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### Leisure Reading Habits: Students Attitudes Toward Their in School Reading Compared to Out of School Reading.

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# Leisure Reading Habits: Students Attitudes Toward Their in School Reading Compared to Out of School Reading.

## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to discover how students attitudes toward their in school reading compare to their out of school reading. It is my claim that students will have a much more positive attitude toward the reading that they do outside of school than they do of in school reading. Data was collected using students from three different ELA classrooms grades 10-12, including questionnaire data as well as interviews. The study reveals that a variety of different factors contribute to the difference in reading outside of school compared to the reading that takes place in school. If teachers are able to draw more of a connection between the two, then students will view their in school reading more positively.

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Leisure Reading Habits:  
Students Attitudes Toward Their in School Reading Compared to Out of School Reading

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

M.S. Literacy Education

Supervised by

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School of Arts and Sciences

St. John Fisher College

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to discover how students attitudes toward their in school reading compare to their out of school reading. It is my claim that students will have a much more positive attitude toward the reading that they do outside of school than they do of in school reading. Data was collected using students from three different ELA classrooms grades 10-12, including questionnaire data as well as interviews. The study reveals that a variety of different factors contribute to the difference in reading outside of school compared to the reading that takes place in school. If teachers are able to draw more of a connection between the two, then students will view their in school reading more positively.

### **Leisure Reading Habits:**

#### **Students Attitudes Toward Their in School Reading Compared to Out of School Reading**

As teachers, we are no strangers to seeing students struggle with reading in the classroom. These issues can take many forms and is not exclusive to just primary and elementary students. Students enter middle and high school at all different levels of reading. While for some students who struggle with reading, we can determine just where the student is having problems, be it in the areas of decoding, fluency, or comprehension, just to name a few, it is important to look at what is causing the student to suffer from these problems and to learn how to help them strengthen their reading, specifically in the area they are having problems.

As someone who considers himself to be a “reader,” I try to encourage my students to enjoy reading as well, not only in the classroom from what is assigned, but perhaps more so outside of school in their free time for enjoyment, in which they can read whatever interests them. One major problem that teachers, and students alike, face is that there is a clear distinction in students’ attitudes toward reading in class and reading outside of school. The assignments that students are given in the classroom are affecting the students’ perceptions of reading outside of school.

According to Hughes-Hassell & Rodge (2007), there is a positive correlation between reading during leisure time and greater success in school. Leisure reading is reading that is being done on a student’s own time and is not reading that was assigned by a teacher. Leisure reading is further characterized by choosing what a student wants to read and reading from any number of different types of reading and includes more than just books (Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007; Mellon, 1991).

When students begin to enjoy reading on their own time not because a teacher said to but because they actually enjoy it, we can then hopefully begin to see positive changes in the

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classroom. According to findings, 72% of students indicated that they are participating in leisure reading, with 50% marking down that they read “when they get a chance”, and as many as 22% indicating that they are “reading constantly” (Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007, p. 23). With numbers such as these indicating how many students are engaged in leisure reading, it would be also interesting to learn how many students are engaged in school related reading (Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007). It is therefore important to examine how students’ attitudes toward outside of school reading compare to their in school reading. Analysis of these attitudes could indicate if a disconnect exists between what students want to read and what they are being asked to read by teachers.

The purpose of this study was to investigate how students view reading from two different perspectives, in school as well as outside of school. It is important for teachers to better understand the different attitudes toward reading. More often than not it seems that there are students who enjoy reading outside of school but make it clear that they do not enjoy reading inside of school. In order to determine how students’ attitudes compare between reading that is done in school compared to out of school, I investigated students attitudes toward reading in general looking at their interests and motivation toward reading. Using questionnaire data given to three different ELA classrooms ranging from grades 10 to 12, student based focus groups as well as teacher interviews were performed to try and get a better understanding of the practices of teachers as well as the attitudes of the students toward reading in school. It is my belief that students consider the reading that they do outside of school to be much more enjoyable than the reading that is associated with school. This research shows that teachers can make assigned reading a more enjoyable experience for students by simply taking what students like about reading for pleasure and applying it to the curriculum in school.

