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The Effects of Read Alouds on Student Comprehension

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Abstract

The focus of this study was to determine how interactive read alouds effect student comprehension with the claim being that they increase comprehension scores. Through the use of observation, interviews, questionnaires, and comprehension questions, data was collected. When given questions after three read alouds and three independent readings, student comprehension scores were higher following the read alouds for below average and average readers. There was no difference in scores for the above average readers. The implications of this study include using read alouds as a support in intermediate grades, average and below average readers preferring read alouds to independent reading, and using interactive read alouds to help engage students and enhance the discussion of text.

The Effects of Read Alouds on Student Comprehension

Every child comes to school with different abilities, strengths and weaknesses. Literacy skills vary based on children's previous experiences before kindergarten. Some attended pre-school while others may have never even seen a book. This experience effects how much or how little information they are able to understand when they begin kindergarten. The ability to comprehend texts is critical for academic success. Therefore, it is important that students establish a solid foundation in this area. As students' progress through grade levels, they acquire more and more literacy skills. However, not all students' skills progress at the same rates. A variety of factors can contribute to this, including children's cultural background and socioeconomic status. The U.S. Department of Education's 1999 Early Childhood Longitudinal Study found that children who were read to at least three times a week had a significantly higher phonemic awareness when they entered kindergarten than did children who were read to less often (Trelease, 2006). This study also showed that the students who were read to the most frequently, were from higher socioeconomic classes. The higher the families' income, the more often the child was read to and the higher the child's literacy skills were entering kindergarten (Trelease, 2006). The conclusions of this study show two things. The first is that read alouds have a significant impact on literacy development and should be started as early as possible. The second being that students from low socioeconomic classes are beginning school at a great disadvantage. Geneva Gay provides insights to teachers on how best to address these discrepancies using the culturally responsive teaching theory (2010). Culturally responsive teaching focuses on students' cultural experiences. She discusses that teachers need to provide texts and materials that show a variety of cultures, people, races, classes, etc., so that all students can relate and have a fair chance at being successful (Gay, 2010).

Knowing that all students come from different backgrounds that contribute to their various comprehension levels and knowing that read alouds have been shown to benefit literacy skills in young students is what sparked the idea for this study. As a fifth grade teacher with students reading above, at, and below grade level, I wanted to see if reading aloud to them would affect their abilities to comprehend texts. As students advance through the grade levels, read alouds become less and less frequent. Students are expected to read the majority of texts independently towards the end of elementary school. However, although students may be in the fifth grade, some are not reading at a fifth grade level. This variable becomes problematic for those below average students when they are asked to read a text independently and then answer questions or write about it when finished. As a teacher, I know that not all of my students receive academic support at home and that many of them have hardly ever been read to. These facts are unfortunate because this lack of support most likely contributed to the students reading below grade level. The international assessment of 150,000 fourth grade students in 2001 showed an average 35 point advantage for students who were read to more often by parents (Trelease, 2006). Read alouds have also been shown to assist struggling readers (Trelease, 2006). Being able to listen to a text allows students to focus on finding the meaning instead of decoding challenging words. This shift alleviates some of the struggle and helps the reader concentrate on other important areas of literacy such as determining themes, making connections, formulating questions, etc.

Another factor that contributes to student comprehension is engagement. The more engaged students are in a text, the more information that they will retain. This is an issue that teachers struggle with in many classrooms in all areas. However, schools in lower socioeconomic areas tend to struggle more with this. As shown by Wigfield et al. (2008)

engagement plays a large role in students' ability to comprehend texts. Teaching strategies for engagement, such as interactive read alouds, increases comprehension because students are interacting with the texts. There are a number of elements that go into selecting texts that are engaging for students and ways to make less interesting texts more engaging. Choosing texts that students can relate to is one way to do this. When students can make connections between characters or situations and their own lives, they become more involved and interested. This is can be specifically helpful with students from lower socioeconomic classes or minority students. Reading about events that may occur in their own lives can also help them to develop ways to deal with situations in the future. Interactive read alouds are another way to engage students in texts. Interactive read alouds allow students to participate with the book, the teacher, and their peers as they read. Students can ask questions, make connections, discuss characters, etc.

The question that this action research study posed was "how does reading aloud to children affect their comprehension?" During this study, interactive read alouds were used in comparison to independent reading. Interactive read alouds involve participation from students in which they interact with the teacher and the text as opposed to just listening. During the interactive read alouds, the researcher paused to ask questions, answer questions, summarize, make connections, clarify vocabulary, etc. Students then answered a set of comprehension questions following each reading. Off task behavior was tallied during each read aloud and independent reading as well. Interviews were conducted one on one with one student from the below average, average, and above average reading levels. When given the questions after the readings, comprehension scores were higher following the read alouds for below average and average readers. There were no difference in scores for the above average readers. Following the interviews it was found that students in the below average and average reading groups

reported enjoying read alouds more because they were easier to understand while the student from the above average group stated that they preferred reading independently because it was easier to focus. Overall, the data from this study showed that read alouds proved to be beneficial to most students, with the greatest impact being on struggling readers. Implications for this study include using read alouds as a comprehension strategy in intermediate grades, average and below average students preferring read alouds to independent reading, and using interactive read alouds to help engage students and enhance discussion of texts.

Theoretical Framework

According to the National Council of Teachers of English, literacy has always been a collection of cultural and communicative practices shared among members of particular groups (NCTE Positon Statement, 2016). In other words, literacy is so much more than just being able to read a book. Literacy encompasses technology, ways of communicating, culture, and much more. Literacy skills begin developing the day we are born. We begin hearing our language and experiencing various aspects of our culture. Once children get to kindergarten, they are expected to be developing the literacy skills necessary to read, write, and speak at the levels deemed appropriate for academic success. Freebody and Luke (1990) suggest four main roles individuals must develop to acquire literacy. The first role is Code Breaker (Freebody & Luke, 1990). Being a Code Breaker means being able to decode words, recognize patterns, and use the fundamental conventions of reading and writing. The second role is Meaning Maker which means being able to derive meaning from the text (Freebody & Luke, 1990). At this role one should be constructing meaning, synthesizing information, making connections, and linking information to prior knowledge. The third role is Text User (Freebody & Luke, 1990). Being a

Text User means using texts in the way they are intended to be used and knowing the function of a variety of texts. The last role is Text Critic. Text Critic means identifying the purposes of texts (Freebody & Luke, 1990). Critically analyzing texts to understand what is included and excluded and realizing that texts can include a variety of viewpoints. This shows that developing literacy skills is a complex process that involves not only being able to read a text but also being able to find deeper meanings, analyze content, and apply information to various contexts. In relation to this research project, in order for students to fully comprehend a text, they must be able to apply these four roles.

Guiding this study is the Emergent Literacy Theory. According to the Emergent literacy theory, literacy development occurs in stages (Clay, 2005). These stages include emergent, early, transitional and fluent readers. These stages are based on experiences not on age or grade level. At the emergent level, children are beginning to focus attention on letter-sound relationships. They are recognizing letters and words and some language patterns (Clay, 2005). Repeated exposure to picture books is important during this time. At the early stage, children can make predictions about events in a story and often use pictures to help confirm these predictions (Clay, 2005). They can discuss background information and develop meaning from the text. At the transitional stage, children read at a good pace and are becoming more proficient with comprehension (Clay, 2005). They have developed many strategies to decode words and the meanings of the text. At the fluent level, children are reading independently. They are confident in their understanding of a text and can maintain meaning though more complex language (Clay, 2005).

This theory connects to this topic of study because it is centered on student comprehension. This study looks at the effects that read alouds have on student comprehension.

Emergent literacy theory breaks down the various stages of development that students are in and describes the abilities that they should have at each stage. In order to assess comprehension, it is important to first understand where each student currently is and what abilities they have. From there, support can be provided during the read alouds to enhance areas of weakness. For example, summarizing, questioning, developing meaning, etc.

Research Question

Given that reading comprehension is influenced by many factors, this action research project asks, how does reading aloud to children impact their ability to comprehend a text?

Literature Review

When conducting an action research study, it is important to locate and analyze research that has already been done on the topic. It is critical that the researcher develops a deeper understanding of the information, perspectives, and implications that impact the area of study. The focus of this literature review will be on the themes surrounding the effect read alouds have on student comprehension abilities. The factors that contribute to a student's ability to understand a text being read to them and what teachers can do to improve upon this will be areas of discussion. The first theme that will be discussed is how student's backgrounds and previous experiences with literacy affect their ability to comprehend read alouds when they are in school. The second theme will focus on the role engagement plays on a student's ability to comprehend a text being read aloud to them and how their attitude towards reading impacts that as well. The final theme that will be discussed is what specific strategies teachers can use during read alouds to enhance their student's comprehension. These aspects are all critical components of read alouds and comprehension.

The Effects of Socioeconomic Status and Background on Student Comprehension Abilities in School

Socioeconomic status is commonly conceptualized as the social standing or class of an individual or group. It is often measured as a combination of education, income, and occupation according to Ready (2010). Children that are socioeconomically disadvantaged are less likely to experience success in school. This claim has been the finding of much educational research over the last few decades. There are different factors that have been researched to look at which children are more likely to have parents read to them and which are less likely. Studies show that children from lower socioeconomic families are less likely to be read to than those students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds (Trelease, 2006). Based on this information it can be inferred that students with greater parent involvement are more likely to be successful academically.

