests of middle school students proved to

be quite diverse, according to findings in the above mentioned journal articles and ERIC documents. Researchers have also explored the many and varied factors contributing to preferences in literary genre, authors, and book titles.

Factors Affecting Recreational Reading Interests

The literature identified many different factors which affected recreational reading interests among middle school students.

The varying developmental levels of emotions, skills, and intellect are factors which affected recreational reading interests of middle school students in a study by Isaacs (1992). Those students at a younger emotional and intellectual development often chose books written for elementary students with comforting, familiar experiences. Students who displayed greater development of skills, emotions, and intellect often chose books originally published for older teens and adults. Recreational reading interests also reflected the sex of the reader with boys showing more interest in science fiction and high fantasy books and girls indicating a greater interest in real life situational books and books with strong female characters. A final and very strong factor affecting recreational reading interest was the reading recommendations of others, with peer recommendations holding greater significance than the suggestions from teachers and librarians.

Low interest genres, including science fiction, historical fiction, fantasy, famous people, and animal stories, could be a reflection of several factors: the developmental level of these students, lack of children's literature written in these areas, lack of easy accessibility to these genre of literature, and the inability of a teacher to motivate student reading in these areas. (Coy-Shaffer and Pettit, 1989)

Factors affecting recreational reading interests as identified by the "Young Adult Choices" program (Samuels, 1989) included the students' knowledge of the literary structures of subject matter, genre, writing style, characterization, plot, theme, setting, and illustrations. In this program, the greatest interest in books was a response to interesting subject matter in primarily nonfiction books. Other student's interests reflected a preference for any work within a given genre. However, as a basis for many students' recreational reading interest was an ability to critically analyze the literary structure of a book and evaluate its ability to provide realism to the student through the reading experience.

Factors affecting recreational reading interests as identified by the "Children's Choices" program (Carter and Harris, 1982) included characterization, style, theme, plot, and illustrations. In this program children indicated theme as an important factor in book approval. The story line, plot, was a secondary measure of interest. Many students based their interests on characterization, looking for books with characters who had concerns similar to their own. Loyalty to authors became evident for those children who's interests where based on writing style. A final factor affecting recreational reading in this program was a preference for

illustrations, though few fictional works above elementary levels contained such illustrations.

In response to the need to develop participation and interests in recreational reading, various programs have been developed for use in schools.

Programs to Develop Participation in Recreational Reading

Four programs were reviewed by the writer as a reflection of their ability to develop participation in recreational reading.

The Story Bowl program was designed in one middle school to develop participation in recreational reading that would continue throughout an individual's lifetime. (Hodges, 1988) The culminating competition of Story Bowl provided an opportunity for students to compete in teams, pitting their knowledge of literature against competing groups. Initially divided into heterogeneous groups of six, each team read twenty books from a required reading list. The team members then analyzed the reading by completing story structure forms for each book and discussed their reading as a group. Not only had each student read at least one book from the required list prior to the competition, but after the competition was completed, teachers and librarians noticed evidence of more recreational reading activity. Books from the Story Bowl reading lists and other books by the same authors were in greater demand in the school library. Students also participated in more

discussions about their recreational reading experiences with teachers and parents.

The “Literature at Home” program, with activities for 36 high interest, high quality books, was designed to stimulate recreational reading participation. (Topolovac et al, 1982) Twenty-four of the books were recommended for middle school aged students with reading levels ranging from fourth through ninth grades. For each book, Topolovac included a story synopsis, vocabulary list, short-answer questions, related writing projects, and other creative projects. They suggest using the materials in large group, small group and individualized teaching situations.

A combination of book fairs, a paperback book exchange club, and weekly Read-Ins was used at J. William Leary Junior High to improve participation in recreational reading. (Crist, 1983) Guidelines for the book exchange included carefully checking books brought in for the exchange to determine their appropriateness, categorizing books for exchange by subject, arranging for volunteers to work during the exchange, and arranging for gift certificates for students who did not have books to exchange. Critical to the success of this program was the establishment of a thirty minute weekly pleasure-reading time. Everyone in the building read at this time, including teachers, students, administrators, support staff, and visitors to the building. While no formal studies were conducted to determine the effectiveness of the program, evidence of its success included the active and eager participation of students in all phases of the program.