### **Theoretical Framework**

As research in the field of literacy has developed over time, different theories have developed, each looking at language and literacy acquisition in different ways. Literacy as studied through the scope of a linguistic, cognitive, sociocultural and developmental lens have all yielded different ideas about how literacy is acquired (Kucer, 2009). Sociocultural theory can be defined by attitudes toward literacy being a product of the culture that we are a part of and is largely affected by the people that we come into contact with on a daily basis.

When looking at literacy through a sociocultural lens, the focus is shifted to literacy practices that occur as a result of patterned behaviors and take place within specific cultural groups (Heath, 1982). Luke (1995, 1998) states that literacy is never done in isolation but rather is an inherently social practice which is to say that when these literacy practices are occurring, the individual is practicing literacy in such a way that reflects the values of a community to which the individual belongs. Whether students are motivated to read or not during their free time, or even what types of materials they are reading are all affected by their social relationships. Students' attitudes toward reading are shaped early on by parents and teachers. When these students approach adolescence their influence grows to the relationships that an individual has with peers (Marin, 2009; Kim 2004).

Gee (1989) talks about "discourses" which he defines as "a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group of 'social network'"(p. 18). Gee uses the term "discourses" as a collection of one's primary and secondary discourses. The primary discourse is usually done in the home or through some sort of social interaction among family, or depending on the culture those who you have the most primary interaction with. After the

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“primary discourse” has been acquired, it is then the use of a “secondary discourse” that is gained. The secondary discourse is the language that is used that is gained, used in places like schools or the workplace. It is considered to be more informal language that is used around friends.

Students’ attitudes toward reading are affected by all the people that they come in contact with on a regular basis. Gee (1989) argues that as people in society we are exposed to a variety of different experiences that will shape who we are. Our parents and the people that we live with at home can shape who our literacy habits, but this is not the only source of our identity. At school, students talk to teachers and other students around their age all with different attitudes toward reading. Understanding how students’ attitudes can differ between in and out of school reading can be affected by the difference in social experiences that are faced at home versus at school. Examination of how different aspects of society affect different literary habits will allow us to see how we can better bridge the two.

Depending on a student’s cultural background, it is possible that reading was not widely supported in the home. Perhaps the parents are not readers themselves and are just not active supporters of reading in general, or perhaps socioeconomic status has affected the number of books that can be purchased or that transportation cannot be afforded to go back and forth to public libraries. Heath (1982) shows us that the culture at home affects students perceptions of reading, but at school teachers can provide an environment that fosters reading and allows all students access, not only to books in general but more specifically, different types of literature that students are interested in.

### **Research Question**

Due to the fact that a student's acquisition of literacy happens both at home, as well as school, it is important to recognize that students may have different perceptions about reading in general, but also where, when, and how often reading is taking place. A student's perception can be altered by how reading and other literacy practices are talked about in the home and at school; therefore this action research project asks, what are students' perceptions about outside of school reading compared to their in school reading?

### **Literature review**

Recent research has shown that while positive attitudes towards reading incline in early school years, it begins a downturn around middle school. Once students begin to hit adolescence there is a shift in attitudes toward reading (Howard, 2011). While it is possible for some overlap to exist between the in school and out of school reading, research shows that most students have two very separate attitudes in regard to each. This literature review will showcase information regarding the kinds of reading that is done both within school and outside of school by discussing the following themes: attitudes towards reading are shaped by social relationships, students attitudes toward in school reading and types of reading students are interested in.

#### **Attitudes Toward Reading are Shaped by Social Relationships**

Reading is highly influenced by social relationships with peers and family. The values expressed in the home and supported by parents can have a profound effect on the literacy practices of students as they get older (Strommen & Mates, 2004; Kim, 2004). How children view reading both for academic purposes as well as for pleasure can be directly affected by parents because while it has been shown that children show enthusiasm toward reading, as teenagers, that enthusiasm begins to decline (Howard, 2011). While younger children are not spending little time reading, adolescents are spending even less. American teenagers spend 21

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hours a week watching television; however, only 5.6 hours a week doing homework, as well as 1.8 hours a week devoted to pleasure reading (Strommen & Mates, 2004). Children considered “readers” have books in the home and literacy play a large role in their everyday lives. These children are regularly interacting with books in the home and saw that belonging to a group of people who saw being a “reader” was an important part of their identity (Strommen & Mates, 2004).