As found by Hill and Tyson (2009), parent involvement is positively associated with student achievement. The study was done to examine which types of parental involvement are related to student achievement and in what capacity and magnitude. Hill (2004) defines parental involvement as "parents' interactions with schools and with their children to promote academic success." In other words, the way in which parents involve themselves in their child's education is considered parental involvement. This study focused on three types of parental involvement. They include home-based involvement, school-based involvement, and academic socialization. Home-based involvement includes strategies such as homework help, creating a learning environment at home, and taking children to places that foster academic success (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Home based involvement requires parents to think about their child's academic environment outside of school and provide supports as needed. School based involvement refers

to strategies such as attending school events, volunteering at school, and communicating with teachers and staff (Hill & Tyson, 2009). This type of involvement requires the parent to put more time into being physically part of the school community. Academic socialization includes communicating parental expectations for academics with children, discussing learning strategies with children, and making plans for the future (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Academic socialization had the strongest impact on achievement in this case. That conclusion can lead to the assumption that when parents set educational expectations for their children and work with them on developing learning strategies and setting goals for the future, they are more apt to be successful than those children who do not have the same academic guidance and support at home.

While the above study gathered much information on parent involvement as a whole, it did not look specifically at the implications of socioeconomic differences and the effects they have on student achievement. Aikens and Barbarin (2008) assessed the contribution of families, schools, and neighborhoods to the relation between socioeconomic status and growth between kindergarten and third grade using a nationally representative sample from the "Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Cohort of 1998-1999". Home literacy environment and number of books owned were two factors that significantly impacted reading outcomes. Similarly, Melhuish et al. (2008) found that home environments strongly influence literacy and numeracy development in early primary school. This study also went on to look at the effect that preschool settings have on early literacy development and how enrolling low socioeconomic status children in preschool can greatly benefit them and better prepare them for school (Melhuish, et al., 2008). Children coming from homes without many educational resources or from homes without much parental involvement, benefited significantly from attending preschool before kindergarten. Children from low socioeconomic class homes who did not

attend preschool prior to Kindergarten began at a greater disadvantage with lower literacy levels overall. It can be inferred that the exposure to books and learning materials before the start of kindergarten, allowed children from low socioeconomic classes to be at a more equal starting point with students who come from higher socioeconomic classes. Both studies looked at the home environments and educational settings of children early in life as predictors of future academic outcomes and both conclusions supported this.

It is generally apparent when children begin kindergarten, which ones have had experiences with books or other materials and which students have not. Those students who have not, are immediately starting at a disadvantage (Trelease, 2006). From the time we are born, we begin hearing words that are said to us by our parents. Every child acquires and understands the same basic set of words at a very early age (Trelease, 2006). From those basic words however, is where there may be a gap. Parents who read stories to their children are giving them a whole new set of words and experiences. They are providing them with knowledge about things that may not have happened to them in their own life but that they will know about because of books. According to Trelease (2006) reading aloud conditions the child's brain to associate reading with pleasure, creates background knowledge, builds vocabulary, and provides a reading role model. All of these things lead to greater success in school. Conversely, children who do not have parents that read to them from early on, do not get these experiences that expedite their literacy skills. From there it can be inferred that they do not acquire the same amount of vocabulary and background knowledge as early readers. Because of this lack of support, when these children get to school, they are already struggling as shown by Bowen and Lee (2006). This study focused on types of parental involvement based on race/ethnicity and socioeconomic class and how it impacted children's academic achievement. The dominant

group included the Caucasian and high income families while the minority groups were comprised of African Americans, Hispanic/Latino, and low income families (Bowen & Lee, 2006). The study found that there were the greatest differences in parent involvement when it came to being at school. Parents from the dominant group were much more involved than those from the non-dominant group. Bowen and Lee (2006) speculated that parents from minority groups may encounter certain barriers at school such as racism or not feel confident in their ability to interact with other parents and teachers. They also speculated that regardless of their reasons for not visiting the school, that teachers may interpret their lack of attendance as a lack of interest in their children's education (Bowen & Lee, 2006). Similar to these speculations, Christianakis (2011) performed a study on city school teachers' perspectives on parent involvement. The findings did not represent parents as partners but rather as helpers. Of the 750 students attending the school, 98% of them were students of color and 90% of them received free or reduced lunches indicating that they were from lower working class families (Christianakis, 2011). The 25 teachers at the school were racially diverse. There were eight African American, 13 white, two Asian American, and two Latino teachers. The study was primarily interview based and took place over six months. Findings stated that all teachers used the word "help" to describe parent involvement (Christianakis, 2011). The way this word was used positioned teachers in a supervisor capacity and parents in the role of helpers. When asked, teachers replied that parent were used for duties that helped them save time and lessoned their work load. Some of these duties included helping with class projects, helping children complete tasks, copying papers, and organizing and cleaning up materials. Teachers favored those parents who could make it to school to help in the classroom and usually looked down on those parents who could not (Christianakis, 2011). Parents at this school were not treated as partners or intellectual

equals and it can be inferred from these findings that if teachers create more of a partnership between parents and the school with more collaboration, that it may benefit the students significantly more.

Children from lower socioeconomic classes are also more likely to be absent from school more frequently than those that come from higher socioeconomic classes (Ready, 2010). This issue increases the gap even more because they are not receiving the amount of necessary instruction. Research from Booker, Invernizzi, and McCormick (2007) also shows that children from lower socioeconomic classes tend to have poorer test scores than children from higher socioeconomic classes. This information is in part due to the fact that often times children from lower socioeconomic classes show up to school with less emergent literacy skills. However, just because a school is considered "low income" does not mean that their students cannot achieve the same skill levels as students from schools not classified this way as shown in a study by Booker, Inverizzi, and McCormick (2007). The four schools in this study were considered low income but high achieving and all had certain areas in common. These areas included attention to phonological awareness and intensive instructional repetition, extensive administrator and teacher knowledge and academic background in reading, establishment of a strong internal and external school community, and thorough monitoring of progress (Booker, Invernizzi, & McCormick, 2007). The dedication of administrators and teachers to close the achievement gaps can make a significant difference. The study done by Christianakis (2006) compared to the one above show the difference in how leadership and dedication to improvements can make even low income schools, high achieving schools.

Much research has been done on the importance of using literature that is relevant to students' backgrounds and personal experiences. The more students can relate to the information

being read to them, the greater ability they have to understand it. Often times, cultural minorities are not depicted as frequently in literature as white individuals as shown in a study by Pilonieta and Hancock (2012). They researched the relationships between student's abilities to connect to a text and their comprehension. A variety of books were read to first grade students that centered on topics such as racism, homelessness, and immigration. It was determined that although these topics were more difficult than those of more traditional read alouds, the students comprehension scores increased (Pilonieta & Hancock, 2012). This finding was because the books possessed the cultural background information that students understood and needed to make connections to the text. In a similar study by Verden and Hickman (2009), culturally relevant read alouds were used with students to help promote more positive behaviors. Texts were chosen based on student abilities to relate to them. These stories facilitated comprehension because the students were able to identify with the characters and reflect and discuss key components of the stories (Verden & Hickman, 2009). From there, the students reflected on their own behaviors and choices and with the help of the teacher, came up with more appropriate behavior plans. Had the teachers not chosen books that were relevant to their students' backgrounds, the intervention would not have been a success. Students viewed characters as role models on how to handle situations and how to appropriately act in various situations that may be applicable to their own lives. It was concluded that this type of read aloud intervention was beneficial and that the students' abilities to relate to the texts allowed for deeper understanding and a more thoughtful examination of the stories (Verden & Hickman, 2009). Both studies show a positive correlation between students being able to make cultural connections to texts and comprehension.

According to Pacheco and Gutierrez (2009), it is the teachers' responsibility to know where the students are coming from and what backgrounds they have. It is critical for teachers

to get to know and understand where their students come from if they want them to really connect to texts and understand what is being read to them. This strategy can make a significant difference in student comprehension abilities. Pacheco and Gutierrez (2009) believe that "we need to restructure social institutions around the knowledge, skills, abilities, and networks, of people of color rather than trying to make them fit in to existing social structures" (p.63). It should be about transforming the structures and not about transforming the people. Parents play a critical role in their child's education. Students who have parents to help them every night are at a significantly greater advantage than those students who do not. Students who have parental support, come to school prepared, with a greater understanding of information that is built upon by instruction (Christianakis, 2011). Having this support provides students with a higher platform to grow from. Children who read the most bring the most knowledge and information to school with them and therefore understand more of what the teacher is teaching during classes (Trelease, 2006). Parents who read to their children are better preparing them for school and setting them up for greater success. The main indicator of failure or success in school is a child's vocabulary when they enter kindergarten (Trelease, 2006). The words a child already knows determines how much of what the teacher is saying will be understood. Children with the largest vocabulary sets will understand more of what the teacher is saying which results in higher comprehension of the material. Thus, the more words a child knows, the better they will do and vice versa (Trelease, 2006). These are all ways in which a child's background, home life, and prior experiences, or lack of, influences their ability to comprehend texts being read aloud to them.

Engaging Students in Reading to Enhance Comprehension

According to Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, and Wilkinson (1985), the most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success is reading aloud to children. In other words, reading to children will significantly impact their future success in school. The way children view reading has a significant impact on their success in school and ultimately the rest of their lives. According to the Report of the Program of International Student Assessment, interest in reading predicted students' reading comprehension scores (Gambrell, 2011). Students who enjoyed reading, performed significantly better than those students who did not. If people like to do something, they do it as frequently as possible. Gambrell (2011) defines motivation as "the likelihood of engaging in reading or choosing to read". Engaged readers are typically intrinsically motivated to read for a variety of personal reasons. Therefore, this intrinsic motivation should be what teachers promote in their classrooms daily.