A recreational reading program at the middle school level aimed at improving participation included 10 to 15 minutes of free reading time in the classroom daily, schoolwide sustained silent reading 15 to 20 minutes weekly, and available reading materials to meet a wide range of reading interest and abilities. Coy-Shaffer and Pettit (1989) further established a need for parents and educators to guide recreational reading growth by reading aloud to students, acting as guest readers in classrooms, and discussing with students what they have read. A final concern of their program was the need for improved funding to provide the needed reading materials in classrooms. Suggested funding sources included the school budget, grant money, business and community partnerships, money raised through book fairs, and student donations of used books.

All four recreational reading programs, though different in design, claimed to improve student participation in recreational reading.

CHAPTER III

PROCEDURE

Subjects

The subjects chosen for this study were sixth grade students at the Wapakoneta Middle School in Wapakoneta, Ohio. The students' ages ranged from 11 to 14 with the largest age group being 12 to 13 years old. The total population of 300 students included 146 boys and 154 girls.

Setting

School. The midwestern school system used for this study implemented the middle school concept, including grades six, seven, and eight, in the 1989-1990 school year. At the time of the survey, a total of 890 students were enrolled at these grade levels.

Prior to entering sixth grade the students attended one of the five public elementary schools or one private school. These students brought a diversity of academic backgrounds to the middle school.

Community. Located in west central Ohio, the community where the study was conducted was comprised of a town of approximately six thousand people and several smaller towns in a rural setting. Many people who lived in the school district were employed by industries in surrounding communities.

Data Collection

Construction of the Data Collecting Instruments. The instruments were constructed by the writer as adaptations and compilations of similar instruments found during the review of the related literature. In this way the writer established content validity of the data collecting instruments.

The first instrument was a Likert-type questionnaire addressing recreational reading attitudes. (See Appendix A) The total 14 statements were divided equally between those which may have been perceived as positive statements and those statements which may have been viewed as negative.

The second instrument required students to rank order their recreational reading interests according to genre of literature. (See Appendix B) Thirteen categories were included with one additional space for students to add a personal choice not listed among the thirteen.

The instruments were field tested in a sixth grade classroom at an adjacent school district in order to identify unwanted complexities. Through this field testing, the writer identified that students had difficulty understanding the instructions for completion of the rank order of reading interests. The writer decided one person would administer the survey in groups of no larger than 25 students in order to provide consistency in the administration of the survey and emphasize the meaning of a rank order.

The field test also revealed a problem with the Likert-type questionnaire of recreational reading attitudes. Nearly one-third of the responses of all students were in the "undecided" category. The writer decided to eliminate that category in order to encourage students to make a choice of agreement or disagreement with each statement.

Administration of the Data Collection Instrument. Both instruments were used in a survey of 169 students. The survey group was chosen by stratified random sample in order to assure that boys and girls were represented in proportion to their appearance in the population. This sample size provided a 95 percent level of confidence.

The survey, conducted by the writer in groups ranging in size from 10 to 25 students, was completed the week of May 17, 1993. Stratified random selection was used to replace any students chosen for the survey that were absent on the day of the survey.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Presentation of the Results

Recreational Reading Attitude Survey. The information gathered through the recreational reading attitude survey is presented in six tables. (See Tables One through Six.) The first three tables express student responses for statements that reflect positive attitudes toward recreational reading. One table presents a summary of all responses, and the other two tables show responses by gender.

The next three tables express student responses for statements that reflect negative attitudes toward recreational reading. One table presents a summary of all responses, and the other two tables show responses by gender.

Responses are expressed as percentages of the total number of responses to each question.

Recreational Reading Interests. Items from the recreational reading interest survey are summarized in three tables (See Tables Seven, Eight and Nine). Each table presents a rank order of types of books from most preferred to least preferred. One table presents the preferences of all students, and the other two tables present summaries of preferences by gender.

TABLE I
 RECREATIONAL READING ATTITUDES
 AMONG ALL SIXTH GRADE STUDENTS IN THE
 WAPAKONETA CITY SCHOOLS

POSITIVE ATTITUDE STATEMENTS
 EXPRESSED AS A PERCENTAGE*

Survey Questions	SA	A	D	SD
Reading is a good way to spend spare time.	25	59	7	8
Books make good presents.	18	48	18	16
I like to share books with friends.	21	41	23	14
There should be more time for free reading in school.	33	36	13	18
I like to pretend I am a character in a book as I read.	22	33	24	20
Free reading time is a reward to me.	19	39	25	17
I like to expand my interests by reading.	29	43	14	14