Reading is a highly social practice and independent reading is affected by not only factors such as reading ability or attitudes toward reading of close family but also by the kinds of relationships between peers and the student’s identity development. Knoester (2009) used Gee’s (1989) concept of “Discourses” to show how parents and immediate family can encourage reading at home, but a student’s “Secondary Discourse” can push a different set of values and ideas. Gee’s (1989) secondary discourse can be defined as the language that is used in places outside of the home, at places such as school or the workplace. It is the “Secondary Discourse” that students use when they are at school and among their friends which can play a role in how attitudes are shaped towards reading.

There are times when students are faced with supporting the values of the school and their families or support the values of their peers and other social groups to which they belong. For the most part, school and families support good academic practices and doing well in school, however it could be that students choose to fall in line with what will make them more popular or well-liked in school (Marin, 2009). In a study conducted by Knoester (2009) interviews done with teachers, looking at the effect of social relationships and reading interest show that those who were less interested in reading were closer to the center of many different social circles and

were more widely liked than those who enjoyed reading more and were farther out of the social loop (Knoester, 2009).

While the relationships that a student makes at school can affect reading habits, the culture at home can have the same effect. A family's socioeconomic status can greatly affect the ease in which a student can obtain new materials to read and the value that a family puts on reading and doing well in school. If a family puts little to no value on gaining access to reading materials or simply cannot afford to buy new books, then it is possible for a student to go through schooling without a wide variety of reading materials at home and this too will affect their view towards out of school reading (Fisher, 2004; Kim, 2004).

Adolescents will pick up a book for any variety of reasons. Perhaps the book was assigned from school or it could be that the school allows students choose their own book but must commit to a predetermined amount of time either daily or weekly. Perhaps adolescents will choose to read for reasons other than their school demands that they must. It is important to look at the free time habits of adolescents in order to see where reading falls among other habits. It is often assumed that teenagers do not enjoy reading and would rather be doing any number of activities however, teenagers engage in many different activities and reading does play a role (Nippold, Duthie & Larsen, 2005). In a questionnaire given by Nippold, Duthie, & Larsen (2005), a group of students consisting of 100 sixth graders and 100 ninth graders were asked how their free time was spent. The researchers wanted to see what kind of role reading played in the free time of the students. When asked how students are spending their free time and how much time they spend reading for pleasure each day the results became clear that reading was chosen among some of the students and was a rather popular choice and that many students were reading for at least some portion of the day, usually between 30 and 60 minutes (Nippold, Duthie &

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Larsen, 2005). Similarly, Hughes-Hassell & Rodge (2007) found that while students are engaging in a variety of activities during free time, students are also reading. When students between the ages of 10 and 15 were asked how if they like to read and if so, what types of materials were interesting as well as what topics. Researchers discovered that magazines were the top choice among both males and females and celebrities and sports figures were the top choices for what students like to read about (Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007).

Students are spending some of their free time reading. However, many of the activities that students' chose instead of reading for student's time were ones that contained a social aspect. When given the choice students are choosing other activities such as talking on the phone, using e-mail or internet, listening to music/going to concerts and shopping or going to the mall instead of reading (Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007; Nippold, Duthie & Larsen; 2005).

Research has shown that teens read for a variety of educational, personal and social reasons (Howard, 2011). While every teen in school is being pushed to read and told by schools and family that reading will benefit them, many of these teens acknowledge these benefits and take part in reading for pleasure. Beyond the well substantiated educational benefits many teens read for a variety of personal reasons. In a discussion facilitated by Howard (2011) students fell into either of two groups: "active readers" and "reluctant readers" (p.49). When asked to explain why the students were reading rather than engaging in some other activity, students all articulated that the reasons they read. Some articulated that reading is a form of entertainment; they make it clear that it is not just television or music that serves as the only form of amusement that teens are seeking. One teen who participated in the study stated "I do my homework then I read for half an hour. And on the weekends, I'm bored in the mornings, so I'll read" (Howard, 2011, p. 52). Other teen's responses for why they read included escapement and relaxation.