Similarly, motivation has also been described in terms of the beliefs, values, needs, and goals that individuals have (Pitcher, et al., 2007). These are the elements in life that make people want to do something. The Motivation to Read Profile was developed by Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, and Mazzoni in 1996 to help elementary school teachers assess their students' motivation. In 2007, the Motivation to Read Profile was adapted by researchers to be used with adolescents and named the Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile (Pitcher, et al., 2007). This study was primarily survey and interview based. The survey and interview questions ask how students feel about themselves as a readers as well as how they view reading in general and why. One major discrepancy that arose within the surveys was students describing themselves as not liking to read and rarely doing so. But then when asked how they spent their time, the majority reported that they looked up things online, read magazines, wrote e-mails, and played games (Pitcher, et al., 2007). All of these things include reading however it was not apparent to the

students. When speaking about reading, it can be inferred that the students strictly thought that actual books had to be involved. The study suggests that teachers should add the multiple literacies that students are engaging in into their instruction to better motivate students as well as provide choice in readings and projects to enhance the enjoyability levels for students as a whole (Pitcher, et al., 2007).

Teachers have the power to provide positive experiences in reading that some children may not have had before. These experiences can be provided in many ways. It is important to check students' reading attitudes. Many times adults do things instinctively because they have the knowledge about the world and their own experiences that they can draw from that enables them to bring the words to life (Ivey, 2016). Often times, students cannot yet achieve this because they do not have the knowledge or experiences and therefore, being read aloud to, enables them to become more connected. Hearing a text read aloud is also very helpful for less fluent readers and they tend to benefit the most from read alouds (Hurst & Griffity, 2015). Read alouds eliminate the need and struggle to decode words and students can instead focus on recognizing meaning.

However, not all students find teacher read alouds more engaging than reading independently. In a study done with sixth graders (Clark & Andreason, 2014), there were mixed reviews about which approach they deemed more engaging. First, students were given a reading interest survey which categorized the students as high interest, average interest, or low interest readers. The study questioned how sixth graders describe their experiences with teacher read alouds, how they describe student participation during read alouds, and how do sixth graders describe the instructional benefits of read alouds (Clark & Andreasen, 2014). The findings for the first question reported that all students enjoyed teacher read alouds. However, the reasons

that students enjoyed them varied. For instance, students with lower reading attitude scores reported that they liked the read alouds because it was more relaxed and they did not have to do as much work. Some of them even admitted to doing things such as drawing while the teacher was reading (Clark & Andreasen, 2014). This data shows that although students liked the teacher read alouds more than reading independently, the reasons were not always because they helped them academically. Conversely, the students who had a much higher reading interest reported enjoying read alouds the most when the teacher engaged them in conversations during and after reading. They also mentioned that the teacher's expression while reading, made the stories more interesting and memorable (Clark & Andreasen, 2014). The findings for the second question, having to do with student participation during read alouds, were inconsistent. Both the students with high reading interests and the students with low and average reading interests reported being engaged at times during the read aloud and less engaged at other times. No group of students described themselves as being completely focused on the stories for the duration of the time. The third question that this study addressed was how sixth graders recognized the instructional benefits of read alouds. In this case, all students, regardless of reading interest level, were able to identify specific instructional benefits gleaned from teacher read alouds. Students recognized things such as the teacher trying to motivate them, introducing, and explaining new vocabulary, modeling fluent reading and expression, providing text to world connections, and alluding to comprehension strategies (Clark & Andreasen, 2014). All of these are elements of strong read alouds.

Read alouds are not always done with narrative stories or with elementary students. Priscilla Griffity and Sylvia Hurst (2015) examined the effects of teacher read aloud on adolescent attitudes and learning. The study took place in a suburban school in seventh and

eighth grade science classes over 10 weeks. Half the classes received teacher read aloud of all texts while the other half of the classes read all work independently. They switched after five weeks so that all students experienced both processes. Student learning was measured with pretest, posttest, and concept map data. A survey was then administered at the end of the study to assess student attitudes towards teacher read alouds (Hurst & Griffity, 2015). Both teacher read alouds and independent reading were found to be appropriate for student learning but neither one presented as superior to the other in terms of better scores. Of the 80 participants, 78 of them had a positive attitude toward the intervention (Hurst & Griffity, 2015). This information could lead to the assumption that read alouds are more engaging and helpful when done effectively. Similar to Clark and Andreasen (2014), students reported that when doing a read aloud, it is helpful when teachers read fluently with expression and provide opportunities for discussion and explanation throughout (Hurst & Griffity, 2015). This study led to the recommendations of alternating independent reading and read alouds in classrooms. It was concluded that read alouds are most effective when working with difficult texts containing new vocabulary so that teachers can demonstrate pronunciation and provide explanation (Hurst & Griffity, 2015). This strategy allows for struggling readers to move their concentration from decoding words to comprehension of the ideas in the text.

As previously noted, read alouds are beneficial across all subject areas and all grades when presented effectively and can increase student engagement. Knowing what students are interested in is one key for engagement. However, in many primary classrooms there is a lack of informational texts for children to read according to Yopp and Yopp (2006). Having a variety of texts and resources in the classroom is a good way to ensure that all student interests are being reached. In recent years, the importance of using non-fiction texts has been greatly pushed upon

teachers (Yopp & Yopp, 2006). The information in non-fiction books is important to the development of student's literacy skills. Informational texts provide answers to questions, build background knowledge around different content areas, and foster learning about specific topics (Yopp & Yopp, 2006). With non-fiction texts, children are exposed to specified vocabulary and text features that are different from that of fictional stories. Exposure to these texts early on will better prepare students for higher grade levels. In their study, Yopp and Yopp (2006) looked at the exposure that students get to informational texts compared to narrative texts both at home and in school. They found that informational texts make up a very small proportion of read alouds in primary classrooms. They also found that not only are non-fiction texts not read aloud, but there are very few of them in classrooms (Yopp & Yopp, 2006). They then looked at exposure to informational texts at home, and this again, was found to be very limited. Having a variety of both fiction and non-fiction texts both at home and in the classroom provides students with a much larger range of information and potential topics to get them interested in reading. Another study (Kraemer, McCabe, & Sinatra, 2012) was conducted to see if primary level students would be able to comprehend non-fiction texts as well as fiction. It discussed how often times, when students get to the intermediate level, their reading comprehension declines because they suddenly encounter informational texts and do not know how to approach them. Within the study, an intervention was done with first graders. They were read aloud non-fiction texts over a four week span. As a result of this continued exposure, their comprehension scores increased significantly (Kraemer, McCabe, & Sinatra, 2012). It can be inferred that this will impact their future academic success when they reach the intermediate grades because they will already be prepared to use informational texts due to their early exposure.

Another aspect of student engagement is choice. A study was done around the idea that in order for English classes to be effective, students need to be able to choose the books that they read (Lapp & Fisher, 2009). This study was conducted in a high school class of struggling readers. The purpose of the study was to analyze student engagement and motivation after implementing a series of instructional tasks. These tasks included read alouds, independent reading, and book clubs (Lapp & Fisher, 2009). For the read aloud portion, students were engaged in conversations with the teacher and their peers. They shared their thoughts and understandings of the texts aloud after being read to. For the independent reading portion, students were to read any book of their choosing. Finally, for the book club, students were asked to discuss the readings and how they could relate to and interpret the ideas of the texts. The findings concluded that these instructional tasks were all a success (Lapp & Fisher, 2009). Similarly, Gambrell's (2011) Rules of Engagement align with these findings. Students are more engaged in reading when they can connect personally with texts and have opportunities to interact with their peers about what they are reading. Students were intrinsically motivated to read and participate because they were given choice in their books and were interested in the topics presented (Gambrell, 2011). Giving students freedom to choose texts and topics proved beneficial in both studies. The participants in the Lapp and Fisher (2009) study became less reluctant to read and they were able to gain deep insight into the texts and their main ideas through conversations with peers. Many students were able to connect personally with the characters and events and consider how they themselves might handle similar situations in their own lives. Being able to interact with teachers and classmates was a major motivator that kept students engaged and is a factor that largely influences reading comprehension (Lapp & Fisher,

2009). Providing positive, enjoyable reading experiences such as these provide for deeper understandings and connections to texts.