*rounded to the nearest whole percentage

TABLE II
 RECREATIONAL READING ATTITUDES
 AMONG SIXTH GRADE MALE STUDENTS IN THE
 WAPAKONETA CITY SCHOOLS

POSITIVE ATTITUDE STATEMENTS
 EXPRESSED AS A PERCENTAGE*

Survey Questions	SA	A	D	SD
Reading is a good way to spend spare time.	16	63	10	11
Books make good presents.	12	39	25	23
I like to share books with friends.	15	29	37	19
There should be more time for free reading in school.	27	33	19	21
I like to pretend I am a character in a book as I read.	24	28	23	25
Free reading time is a reward to me.	16	30	31	23
I like to expand my interests by reading.	25	36	19	21

*rounded to the nearest whole percentage

TABLE III
 RECREATIONAL READING ATTITUDES
 AMONG SIXTH GRADE FEMALE STUDENTS IN THE
 WAPAKONETA CITY SCHOOLS

POSITIVE ATTITUDE STATEMENTS
 EXPRESSED AS A PERCENTAGE*

Survey Questions	SA	A	D	SD
Reading is a good way to spend spare time.	33	56	5	6
Books make good presents.	23	57	11	10
I like to share books with friends.	26	54	11	9
There should be more time for free reading in school.	38	39	8	14
I like to pretend I am a character in a book as I read.	20	38	26	15
Free reading time is a reward to me.	22	47	19	12
I like to expand my interests by reading.	33	50	10	7

*rounded to the nearest whole percentage

TABLE IV
 RECREATIONAL READING ATTITUDES
 AMONG ALL SIXTH GRADE STUDENTS IN THE
 WAPAKONETA CITY SCHOOLS

NEGATIVE ATTITUDE STATEMENTS
 EXPRESSED AS A PERCENTAGE*

Survey Questions	SA	A	D	SD
Reading is for learning but not for enjoyment.	8	8	35	49
I seldom read except when I have an assignment.	16	16	35	32
There is nothing to be gained from reading books.	4	6	27	63
Books are a bore.	11	5	33	52
Books aren't usually good enough to finish.	9	11	42	39
Very few books are interesting to read.	19	13	42	26
Books should not be read unless assigned for class.	9	6	29	56

*rounded to the nearest whole percentage

TABLE V
 RECREATIONAL READING ATTITUDES
 AMONG SIXTH GRADE MALE STUDENTS IN THE
 WAPAKONETA CITY SCHOOLS

NEGATIVE ATTITUDE STATEMENTS
 EXPRESSED AS A PERCENTAGE*

Survey Questions	SA	A	D	SD
Reading is for learning but not for enjoyment.	10	11	31	41
I seldom read except when I have an assignment.	16	22	37	25
There is nothing to be gained from reading books.	5	9	27	59
Books are a bore.	14	5	42	40
Books aren't usually good enough to finish.	11	10	48	31
Very few books are interesting to read.	26	13	38	24
Books should not be read unless assigned for class.	11	6	40	43

*rounded to the nearest whole percentage

TABLE VI
 RECREATIONAL READING ATTITUDES
 AMONG SIXTH GRADE FEMALE STUDENTS IN THE
 WAPAKONETA CITY SCHOOLS

NEGATIVE ATTITUDE STATEMENTS
 EXPRESSED AS A PERCENTAGE*

Survey Questions	SA	A	D	SD
Reading is for learning but not for enjoyment.	7	5	31	57
I seldom read except when I have an assignment.	16	11	34	40
There is nothing to be gained from reading books.	3	4	26	68
Books are a bore.	9	5	23	63
Books aren't usually good enough to finish.	6	12	36	46
Very few books are interesting to read.	12	13	46	29
Books should not be read unless assigned for class.	6	6	19	69

*rounded to the nearest whole percentage

TABLE VII
 RANK ORDER LISTING OF
 RECREATIONAL READING INTERESTS
 AMONG ALL SIXTH GRADE STUDENTS IN THE
 WAPAKONETA CITY SCHOOLS

Literature Genre	Ranking
Mystery	1
Adventure	2
Scary	3
Humor	4
Death and Dying	5
Sports	6
Fantasy	7
Real Life Situations	8
Animal	9
Science Fiction	10
Famous People	11
Romance	12
Historical Fiction	13

TABLE VIII
 RANK ORDER LISTING OF
 RECREATIONAL READING INTERESTS
 AMONG SIXTH GRADE MALE STUDENTS IN THE
 WAPAKONETA CITY SCHOOLS

Literature Genre	Ranking
Scary	1
Mystery	2.5
Adventure	2.5
Sports	4
Death and Dying	5
Humor	6
Science Fiction	7
Fantasy	8
Real Life Situations	9
Famous People	10
Animal	11
Historical Fiction	12
Romance	13