Parents and teachers push for students to read because of the evidence to show that students who read are more likely to be successful in school (Fisher, 2004; Kirby, Ball, & Geier, 2011). Teenagers are aware of this fact as well and some are reading because of that idea, however there are also some teens who read for their own personal or social reasons (Howard, 2011; Wilson & Kelley, 2010). Adolescents are aware, like adults as well as younger children that reading can be done for enjoyment, and while reading may not have been chosen over watching television or surfing the internet on students' favorite free time activity, reading was selected by some students as a free time activity saying a lot about teenager's attitudes about reading outside of school (Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007; Nippold, Duthie & Larsen, 2005).

### **Students Attitudes Toward In-School Reading**

While it has been shown that students do enjoy reading outside of school at least to some degree, it has been equally clear that many students do not enjoy reading in school. Students have been shown to have very definite preferences for what types of texts they would like to read and their expectations are not always met by teachers, librarians, and administrators. In order to keep a positive attitude toward reading it is important that classrooms are able to supply the materials that interest students. There is a connection between interest in what is being taught and access to materials that interest students to learning, motivation, effort and attitude improvement (Worthy, Moorman & Turner, 1999).

There are major implications when a teacher places too large of an emphasis on what the teacher thinks that the student is supposed to get out of a particular text. These problems with teachers pushing their ideas about texts can lead to a negative effect on students attitudes towards reading, including that of the "avid readers" in the class (Wilson & Kelley, 2010, p. 101). An "avid reader" according to the authors would then be "one who chooses to read often, keeps at

reading, and is intent on reading” (p. 101). Contrary to what was believed not all “avid readers” were good students leading the authors to examine perhaps some more misconceptions of this group.

A study facilitated by Wilson & Kelley (2010) examined different “myths” that surround students considered to be “avid readers.” Nominated by teachers, 10 students identified as “avid readers” and were interviewed by the researchers in an effort to learn what motivated these students to read. According to findings these “avid readers” did not have different opinions about enjoying language arts, and were not all necessarily highly successful in school. It was found that somewhere along the lines there was a disconnect between what they read for pleasure and that which they read in classrooms (Wilson & Kelley, 2010).

Jones (2007) pleads to fellow librarians and teachers that instead of fearing teenagers and trying to keep them out, libraries (both public and school) should be doing what they can to get teenagers more involved at the library. He states that it was a “scary day” when the library’s solution to the problems associated with teenagers was to lock the doors during a specific period of the day. (p. 48). The author says that teens are seen as a problem, but rather they should be seen as the focus of the library’s funds and allocation of other resources. Librarians continue to try to censor the things that the library allows access to calling certain books or types of books “trash” (p. 48).

Nippold, Duthie & Larsen (2005) state teenagers are reading more than just books, and in fact prefer many different types of literature. The most popular reading material among adolescent readers is magazines, novels, including books in a series, and comics (Edwards, 2009; Nippold, Duthie & Larsen, 2005; Norton, 2003; Versaci, 2001; Worthy, Moorman & Turner, 1999).

Certainly there is research that talks about what students in general are looking for in classroom reading and why a disconnect exists, there is further evidence to show that gender differences exist as well (Simpson, 1996). Boys and girls are interested in two different types of reading in the classroom. So while there is a loss of interest in reading at the middle school age in general, it could be in part because of the different needs of boys and girls in the classroom.

There is a clear distinction between the reading preferences of boys and girls. While girls overwhelmingly prefer fiction, boys prefer nonfiction to the same extent. Girls choose their books based on suggestions they received from friends, family, parents or teachers. When asked about their books, girls often cite specific titles, characters or something that happened in a particular novel (Simpson, 1996). Boys on the other hand mentioned things like the genre (usually sports, horror, or books with fighting) as to why they liked a book or at least chose it in the first place and for the most part only listed their friends as to where they heard of the book (Clark 2010; National Endowment for the Arts, 2008 Simpson, 1996).