Two very similar studies were conducted using CORI which stands for Concept Oriented Reading Instruction (Wigfield, et al., 2008). This program focuses on fostering comprehension, motivation, and engagement in elementary school students. It integrates science or social studies and reading through activities and the use of science or social studies books in reading instruction (Wigfield, et al., 2008). Students learn a variety of research based strategies that enhance comprehension. CORI also employs several instructional practices that foster student engagement in reading. The first study, formed around CORI, included 492 fourth grade students from five schools. Two schools were assigned CORI, two schools were assigned Strategy Instruction, and one school was assigned Traditional (Wigfield, et al., 2008). These assignments included using content goals in a conceptual theme for reading instruction, giving choices and control to students, providing hands-on activities, using interesting texts for instruction, and incorporating collaboration in learning. The second study done by Guthrie, et al. (2006), was not nearly as expansive and only took place in two schools over a 12 week span with 31 students in fourth grade. Participants in both studies included below average, average, and above average readers. The major difference between the two studies was that in the one conducted by Guthrie, et al. (2006), only one framework was implemented and researched. All participants in this study received CORI as opposed to Strategy Instruction and Teacher Instruction as well. In the study done by Wigfield et al. (2008), at the schools employing the Strategy Instruction framework, the design implemented was to be as similar as possible to the existing practices of research based multiple strategy instruction. Teachers used the materials within their schools and taught the same curriculum as CORI teachers. They taught a variety of

strategies that promoted student confidence in using tools to improve their reading. These included activating background knowledge, questioning, looking for information, summarizing, using graphic organizers, and identifying story structure (Wigfield, et al., 2008). These strategies were also the ones used by CORI teachers. The difference between the CORI framework and the Strategy Instruction framework was that no explicit support for student engagement was used by teachers in the Strategy Instruction schools. In Traditional Instruction rooms, teachers provided their normal reading and language arts instruction (Wigfield, et al., 2008). No training or additional support strategies were given to or implemented by these teachers. CORI teachers participated in a 10 day professional development workshop while Strategy Instruction teachers participated in a five day workshop. All frameworks were implemented over a 12 week span with daily instruction of the program lasting 90 minutes (Wigfield, et al., 2008).

The first conclusion that both studies came to was that reading engagement and reading comprehension are correlated (Guthrie, et al., 2006 & Wigfield, et al., 2008). Both studies showed that the more engaged students were in the text or activity, the greater the understanding they developed. Wigfield, et al. (2008) determined that students who experienced CORI had higher reading comprehension, reading strategy use, and reading engagment than students who experienced Strategy Instruction and Teacher Instruction. The study was a success in showing that when students are engaged, their comprehension increases. The study also showed the opposite of this as well. Areas in which student engagment was low, so too was comprehension (Wigfield, et al., 2008). This provides a direct corralation between engagament and comprehension. Guthrie, et al., (2006) looked at interest, perceived control, self-efficacy, involvement, and collaboration in regards to motivational factors in students. He provides findings for all areas. For interest, it was apparent that this area of motivation was positively

associated with high cognitive recall and comprehension of text (Guthrie, et al., 2006). In other words, the more the students enjoyed what they were learning, the more they were able to remember and understand. For perceived control, results were mixed. Some students very much enjoyed and wanted to make all of their choices while others reported that they liked making their decisions as well as having a close friend or teacher choose something for them (Guthrie, et al., 2006). It can be inferred that some children do not mind others makign decisions for them if they deem them trustworthy of doing so. For self-efficacy it was found that students did not think about their overall reading abilities, but instead on their ability to handle hard words or passages (Guthrie, et al., 2006). This thought process may be due to the fact that they are in fourth grade and still may be struggling with specific skills instead of thinking about their literacy abilities as a whole. Students became more involved in reading and spent large amouns of time absorbed in books (Guthrie, et al., 2006). Finally, many students enjoyed reading collaboratively with peers however, it did not prove necessary in order for children to fully engage in a book (Guthrie, et al., 2006).

Over the last few years, electronic books have been gaining popularity and becoming more and more present in classrooms (Jones & Brown, 2011). It can be questioned whether e-books are more engaging for students than regular books and if students prefer the electronic version. Jones and Brown (2011) conducted a study consisting of 22 third grade students with most reading at grade level standards. First, students were given a traditional print version of *The Yellow House Mystery*, by Gertrude Chandler. They read three chapters aloud in their reading groups with the teacher present. After the completion of the first two chapters, students were given a mapping activity to complete that measured their predicting and inferencing, and overall comprehension skills. After the third chapter was read, students were given a

comprehension test on all chapters along with an enjoyment survey (Jones & Brown, 2011). For the second part of the study, students were given school lap tops and given instruction on how to use Raz-Kids.com which is a reading site. Students had access to over 100 titles and were introduced to features such as electronic page turning, pronunciation, vivid graphics, pop-up definitions, etc (Jones & Brown, 2011). They were then told to find a specific title and meet back with their reading groups to read aloud to each other. Again, after completion, students were given a comprehension test and an enjoyment level survey. For the final part of the study, students were assigned another e-book title to read in their groups. They again had to take a comprehension test when finished along with an enjoyment survey. Following the test and survey, they were able to read any book they chose and play with the various features. Logan, Medford, and Hughes (2010) would argue that intrinsic motivation is the key to comprehension performance. Intrinsic motivation comes from within each student. Students who are intrinsically motivated will put forth more effort simply to complete the task while students who are not intrinsically motivated are less likely to try their best unless there is an external reward (Logan, Medford, & Hughes, 2010). For instance in this study, that external motivation may be getting to play with the features of the e-books. The findings of this research showed variable results. There was very little difference in scores for tests one and three, however, students scored significantly lower on test two (Jones & Brown, 2011). It can therefore be implied that the format of a text does not have a significant impact on student comprehension. The surveys showed that students enjoyed each form of text equally but did favor the extra text features of e-books (Jones & Brown, 2011).

In all of the above studies, read alouds were concluded to be beneficial for students motivation and engagement. Being motivated and engaged in a text is critical for student

comprehension. In order to gain the deepest understanding of a text, students must be interested and focused on the book being read. It was shown through many studies that students that were engaged in the text, got much more out of it. When able to interact with the text, the teacher, and their peers, students could make connections and develop conversations and insights that they may not have otherwise thought about. Struggling readers are one group of students whose comprehension benefits significantly from read alouds because they eliminate the challenging component of decoding words. It is especially important to make the reading process fun and interesting for these students so that it is not always an area of frustration. The more students are engaged in a text, the more they will hear, and the more they will ultimately understand.

Comprehension Strategies to Use along with Read Alouds

According to Clark and Andeasen (2014), teacher read aloud is intended to increase student motivation for reading, build background knowledge, and to expand student vocabulary. In order for read alouds to be the most effective and to ensure that students are gaining as much meaning from the text as possible, a variety of comprehension strategies should be used along with them. More often now, many of these strategies are part of what are called "interactive read alouds". Interactive read alouds can be defined as read alouds that encourage the students to become active participants in discussion of the text and include multiple steps. Traditional read alouds involve a two-step process of first having the teacher read a text aloud while the students listen and then guiding a discussion after the reading is complete (Delacruz, 2013). The main difference is the level of engagement and understanding the students have. During traditional read alouds, it is much easier for students to tune out while the teacher is reading because they are not responsible for doing anything but listening. During an interactive read aloud, students must be active participants. Typically, the steps of an interactive read aloud go as follows. First,

the teacher will have pre-read the text or section of text that he or she will be sharing with the class. Doing so enables them to highlight specific parts, develop questions, and identify any vocabulary that may need to be taught prior to the lesson. Before the teacher begins reading to the class they first direct the student's attention to the author, title, picture, and any other information on the covers of the book (Scharlach, 2008). This pre-reading technique should open up a conversation with the students about what the text may be about. As the teacher is reading, they will pause to ask questions and allow students to ask questions. The questions should be varied in level with some that require students to think beyond the text. Opening up conversation allows students to hear each other's perspectives and think about the text in ways they might not have otherwise. The teacher should also ask students to make predictions about what will happen next or later in the story and to provide evidence as to why they think that (Scharlach, 2008). This forces the students to engage with the text and think more deeply about the meaning it is trying to convey. Students will also be encouraged to make connections with the text. Text-to-self connections allow the students to try to relate to the story and identify with the characters. They may have experienced similar situations and discuss how they solved it or they might not be able to relate at all but may be able to hear about how one of their classmates can. The conversations that arise from interactive read alouds are what make them so influential (Scharlach, 2008). This is the part of the class that the students will remember and enjoy. Even though the majority of this strategy is focused on conversation, literacy skills such as comprehension, and vocabulary are embedded as well. They are engaging in critical thinking and are responsible for making meanings of the text as it relates to them or the class.

The START program was developed and incorporated into a classroom as an intervention. The purpose of this study was to determine effectiveness of an instructional

framework designed to model and scaffold the use of metacognitive reading comprehension strategies (Scharlach, 2008). This framework was designed to improve comprehension through the modeling and scaffolding of eight comprehension strategies during teacher read alouds. It was also designed to be easily implemented with a gradual release of responsibility so that the students will eventually be able to use the strategies on their own. The study was conducted with third grade students, some of which received the START intervention and some of which who did not. All students were given a pretest to determine comprehension and use of comprehension strategies prior to the intervention. The eight comprehension strategies that the teachers modeled and scaffolded use for were predicting, visualizing, making connections, questioning, determining main idea, summarizing, checking predictions, and making judgements. A chart was put up in the classrooms for students to reference as prompts they could ask themselves when reading. Teachers used think alouds to explicitly model when and how to use each strategy (Scharlach, 2008). Before reading, students predict and infer. During reading they visualize, make connections, and question. And after reading they determine the main idea, summarize, check predictions, and make judgements. Reference charts provide prompts in student friendly language to help children generate ideas of what to think about during the read aloud. This process is similar to that of interactive read alouds as shown by Delacruz (2013). An interactive read aloud encourages students to become active participants in the text. The key benefits of interactive read alouds include teacher modeling of skills, the use of analytic talk, and an increase of student content knowledge (Delacruz, 2013). After the intervention was complete, students were given a post-test to assess comprehension. All students who participated in the intervention made significantly higher gains in reading comprehension than the students who did not receive it (Scharlach, 2008). This information proves the importance of explicitly teaching

reading comprehension strategies to students. Modeling is a key component of this so that students can see exactly what they need to be doing. Using a gradual release model is an ideal way to do this as well. It takes the responsibility from the teacher to the student at a pace that allows the students to first learn before applying the information on their own. The first part of this intervention focused on teacher read aloud, but by the end, students were applying the strategies they were seeing to their own independent reading. This transfer shows that students were more aware of their own metacognitive abilities and were able to apply strategies without specific teacher direction to do so. Getting students to this point in their abilities is a goal of all teachers.