TABLE IX
 RANK ORDER LISTING OF
 RECREATIONAL READING INTERESTS
 AMONG SIXTH GRADE FEMALE STUDENTS IN THE
 WAPAKONETA CITY SCHOOLS

Literature Genre	Ranking
Mystery	1
Adventure	2
Humor	3
Scary	4
Fantasy	5
Real Life Situations	6
Romance	7
Death and Dying	8
Animal	9
Sports	10
Famous People	11
Historical Fiction	12
Science Fiction	13

Discussion of the Results

Recreational Reading Attitude Survey. The overall results of the attitude survey indicated that sixth grade students had a positive attitude toward recreational reading. Thirty-five percent of all responses indicated strong positive attitudes, with respondents strongly agreeing to positive attitude statements and strongly disagreeing to negative attitude statements. Responses of agreement for positive attitude statements and disagreement for negative attitude statements totaled 39 percent.

Three positive statements showed the highest percentage of agreement and strong agreement. Eighty-four percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that reading is a good way to spend spare time. Seventy-two percent of the survey group indicated they like to expand their interests by reading. Sixty-nine percent believed there should be more time for free reading in school.

A majority of students surveyed disagreed with two positive statements. Fifty-six percent of students indicated disagreement or strong disagreement with the statement, "I like to share books with friends." Fifty-four percent of respondents did not agree with the statement, "Free reading time is a reward to me." The variance between these responses and responses to other positive statements could indicate a misinterpretation

of the question. There may also be a need for more guidance in peer-interaction recreational reading experiences, as studied by Manning and Manning (1984).

Responses to positive attitude statements showed some variance between male and female students. While both groups' responses indicate an overall positive attitude toward recreational reading, boys had a greater percentage of negative responses. Forty-three percent of the boys' responses indicated a negative attitude, but only twenty-three of the girls' responses were not positive. Two statements showed the greatest variance between genders. Fifty-one percent of the males agreed or strongly agreed that books make good presents; eighty percent of females believed books make good presents. Similarly, only 44 percent of males said "I like to share books with friends." Again, 80 percent of females agreed or strongly agreed with that statement.

Disagreement and strong disagreement to negative attitude statements indicated a positive attitude toward recreational reading. Responses to four statements particularly showed positive attitudes. Eighty-nine percent of students did not agree with the statement "There is nothing to be gained from reading books." Eighty-five percent of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that books are a bore and should not be read unless assigned for class. Eighty-four percent of those surveyed did not agree with the statement, "Reading is for learning but not for enjoyment."

In contrast, two negative statements which received the highest percentage of responses in agreement may indicate deficiencies in the existing recreational reading program. Thirty-two percent of respondents indicated they seldom read except when they have an assignment. The same percentage of students said very few books are interesting to read. The existing program may not allow enough time for pleasure reading. There also may be a greater need for teachers to help guide students toward books they will enjoy and have the ability to read. These indications can be supported through the findings of Stockton (1982), Lesesne (1991b), Beckman (1984), and Cothorn and Collins (1992).

Responses to negative attitude statements varied slightly between male and female students. Thirty-four percent of girls agreed or strongly agreed that books are a bore; only 18 percent of boys indicated agreement with that statement. Conversely, only 12 percent of females felt that reading is for learning but not for enjoyment; twenty-eight percent of males agreed or strongly agreed with that statement.

Recreational Reading Interest Survey. The rank ordering of literary genre produced two areas of greatest recreational reading interest to all students: mystery and adventure. Respondents overall showed little interest in reading historical fiction, famous people, and animal stories.

Some variance in responses seemed to be directly attributable to the gender of the respondent. Males ranked scary stories as most interesting for pleasure reading; females ranked scary stories lower at fourth most preferred genre. Boys showed a high interest in sports reading, ranking this genre fourth; however, girls showed little interest in this genre with a tenth place ranking. Another category where males indicated a stronger interest was death and dying, ranking it fifth to the females' eighth place ranking. A final genre of more interest to boys than to girls was science fiction. Girls had no interest in this genre, ranking it last; but boys ranked science fiction in the middle at seventh place.

Literature genre which were somewhat more interesting to girls than boys included fantasy, humor, and real life situations. Of significantly more interest to females was the romance category with a seventh place ranking; males ranked this type of literature last.

Three additional categories were added more than once by students. Three girls ranked books about growing up as the most interesting type of recreational reading to them. Four students were interesting in books showing how to draw. Another groups of three students preferred reading comic books.