### **Types of Reading Students Are Interested In**

Evidence has shown that a disconnect exists between students and what they read in school (Clark, 2010). The material that some teachers have students read in the classroom is rarely what students would choose to read on their own time for pleasure. The way then to raise reading interest in school amongst students is to incorporate what students want to read into the curriculum (Worthy, Moorman & Turner, 1999).

Comic books, graphic novels and Manga are all growing in popularity among school age children (Nippold, Duthie & Larsen, 2005). If students' interest in reading declines around adolescence, but not all students in middle and high school have stopped reading altogether, we should learn from the students who never stopped reading (Howard, 2011; Knoester, 2009;

Nippold, Duthie & Larsen, 2005). They are motivated by intrinsic reasons to read and this can be accomplished if students enjoy that there are a variety of different genres that can pique one's interest. In a study done by Edwards (2009), evidence was gathered that supported the idea that students who did not enjoy reading in general, often liked reading graphic novels and comic books and if said that if given the opportunity to read more they would have.

There is a movement among some teachers and librarians to not allow things like comic books or graphic novels into classroom and school libraries because of the notion that it is not real reading or that these types of materials are "trash" (Jones, 2007, p. 8). However research shows that graphic novels do have a place in school and libraries if it means that more students will start reading (Edwards, 2009; Norton 2003).

Students enjoy reading a variety of genres that can have limited availability in school. Nonfiction texts can often be disregarded as good reading by teachers and librarians. Unfortunately, there are teachers out there who think that nonfiction texts are not actual reading, they are rather a source of information and make more sense to be used as homework assignments rather than good reading (Sullivan, 2001). There is however a lot of students who make nonfiction texts a part of their repertoire and do so for the same reasons that students read fiction, for things like excitement, entertainment and pleasure (Sullivan, 2001; Howard, 2011). Not to say that reading of fiction should not be rewarded, it is simply to state the case that there are students who would prefer to read nonfiction and because teachers play such a big role in motivating students to read they should be encouraging students to read from a variety of styles in order to find something they may enjoy and hopefully read more of (Sullivan, 2001; Kirby, Ball, & Geier, 2011).

Texts that contain the “urban experience” are growing in popularity. The purpose of these texts is to relate to urban youth, a group that is often not talked about in literature (Hughes-Hassell & Guild, 2002). The decrease in reading interest that takes place around middle school is hitting minority students perhaps the hardest (Knoester, 2009). One possible reason is that urban youth has a lack of access to literature that appeals to their specific interests. More young adult literature that talks about authentic urban experiences could encourage these students to read these books and therefore read more books. One article depicts the importance and appeal of literature that accurately depicts the experiences of urban youth. The article discusses common characteristics of literature that provides genuine experiences of students who live in an urban setting. One student who discussed her experience with literature says that she felt the need to “put herself into the book” and “read about a childhood and neighborhood that could have been her own” (Hughes-Hassell & Guild, 2002, p. 35). The authors say that young adults across ethnic and racial lines want to read books that portray the life of urban youth. These types of materials should be made available so that students have access to them.

In these fast growing times, technology is changing constantly. More and more technology makes its way into the classroom for academic purposes as well as recreational. Technology is changing the way that reading is defined (Schmar-Dobler, 2003). In the past, teachers and parents wanted their children to read more books and it was very clear what was meant by that, the kind that are in libraries on shelves. However, as time continues to roll forward, books can no longer be so easily defined. Outside of school, students are constantly being exposed to different types of literacy that has recently grown to include webpages, blogs and other types of digital text. As a result, students are can become more comfortable with this

style of reading and these types of literacy events and would like to see more of it enter the classroom (Considine, Horton & Moorman, 2009).