Another similar study was done in a kindergarten class that attempted to research how a teacher can support student learning by incorporating interactive read alouds into their literacy curriculum daily (Wiseman, 2011). While reading, the teacher drew the students' attention to specific words, pictures, or elements of the book that she deemed important and allowed the children to respond and discuss these parts. By doing so, students considered how both pictures and words can contain meaning and began applying these together to construct ideas. Following the story, the class would discuss it as a whole and then students would turn to a partner and talk. After the partner conversations students would write in their journals whatever was on their minds. It did not have to be directly about the read aloud but usually this was used as a springboard for their ideas. This teacher also used what is called "scaffolding" to guide her lesson (Wiseman, 2011). Scaffolding is the gradual building upon of information. Scaffolding was also a key component of the intervention done by Scharlach (2008). She explained that comprehension strategies are crucial during read alouds and by modeling these strategies students will begin to employ them when they read independently. Students being able to use

strategies independently is the goal of both studies. Instructors should be able to teach comprehension strategies with a gradual release of responsibility to their students (Scharlach, 2008). Providing instruction in this way allows students to practice and become proficient with a variety of skills. According to Wiseman (2011), confirming was one thing that she did to encourage student predictions. She had them make them in the beginning and then as the story went on, she would refer back to them and confirm comments to foster participation. The teacher also did this simply by saying "that was a good idea" to make the children feel comfortable providing answers and input to the class (Wiseman, 2011). Another technique that this teacher used was modeling. She modeled how to read, understand, predict, question, and analyze a story in a way that her students were able to pick up on and apply to themselves. Extending is another technique the teacher used. Extending is when the teacher takes what the student says and guides them into developing a deeper, more complex meaning of the text. They may point out pictures or phrases that are pertinent to the reading and direct students' attention there as well. This technique helps student uncover themes that they may not have picked up on right away. The last component of the interactive read aloud that this teacher used was Building. Building gives students the opportunities to construct meaning together and build upon each other's ideas. At the end of the study, it was determined that interactive read alouds were indeed very supportive of literacy development in kindergarten students. Their participation, engagement, ability to make connections, and ability to construct meaning increased significantly and their thoughtful conversations fostered a positive and accepting classroom community (Wiseman, 2011).

Another strategy that is often used in primary grade classrooms is repeated read alouds. The term "repeated read aloud" means that the same book is read aloud multiple times.

Repeated reading is done so that the students have multiple opportunities to hear vocabulary words and pick up information they may have missed. This strategy is typically used with students with disabilities and very young children. A study conducted by Shurr and Taber-Doughty (2012) explained that middle school students with Moderate Intellectual Disability benefit from continued literacy support such as repeated readings and diagrams accompanying text. The more exposure they have to vocabulary, the more they will be able to retain. This strategy is very commonly used in Kindergarten classrooms as well. However, another study found that repeated readings may not be completely necessary. Two kindergarten classes were given repeated interactive read alouds in an attempt to see if their comprehension scores increased as a result (Greenawalt, 2010). The teacher read aloud the same book, interactively, three times. They then administered the same set of nine questions after each read aloud. The results of these questions showed that all students got all nine questions correct after the first read aloud was done (Greenawalt, 2010). These findings show that when a read aloud is done effectively, it may not take multiple readings to ensure student comprehension.

Another strategy to be used along with read alouds is graphic organizers. Some students are visual learners and being able to have something that they can see and touch in front of them while they are being read to can improve their comprehension significantly. Graphic organizers are tools that can be used by students for organization. They can include pictures, diagrams, charts, or other visual representations of the content of the text (Barret-Mynes, Moran, & Tegano, 2010). Teachers can model how to use these before they begin reading aloud and remind students to refer back to them as well. Being able to interact with graphics is similarly engaging to the use of e-books. Students get to create images and see more than just text. According to Jones and Brown (2011), students prefer working with materials that are

stimulating. The students in their study enjoyed the amenities associated with e-books such as pop-up definitions, word pronunciation, automatic page turning, read aloud narration, and being able to draw and highlight on the text (Jones & Brown, 2011). Being able to interact with texts in this way can better stimulate students. Graphic organizers provide similar stimulation. During one study done with seven and eight year olds in which each week they would listen to a story and create a character map, setting sketch and event time line to go along with them (Barret-Mynes, Moran, & Tegano, 2010). They were able to create something visually appealing that connected to each text. The students were then given Accelerated Reader quizzes which tracks individual comprehension. The analysis of the study revealed three findings. Children's discussions became more collaborative, the creation of graphic organizers became more student directed with less teacher input necessary, and the children received higher tests scores throughout the four weeks of study (Barret-Mynes, Moran, & Tegano, 2010). This shows a positive correlation between the use of graphic organizers and children's comprehension scores. Using strategies such as this one along with interactive read alouds has proved beneficial in heightening students' comprehension abilities as a whole.

As proven by most of the studies mentioned above, the use of additional strategies along with read alouds is very effective for supporting the growth of student comprehension. Using interactive read alouds as opposed to traditional ones makes a significant difference in and of itself. When those are paired with other strategies such as graphic organizers, questioning, scaffolding, etc., children are really able to construct a much deeper meaning and understanding from the texts. From the study done by Andreasen and Clark (2014), many recommendations were derived. Teachers should clarify student expectations during read aloud activities so that students understand the purposes for doing them. Teachers should also provide opportunities for

students to actively engage with the read aloud text and there should be some type of collaboration between the teacher, student, and peers, before, during, and after the read aloud. Teachers need to be more explicit and intentional about the instructional benefits of read alouds so that students are aware of these and can reflect on them. Finally, teacher read alouds should be paired with other techniques to enhance full comprehension of the text. The above information synthesizes all of the themes presented in this literature review into a few concise suggestions for teachers. When all of these ideas are combined into read alouds, the ability of the students' to develop deep meaning from texts increases exponentially. Background experiences and home life situations, have a direct impact on how much a child comprehends when they get to school. However, the engagement techniques that teachers supply and the instructional strategies that they use during read alouds, are what can make the significant difference in how much they grow.

Method

Context

This study took place in one elementary school in upstate New York. The school is comprised of 333 students with 80% being white, 8% being African American, 6% being Hispanic, 1% being Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and 5% being multiracial (School Report Card Data, 2015). Of these students, 39% of them are economically disadvantaged. Ten percent of students are eligible for reduced price lunches and 26% are eligible for free lunches (School Report Card Data, 2015). The school contains grades kindergarten through fifth and is one of four elementary schools in the district.

The classroom that the study took place in contains 20 students. It is a general education classroom made up of 13 boys and seven girls. All students are in fifth grade but their reading abilities range from 3rd to 6th grade. Three of the boys are African American and the rest are white. One of the girls is multiracial with the rest being white. None of the girls are eligible for free or reduced lunches while four of the boys are. The students come from a variety of homes. About half of the students in the class live with both parents while the other half have parents who are divorced. Three students in the class have an IEP and nine students are pulled out for reading services daily.

Participants

There are 15 students who participated in this study. They are all in the fifth grade at the same school as mentioned above. Of the participants, 10 are boys and five are girls. Two of the boys are African American and the rest are white. One of the girls is multiracial with the rest being white. One of the boys is eligible for free or reduced lunch. One of the boys has an IEP and is pulled out of the classroom for both math and reading services daily. Another one of the boys also has an IEP but is only pulled out of the classroom for writing intervention. In addition to that, two other boys along with two girls are pulled out for reading services daily as well.

About half of the students in the study live with both parents and siblings and are part of families in the average-high socioeconomic class range. The other half of the students have divorced parents, or only live with/see one of them regularly. One student has a father that was killed while another has a father who is incarcerated.

The students range academically in reading, math, and writing. The lowest student performs in all areas at about a third grade level while a few of the highest students perform at

middle school levels. The majority of the class falls in the average reading, writing, and math levels for fifth grade.

Researcher Stance

I am currently a graduate student at St. John Fisher College. I am working towards a Master's of Science in Literacy Education, and certification for teaching literacy to children from birth through grade six. I hold a Bachelor's degree in Childhood Education grades 1-6 and Special Education grades 1-6, which I earned at St. John Fisher College. I hold New York State teaching certifications in those areas as well. As a researcher for this study, I acted as an active participant observer. This type of observation is done with the purpose of looking at the activities, people, and physical aspects of a situation and engaging in activities that are appropriate to a given situation and provide useful information (Mills 2014). Following that definition means that I taught the students a strategy and also observed their reactions to it. I observed them while they read independently and recorded off task behavior. I then introduced interactive read alouds to them and observed their behavior during this time as well. Doing a variety of observations in my research provided a broader range of information and data to analyze.

Method

For this study I collected both qualitative and quantitative data. The idea was to see how/if reading aloud to children affects their comprehension. First, I gave students a story book to read independently. They all received the same book and were given the same set of questions (Appendix A) to answer after they had completed the reading. While they were reading, I observed for off task behavior. This data included things such as looking around the room, talking to a neighbor, playing with things on their desks, etc. I kept a tally sheet to record how

often the off task behavior occurred. Reading and completion of the questions took about 30 to 45 minutes.