The diverse recreational reading interests of students in this survey group were similar to findings by Coy-Shaffer and Pettit (1989). These

findings may indicate a strong need for individualization of material selections and proper guidance by teachers, parents, and librarians to meet the recreational reading interests of students. This is also in keeping with the recommendations of Lesesnes (1991b) and Beckman (1984).

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

While many sixth grade students seldom appeared to use free time at school or home for recreational reading, it was the author's concern that this apparent lack of interest in reading for pleasure was limiting the emotional, social, and experiential development of the student's education. In undertaking this study of recreational reading interests and attitudes of sixth grade students, the writer's intent was to explore the conceptual feelings and understandings students held toward recreational reading and the genre of literature that sparked a child's interest to choose reading as a recreational activity.

The purpose of this study was two fold: first, to analyze the attitudes of sixth grade students toward recreational reading, and second, to determine the genre of literature sixth grade students chose for recreational reading.

Two surveys were administered to sixth grade students in a west central Ohio middle school. The first instrument, a Likert-type questionnaire, addressed recreational reading attitudes. The second

Instrument required students to rank order their recreational reading interests according to genre of literature. Both instruments were constructed as compilations and adaptations from similar instruments which the writer found during the review of related literature. Both instruments were also field tested and necessary changes were made prior to the administration of the surveys.

The survey group consisted of 169 students chosen by stratified random sample in order to assure that boys and girls were represented in proportion to their appearance in the population.

The overall results of the recreational attitude survey indicated that sixth grade students had a positive attitude toward recreational reading. Seventy-four percent of total responses indicated positive attitudes. When analyzing responses by gender, it appeared that girls had a slightly more positive attitude toward recreational reading than boys.

The recreational reading interest survey results indicated a diversity of interests. Greatest interest was exhibited in mystery and adventure stories. Least interest was displayed in historical fiction, famous people, and animal stories. Rankings of other categories varied considerably between male and female respondents.

Conclusions

The writer concludes that, while a majority of students hold positive attitudes toward recreational reading, there remains a need to guide many others toward the development of positive recreational reading attitudes. A second conclusion of this study is a recognition of the importance of individually assisting students in book selections that will meet their own needs and interests.

Recommendations

The writer recommends that practitioners regularly assess the recreational reading interests of students and guide reading selections toward those interests. The writer further recommends using the findings from this study to develop a recreational reading program at the sixth grade level which has as its goal the development of positive attitudes toward and active participation in recreational reading both immediately and as a lifetime pursuit. This is in keeping with the recommendations of Barbe and Abbot (1975, p. 20) who stated that the schools need a reading program "which will produce not only readers but also children who will grow into adulthood loving books and constantly enriching their lives and the lives of others by what they have found on the printed page."

APPENDIX A
SIXTH-GRADE STUDENT RECREATIONAL READING SURVEY

_____Boy _____Girl

Recreational Reading Attitudes.

Directions: Read each statement below. Circle the number that best describes your attitude toward each statement.

- 4 = Strongly Agree (SA)
- 3 = Agree (A)
- 2 = Disagree (D)
- 1 = Strongly Disagree (SD)

	<u>SA</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>SD</u>
1. Reading is a good way to spend spare time.	4	3	2	1
2. Reading is for learning but not for enjoyment.	4	3	2	1
3. Books make good presents.	4	3	2	1
4. I seldom read except when I have an assignment.	4	3	2	1
5. I like to share books with friends.	4	3	2	1
6. There is nothing to be gained from reading books.	4	3	2	1
7. Books are a bore.	4	3	2	1
8. There should be more time for free reading in school.	4	3	2	1
9. I like to pretend I am a character in a book as I read.	4	3	2	1
10. Books aren't usually good enough to finish.	4	3	2	1
11. Free reading time is a reward to me.	4	3	2	1
12. Very few books are interesting to read.	4	3	2	1
13. Books should not be read unless assigned for class.	4	3	2	1
14. I like to expand my interests by reading.	4	3	2	1

APPENDIX B

SIXTH-GRADE STUDENT RECREATIONAL READING SURVEY

_____Boy _____Girl

Recreational Reading Interests.

Directions: Rate the following kinds of books from most interesting (*1) to least interesting (*14).

- _____Romance
- _____Sports
- _____Real Life Situations
- _____Science Fiction
- _____Mysteries
- _____Adventure
- _____Humor

- _____Fantasy
- _____Death and Dying
- _____Famous People
- _____Scary/Horror
- _____Animal Stories
- _____Historical Fiction
- _____Other What?_____

Thank you!

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