Later in the day, I did an interactive read aloud for the class. I told them what an interactive read aloud is and explained that I would be pausing to ask questions and allowing them to make connections and predictions and have conversations about the book. Again, while I was reading, I kept a tally sheet next to me to record any off task behavior I observed. After I read, I gave the students the same set of comprehension questions they answered when reading independently, to answer on their own again (Appendix A). This process took about 45 minutes to complete. I repeated this process three times to collect enough data for accurate comparison.

After the students completed three independent readings and three interactive read alouds, I gave them a questionnaire (Appendix B) to fill out. The questions were about their attitudes towards reading independently versus being read aloud to, and how they think being read aloud to affects their comprehension abilities and why, etc. I also chose three students to interview as well. I asked 11 questions to each participant (Appendix C). I chose one high, average, and low level reader for this. The goal of the interviews was to see if student reading abilities impacts their preference for read alouds and if this aligns with how well they were able to comprehend the texts. All parts of the study were done whole group with the exception of the interviews being done one on one.

Quality and Credibility of Research

Since the collection of this data is part of an action research project, it is essential for me to ensure that the study is trustworthy. Mills (2014) cites the work of Guba (1981) in explaining how credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability lead to trustworthiness in

research. Using these four things, all aspects of this study should align with Guba's trustworthiness of research.

The first criterion for trustworthiness in research is credibility. Mills (2014) explains, "The credibility of the study refers to the researcher's ability to take into account the complexities that present themselves in a study and to deal with patterns that are not easily explained" (p. 115). This definition means that researchers need to understand that data is collected in real world situations, where problems and errors can occur and that the data may not always present in the expected ways. To meet this need, I practiced triangulation. I compared a variety of data sources and methods to cross check information and tried to determine positive correlations and conclusions.

The second criterion for trustworthiness in research is transferability. Mills (2014) defines transferability as, "Qualitative researchers' beliefs that everything they study is context bound and that the goal of their work is not to develop 'truth' statements that can be generalized to larger groups of people" (p. 116). Based on this definition it means that the conclusions I come to for this study cannot be considered as facts. They only apply to the participants for this specific study. To ensure the possibility of transferability, I collected detailed, descriptive data. This specific data will allow for comparisons to be made for other populations (Mills, 2014).

Dependability is the third component of trustworthiness. Mills (2014) defines research dependability as "The stability of the data" (p. 116). In other words, how strong or weak the researcher's conclusions are based on the quality of data that they collected during the study. To ensure dependability, I used overlapping methods. In simpler terms, I used two or more methods so that they will support the weaknesses of each other. Using overlapping methods allows the

researcher to approach the same problem in multiple ways. In my study, I did this using interviews, questionnaires, comprehension questions, and observation.

Finally, the last criterion for trustworthiness in research is confirmability. Mills (2014) defines confirmability as "The neutrality or objectivity of the data that has been collected" (p. 116). In other words, research can be confirmed if the researcher's opinions have not influenced the study and are not included in the findings. To ensure confirmability for this study, I practiced the use of triangulation. I used a variety of data collection methods which I then compared to each other. I looked for areas of commonality as well as areas of discrepancy. Once I had analyzed all of the data and crosschecked the information, I could draw conclusions and trustworthiness could be ensured.

Informed Consent and Protecting the Right of the Participants

Before beginning to collect data for this study, I had to gain permission from the students I would be working with, as well as their parents, as they are all minors. I sent assent and permission forms home with the students along with a letter detailing the study I was conducting. The permission form informed the parents of the purpose for the study and asked for their signature, ensuring their permission for their child's involvement in my research. I also asked the children involved if they were willing to participate and gave them some background information. The assent form signed by those children informed them of the purpose of the study and asked for their signature to ensure their willingness to participate. The parental permission form and the children's assent forms were collected after they had been brought back to school and signed. All parents and participants were also notified that pseudonyms would be used to protect the identities of the students involved. Along with these precautions, any identifying

information that is evident in questionnaire answers or in the interviews, was eliminated as well. This measure of protection ensures confidentiality and anonymity.

Data Collection

I collected four forms of data in this research study. This information was used to triangulate the conclusions I made at the end of the study. The first type of data collection I used was observation. While my students were reading independently and also while I was reading aloud to them, I kept a tally sheet to record any off task behavior that I observed. I then compared the results of the tally sheet from independent reading and the read alouds to assess engagement in the different activities. This information helped me to see if students are more interested and engaged during read alouds or when they read independently and I compared this to how well they score on their comprehension questions to see if there is a positive correlation between engagement and comprehension.

The next type of data collection I used is assessment. After the completion of both independent readings and read alouds, I gave students a set of comprehension questions to answer on their own. The questions were very similar to ensure reliability and are included in the appendices. I collected all questions after each reading and compared answers from read alouds and independent readings. I looked to see if students performed better on one or the other and compared those results to how engaged they appeared to be during each type of reading.

Another type of data I collected is questionnaire responses. The questionnaires included questions about student preference in read alouds or independent reading, how each impacts their comprehension, which one is more engaging, etc. A copy of the questionnaire is included in the appendices. Each participant received one of these at the conclusion of all independent readings

and read alouds. The results of these were used in comparison to comprehension question results to see if there was a positive correlation.

The final type of data I collected was interviews. I interviewed three students one on one. I interviewed a high reading level student, an average reading level student, and a low reading level student. I asked them similar questions as those they answered on the questionnaire. I recorded the interviews and then transcribed them for analysis. Interviews provided a deeper look into the thoughts of these students and allowed me to see if their reading levels may have impacted the results of the data collected in each area for these students. Interview questions are included in the appendices.

Data Analysis

Several forms of data were collected for this action research study. These types of data include observations, student questionnaires, interviews, and student responses to comprehension questions. The data was coded several times to find patterns within the various forms of information. From the data, I was able to draw conclusions about how read alouds impact the comprehension of different level readers. I found that read alouds have a much more significant beneficial impact on below level readers than average or above level readers.

The first piece of data I analyzed was the student questionnaires. I began by breaking the student participants into groups based on reading levels. The groups were below level, average, and above level readers for fifth grade. Creating groups helped develop more conclusive patterns and more in depth analysis. I then looked at student responses and explanations about reading preference within each group and drew conclusions from there. This data was coded multiple times to find commonalities and discrepancies within responses. Specifically, reasons for student preferences were looked at in comparison to their reading levels.

The next piece of data I looked at was the comprehension question responses for each student. Each student answered six sets of questions, one following each read aloud or independent reading. I compared results from the read alouds versus the independent readings and found a variety of results from group to group. First, all questions were scored out of five possible points. Next, the worksheets were divided into groups based on reading levels. These groups were above level, average, and below level. This data was coded several times to find reoccurring patterns. In each group, I highlighted the questions least missed in green, and the questions most missed in red. I compared this information between groups to see similarities and differences between read alouds and independent readings.

The next group of data I analyzed was the interview responses to 11 questions. I interviewed one student from each of the three groups (above average, average, and below average) one on one. I first recorded and then transcribed each interview. After being transcribed, the responses were coded for themes. Specifically, I looked to see similarities and differences in the reasons behind their responses.

The final piece of data I looked at was off task behavior. While doing the read alouds and having students read independently, I observed and recorded any off task behavior I saw. These behaviors include looking around the room, talking to a neighbor, and playing with something in their desk. To analyze this data, I first looked at all of the off task behavior tallies for read alouds and independent readings and compared the two. I then looked at the tallies of each individual reading to see if they increased or decreased as the readings continued.

In order to effectively analyze the data, I looked for recurring themes, outcomes, and patterns in the information. Tables were created to show the results of questionnaire findings,

comprehension question responses, and off task behavior. Similarities and differences arose within the data collected through coding and it became possible to draw accurate conclusions from there.

Findings and Discussion

The data from this action research study was derived from observation, student questionnaires, interviews, and student responses to comprehension questions. When looking at the data through several lenses, multiple themes emerged. The first theme discusses student responses and reactions to the read alouds. This theme was based on student behavior as well as comprehensions scores. The second theme highlights student preferences for read alouds based on reading levels. The final theme details the perceptions of interactive read alouds as a support for reading comprehension. The analyzed data provided me with a greater range of perspectives, understandings, and conclusions.

Reactions to Read Alouds

In the context of this theme, behavior and comprehension scores were compared to see if off task behavior impacted comprehension scores. The students' physical reactions to the read alouds and independent readings were kept track of with tallies. Off task behavior such as talking to a neighbor or playing with objects in their desks were recorded during each read aloud and independent reading. These tallies were then analyzed against the scores the students received on their comprehension questions following all readings. One of the main ideas behind interactive read alouds is engagement. Typically, the more engaged students are in a text, the better their comprehension is. However, upon analysis of this study, as a whole, more off task

behavior was recorded during the interactive read alouds than during the independent readings. During the study, reading methods altered each day. The first day was a read aloud, the next day was an independent reading. It continued this way until three of each had been done. The first read aloud was compared with the first independent reading, the second read aloud with the second independent reading, and the third read aloud with the third independent reading. In each case, there was a higher number of off task behavior tallies during the read alouds. When compared as a whole, there were about half as many off task behaviors during independent readings than there were during the interactive read alouds. Specifically, 37% of off task behavior occurred during independent readings while 63% of off task behavior occurred during read alouds (Off-Task Behavior, 2016). One reason for this result may be that during read alouds, the teacher has more of the responsibility and the students take advantage of the opportunity to fidget with other things or whisper to their neighbors. They can just listen instead of focusing on actually reading a text themselves. During the independent reading times, the room is very quiet so any talking would be noticed and having the book in front of them forces students to concentrate more on the task at hand. These findings contradict those of Wigfield, et al. (2008) who showed that engagement should directly relate to the outcome of comprehension scores. That is, the less off-task behaviors occur, the better comprehension should be.

Based on these findings, it would be reasonable to assume that since a greater amount of off task behavior occurred during the read alouds, comprehension scores would be lower following them. However, Table 1 shows the exact opposite. The table below represents six students, from a range of reading levels, scores on the comprehension questions following the second read aloud and independent reading.

Table 1

Comprehension Scores

Independent Reading #2	Read Aloud #2
60%	80%
60%	100%
80%	100%
80%	80%
100%	100%
100%	100%

This table shows a discrepancy between off task behavior and comprehension scores. Although there was more off task behavior during the interactive read alouds, students performed better on the comprehension questions following read alouds than they did after reading independently. All students scored the same or better on the comprehension questions following the read alouds than they did on the questions following the independent readings. Therefore, it can be implied that although more off-task behavior occurred during the read alouds, the students were still hearing what was said and remembering the information. This information leaves room for further investigation. For the purpose of this study, as a whole, it was concluded that the off task behavior, did not negatively impact comprehension scores and from this data it can be stated that interactive read alouds have a positive impact on comprehension.

Additionally, it was found that not all off-task behavior can be indicative of students not paying attention. For example, some students need to play with small items or "fidgets" in order to actually concentrate better. It could be argued that some of the behaviors recorded as "off-task", were actually not off-task at all. When interviewed, students were asked about concentrating during read alouds and independent reading. They were specifically asked whether it is easier for them to pay attention and focus when reading independently or when being read to and why. The above level student responded, "By myself because I like it quiet and to go at my own pace. Sometimes when the teacher stops, I lose my place and I just like reading through it" (Student Interview, 2016). The above average reader's response indicates that she works best with no distractions and that they focus best when reading alone. This response is different from the other two students. The average reader responded, "when the teacher reads because I can focus on what she's saying and not worry about looking at the words myself or how fast everyone else is going" (Student Interview, 2016). The average reader concentrates best when the teacher reads because it eliminates the pressure of keeping up with the other students when reading independently. Constantly checking around the classroom to see where everyone else is can be hugely distracting when reading and can affect how much information they are actually taking in. The below average reader's response was, "when the teacher reads I like it because then I can just sit there and listen and play with my toy that helps me think and it goes faster. I read slow so I get distracted when it takes me a long time" (Student Interview, 2016). The below average readers explanation provides a new way to look at "off-task" behavior. Although this student was playing with a toy in his desk, it was actually helping him to concentrate as the teacher was reading. It can be implied that this may be one of the

reasons that performance on comprehension questions did not decrease, although there was more "off-task" behavior during the read alouds than independent readings.

Preferences for Read Alouds

When looking at the data as a whole, there were very mixed responses as to which method of reading students' preferred, independent reading or read alouds. Evidence of these responses was attained through student questionnaires and interviews. After breaking the data into groups based on high, average, and low readers, similarities began to occur amongst the student responses in each group.

Of the 15 participants in this study, 47% prefer reading independently while 53% prefer being read to. Given that the study consisted of a variety of level readers, this may have to do with reading ability. Generally, the below average readers prefer being read to while the above average readers prefer reading on their own. Responses from the questionnaire were analyzed to determine reasons behind the preferences. The table below shows one of the questions students responded to on the questionnaire. Students were broken into groups according to reading levels and the table depicts these groups and the percentage of students who agree with the statement.

Table 2

Student Responses

I understand more when someone reads to me than when I read by myself.	
Above Average Readers	0% Agree
Average Readers	50% Agree

Below Average Readers	80% Agree

Students in the below average reading group were the ones who most agreed with understanding more of the text when being read to than when they read on their own. These students are the struggling readers of the group and therefore have a more difficult time decoding words and comprehending texts when reading independently. It makes sense that these students understand more when a teacher reads to them because they no longer have to focus on figuring out words, and can instead just listen for the meaning. As reading abilities increase, students become more capable of comprehending texts on their own as is likely the case for the above average readers in the table. They become able to complete tasks independently and do not rely so much on the teacher for help.

Similarly, it became evident across the questionnaires and interviews that the above average readers main reason for preferring to read independently was the ability to focus better. Table 4 shows the student responses to the question on the questionnaire regarding ability to focus. Based on reading levels, it shows the percentage of students who agree that it is easier to focus/pay attention when they read independently.

Table 3

Student Responses

It is easier for me to pay attention/focus when I read by myself.	
Above Average Readers	100%
Average Readers	50%

Below Average Readers	20%

All of the above average readers reported that it is easier for them to focus on the text when they read independently than when they are read to. When students abilities extend past those of their classmates, they often wish to work at their own pace which may be faster than when activities are done whole group. When they work at their own pace they can focus on the features of the text that they deem important and do not have to stop and listen to their classmates and teachers. Reading independently may help the text flow more smoothly for them and could be a reason for their responses. Along with that, it is often quieter in the room when students read independently with very minimal distractions. Half of the average readers find it easier to pay attention when they read alone while the other half find it easier to pay attention when being read to. Those who prefer reading alone may be more fluent readers than those who prefer being read to. Half of the students in the average reading group and 80% of the students in the below average reading group reported being able to focus better when being read to. Read alouds allow students to sit and listen to find meaning instead of forcing them to focus on decoding words they may not know. When students have to decode words themselves, it takes their attention away from the meaning of the text which could have led to these students' responses. The more they are able to understand, the better prepared they are to answer questions following the reading. This finding connects to Delacruz (2013) who found that interactive read alouds do increase assessment scores and would recommend that teachers implement them daily.

Throughout the questionnaire and interviews, how prepared students feel to answer questions after each method of reading was another area of focus in which similarities were found amongst student responses in the different reading groups. The table below shows student responses to one of the questions on the questionnaire pertaining to which method of reading prepares them most to answer comprehension questions. Responses are grouped based on reading levels and the percentages represent the students who agree with the statement.

Table 4

Student Responses

I feel more prepared to answer questions when someone reads to me.

Above Average Readers	25% Agree
Average Readers	67% Agree
Below Average Readers	80% Agree

Again, this table is showing that below average readers are the students who most prefer and benefit from read alouds. As seen, 80% of below average readers feel more prepared to answer questions after someone has read the text to them. Taking the responsibility of decoding text and figuring out tough words away enhances their ability to find the meaning of the story and focus on other important text features such as characters, themes, problems, etc. The average readers again stand divided which makes sense being in the middle group where some students may be stronger than others. Along with that, it may simply depend on the type of

learner the students are. Some may be auditory while others are visual which may contribute to the given responses. Only 25% of above average readers feel more prepared to answer questions after being read to. This statistic shows that the majority of these students feel more confident in answering questions when they read independently. This information could tie back to the fact that this group reported that they focus much better when reading independently and therefore retain more of the information being given. When asked whether it is easier to answer questions about a text after being read to or reading independently, the student from the above level reading group reported that "it's easier to answer questions when I read by myself because I can concentrate better and stop and reread parts I don't get. And I can look back at the book when it's in front of me if I need help and I can work at my own pace" (Student Interview, 2016). This student mentioned that it's easier to focus when reading alone, which was a common response of high level readers in Table 4. Conversely, when given the same question in the interview, the below level reader responded, "It's easier when someone reads to me because I know more" (Student Interview, 2016). This statement shows that this student gains a better understanding of the text when being read to and feels more comfortable answering questions following read alouds. This piece of data also aligns with the responses recorded by below average readers in the tables above.

Perceptions of Interactive Read Alouds as a Support for Comprehension

Throughout the study, students provided their perceptions of read alouds through interviews and questionnaire responses. When analyzing the data it became apparent that many students discussed their preference for read alouds as a support for answering questions following a text. Even students in the above average reading group recognized the educational benefits of read alouds even though they preferred reading independently.

The last question of the questionnaire asked students to explain why they preferred either read alouds or reading independently. Of the students who chose read alouds, 75% stated that they "understand more" and "it helps make it easier" when they are read to than when they read on their own. Based on these statistics it can be implied that the discussion that goes along with read alouds significantly impacts the amount of information students retain and are able to carry over in their responses to comprehension questions. All of the students who chose read alouds were in the average or below average reading groups. This information shows that these students appreciate the support in instruction and they can acknowledge that it helps them to be more successful on tasks following texts.

The interviews provided further explanation into student perceptions of read alouds as an instructional support. Question seven on the interview asked students about the educational benefits of read alouds. Specifically it asked them if they think there are any educational benefits of read alouds and if so, what are they. The above average student responded, "Yes, when teachers read they help you with the words and talk about the parts you don't know. That helps us do better" (Student Interview, 2016). Although it was shown earlier that above average readers prefer reading independently, this student still recognizes the benefits of teacher read alouds. This student's response indicates that when texts are more difficult, they may prefer a teacher read aloud to help with harder words and clarify information. The average level student responded to the question with, "yes, teachers read faster so we get more done and they help us understand more" and the below average student stated, "Yes, we pay attention and the teacher helps us understand" (Student Interview, 2016). Both the average and below average students mention understanding more with the teachers help and support which connects to the information in the tables above. They may typically read at a slower rate than their classmates so

this may have led to the mention of their ability to focus and get more done with the help of teachers. All students acknowledged the support that can be provided with teacher read alouds. This data connects to Clark and Andreasen (2014) because they also found that the students in their study acknowledged the instructional benefits of reading aloud and the importance of using it as a strategy to engage children.

Similarly, students were asked about their feelings towards the specific parts of interactive read alouds as part of the interview. They were asked if they like it when teachers stop while reading to ask questions and summarize parts of the story among other things. The above average reader reported that "I don't like it when they stop because I like reading at my own pace and not stopping" (Student Interview, 2016). This response indicates that they are confident enough in their reading abilities to complete tasks without the help of a teacher and that they would prefer to work at their own pace which is likely faster than that of the rest of the class. The average reader responded, "I like when they stop sometimes so I can catch up on what's going on if I get lost and when they help us figure out things", and the below average reader stated "I like when teachers stop because sometimes I don't know the answers and they help and we talk about it" (Student Interview, 2016). The average and below average readers responses imply that they prefer read alouds as a support for comprehension when they fall behind or do not understand something. These readers are not as skilled as the above average student and therefore acknowledge the benefits they receive from read alouds. As reported by Wiseman (2011), interactive read alouds provide important learning opportunities for struggling readers because teachers and peers can actively engage in modeling of comprehension strategies and enhance the meaning of texts.

Implications and Conclusions

One implication of this study is that read alouds can be used as a comprehension strategy even in the intermediate grades. Traditionally, read alouds are done more with younger students and decrease as students' progress through the grade levels. However, this study shows that read alouds can be effective even with older students. Many students in the intermediate grades have not fully developed the foundational literacy skills learned in the primary grades. According to Clark and Andreasen (2013), only 34% of fourth graders are at or above the proficient level in the United States. Hearing texts read orally can provide students with additional support to develop literacy skills and increase proficiency levels. High school teachers may want to consider this as well when working with students on difficult topics or with students who are struggling readers.

Another implication of this study was that most below average and average readers prefer being read to over reading independently. Not only did read alouds provide an additional instructional support, but the majority of students in this study preferred the read alouds to reading independently. This enjoyment, in turn, resulted in students performing better on their comprehension questions following the texts. According to Logan, Medford, and Hughes (2010), children with poorer reading skills often need additional motivations to persist and perform well on tasks. Reading aloud is one strategy teachers can use to achieve this when working with struggling readers. Providing the text in a way that students enjoy can substantially increase their success on tasks following the readings.

The last implication for this study is that interactive read alouds can be used to help engage students and enhance discussion of texts. Students who were typically reluctant to answer questions became part of the discussion when interactive read alouds were taking place.

Interactive read alouds take the pressure off individuals and create a more comfortable group dynamic. Each student can feel more confident speaking because their peers and teachers are there for support. This implication is something for teachers to consider when working with students of different abilities and personalities. When students engage with a text they are more likely to remember the information being given and develop a deeper meaning. They can also become proficient with the literacy strategies incorporated into interactive read alouds such as questioning, predicting, summarizing, etc. As reported by Delacruz (2013), when teachers model interactive read alouds, they provide opportunities for authentic learning and a scaffold to students using those strategies on their own.

The original question that this action research study posed was "how does reading aloud to children affect their comprehension?" During this study, interactive read alouds were used in comparison to independent reading. Interactive read alouds involve participation from students in which they interact with the teacher and the text as opposed to just listening. During the interactive read alouds, the researcher paused to ask questions, answer questions, summarize, make connections, clarify vocabulary, etc. Students then answered a set of comprehension questions following each reading. Off task behavior was tallied during each read aloud and independent reading as well. Interviews were conducted one on one with one student from the below average, average, and above average reading levels. When given the questions after the readings, comprehension scores were higher following the read alouds for below average and average readers. There were no differences in scores for the above average readers. Following the interviews it was found that students in the below average and average reading groups reported enjoying read alouds more because they were easier to understand while the student from the above average group stated that they preferred reading independently because it was

easier to focus. Overall, the data from this study showed that read alouds proved to be beneficial to most students, with the greatest impact being on struggling readers. Implications for this study include using read alouds as a comprehension strategy even in the intermediate grades, most average and below average readers preferring to be read aloud to over reading independently, and using interactive read alouds to help engage students and enhance discussion of texts.

After completing this study, one question I still have is how would the results be different if regular read alouds were used instead of interactive ones? I wonder if having students engage with the text and teacher has a significantly larger impact on comprehension than a straight forward read aloud would. This question is something that could be looked at in future studies with traditional read alouds versus interactive ones.

If I could do this study over again, I would collect data in the middle of the school year when students are settled into a routine and are more focused on their academics. I would also spread the data collection out over a longer period of time. Two weeks was a short amount of time to fit all of the readings in along with the interviews and questionnaires. To monitor off task behavior I would have a list of student names instead of a blank sheet of paper and record tallies next to specific student names when they performed any off task behaviors. I could then compare this to their comprehension scores and see if their specific behaviors may have impacted their individual scores.

One limitation of this study is the lack of differentiation in the texts. All books were part of a fifth grade author study, however, not all students were reading at a fifth grade level. Had the texts used been matched with student abilities, results of the comprehension scores may have

been different. If the above level readers were given more difficult texts, interactive read alouds may have had a more noticeable impact on their performance. They may have preferred the teacher read alouds to clarify information and unknown vocabulary words as many of the below average readers stated as being the reasons they enjoyed being read to over reading independently. As it was, no difference was shown in the above level readers scores between the independent readings and read alouds. Likewise for the below level readers, their scores may have improved had the texts been at their levels.

Another limitation of this study is the off task behavior tallies not being tied to specific students. Tallies were recorded of the class behavior as a whole and did not account for individuals who may have been off task more frequently. Had tallies been placed next to each individual student's name, they could have been compared to their comprehensions scores individually and analyzed to see if this had an impact on them.

A final limitation of this study is the time of year it took place. Data was collected during the last two weeks of school before summer vacation. Most of the curriculum had been finished and students were very anxious to be outside instead of in the classroom working. The schedule and routine of these weeks changed daily to accommodate end of the year activities. Students had trouble sitting through the longer read alouds and although many of them still did very well, it can be implied that these factors may have impacted their comprehension scores.

Student ability to comprehend texts is key for success in school. From the time they begin kindergarten, teachers employ strategies to help students understand the meaning of texts. As students' progress through the grade levels, explicit teaching of these skills become less teacher guided and certain tools are not used at all. Read alouds are one of the tools that

decrease drastically by fifth grade. However, the findings from this study show that read alouds are still very beneficial to intermediate students, especially those who are struggling. The increase in comprehension due to read alouds aligns with the findings from Wigfield, et al. (2008) who found that when students are engaged in reading and teachers use strategies such as interactive read alouds to do so, student comprehension increases significantly. This study also supported the results of Griffity and Hurst (2015) who reported that all below average readers favored read alouds while above average reader responses were mixed. This information is significant for teachers in upper grades to consider as well when working with their struggling readers. Even students in high school can benefit from read alouds to help with vocabulary and comprehension. Reading aloud to students takes the stress off of figuring out tough words and allows students to concentrate on uncovering messages and meanings in the text. They can develop a deeper understanding when provided with this support, no matter what age.

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Appendix A

Name:

Title of Book:

1. List the main characters in the story.

-
-
-

2. Where did this story take place?

3. What was the problem in this story?

4. List three main events from this story.

-
-
-

5. How do you think the main character was feeling at the end? Why?

Appendix B

Name:

Please circle which number best represents your feelings about each statement on the scale from 1-5.

1 = Never 2 = Usually Not 3 = Sometimes 4 = Usually 5 = Always

I enjoy reading independently:

1 2 3 4 5

I enjoy being read to:

1 2 3 4 5

I understand more when someone reads to me than when I read by myself:

1 2 3 4 5

I understand more when I read by myself than when someone reads to me:

1 2 3 4 5

I feel more prepared to answer questions when someone reads to me:

1 2 3 4 5

I feel more prepared to answer questions when I read by myself:

1 2 3 4 5

It is easier for me pay attention/focus when I read by myself:

1 2 3 4 5

It is easier for me to pay attention/focus when someone reads to me:

1 2 3 4 5

On the back of this sheet, please answer the following questions in complete sentences.

1: Which do you like better, reading on your own or being read to?

2: Why do you like that better? Explain. (How does it affect your understanding of the story, is it more enjoyable, etc.) Please take your time and answer this using more than one sentence.

Appendix C

Interview Questions

1. How do you feel when a teacher says you will be reading on your own? Explain.
2. How do you feel when a teacher says they will be reading a book to you? Explain.
3. How do you feel when a teacher says you will be answering questions after you read a story? Is this usually easy or hard for you? Why is it easy or hard?
4. Do you find it easier to answer questions about the story after being read aloud to or when you read by yourself? Why?
5. Do you find it easier to pay attention and focus on the story when you are reading by yourself or being read aloud to? Why?
6. Do you think being read aloud to makes it easier for you to understand what is happening in the story? Why or why not?
7. Do you think there are any educational benefits of being read to? What are they?
8. When do you like being read to and when would you prefer to read alone?
9. Do you like it when teachers stop while reading to ask questions, summarize, etc.? Why or why not?
10. What is your favorite thing about a teacher reading to you? What is your least favorite thing?
11. What is your favorite thing about reading to yourself? What is your least favorite thing?