Literacy, by nature is affected by different aspects of society and the relationships that are built with the people around us (Strommen & Mates, 2004; Fisher 2004). Parents can impact attitudes toward reading in a very big way, how parents view reading during leisure time and the actions that they exhibit to children will have lasting effects on children's attitudes (Kim, 2004). However, the same can also be said for the relationships that are built with peers and those that live outside of the home. How other students view leisure reading can also have a large effect, sometimes bigger than that of parents (Marin, 2009). If reading is not an activity that is viewed positively by fellow students then it is possible for that perception of reading to carry over, and students may not read because they think that it will impact them negatively in their social life (Knoester, 2009).

Students' attitudes toward their in school reading can be a very negative one. A disconnect exists when students like to read a particular genre or type of text and they are forced to read something else in school (Wilson & Kelley, 2010; Worthy, Moorman & Turner, 1999). In school, teachers can cause students to feel alienated and it can affect student's perceptions of reading outside of school negatively. Allowing students to read the types of literature that they are more interested in in school can create a more positive attitude toward reading in general. Things like comic books and graphic novels are sometimes looked down upon by teachers, but many students are interested in reading (Norton, 2003; Versaci, 2001). By keeping an open mind towards what is appropriate reading in school, and allowing students to read more of the types of literature that they are interested in we can close the gap between students attitudes toward in school reading compared to their out of school reading.

## **Methods**

### **Context**

The location of this study will be at a high school in a suburb of Upstate New York. The school contains approximately 1500 students with nearly 400 students eligible for free or reduced lunch. At 71%, the majority of the students are Caucasian, 17% are African American, 8% Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander and the remaining students are split between Hispanic (Latino) and American Indian/Alaska Native (School report card, 2011).

This study took place in the school library as well as three separate ELA classrooms. The three ELA classes used for this study consisted of one 10<sup>th</sup> grade class, one 11<sup>th</sup> grade class and one 12<sup>th</sup> grade class. All the classes were Regents classes and all classes had at least one student with either a 504 plan or IEP. All three classes had a diverse ethnic makeup. The first portion of the study consisted of a questionnaire which was handed out to whole classes excluding students who either opted out of the study themselves or whose parents did not want their children to participate.

The Library Media Specialist was used to obtain the names of ELA teachers, their contact information and allowing space to be used for the interviews. Space within the library was also provided in order to conduct the teacher and the focus group interviews.

### **Participants**

The participants for this study are the students in grades 10-12 from three ELA classrooms, one from each grade level, as well as the three different teachers from those classrooms, and the Library Media Specialist from the school library. The age, grade, gender and ethnicity of the students varied among subjects as entire classes were examined. Following the questionnaires, student-based focus groups were formed for follow-up interviews. Four 10<sup>th</sup>

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grade students were interviewed as well as two 11<sup>th</sup> graders and one twelfth grader. Four students were volunteered from each grade by their ELA teacher, but not all the chosen students came in for the interview.

**Student 1.** Calvin (pseudonym) is an African American, 15 year old, 10<sup>th</sup> grade male. Calvin has a low reading level and this shows in his school work. Calvin does not appear to take school too seriously and will at times refuse to do his work. Calvin is well liked by his teachers and is popular among his peers. Calvin is very athletic and has friends in a variety of different cliques.

**Student 2.** Michael (pseudonym) is a Caucasian, 15 year old, 10<sup>th</sup> grade male. Michael reads at a low level and does not take school very seriously. Michael has a great sense of humor and can be very funny at times. Michael sometimes uses his sense of humor to deal with situations where he is being asked to do an assignment that he does not want to do, particularly one with reading.

**Student 3.** Tim (pseudonym) is a Caucasian, 15 year old, 10<sup>th</sup> grade male. Tim is at a high reading level and gets good grades. Tim clearly shows a lot of pride in his work and wants to do well in school. He has parents that have very high expectations for him which clearly plays a role in his outlook towards school. In class Tim has a lot of energy, and can easily become restless. Tim is an athlete who plays soccer. Most of his friends are athletes as well.

**Student 4.** Patrick (pseudonym) is a Caucasian, 15 year old, 10<sup>th</sup> grade male. Patrick is at a high reading level who has a very strong work ethic. Patrick has a very strong work ethic and gets good grades. Patrick is a pleasure to be around and always has a positive attitude. Patrick is very athletic and most of his friends are athletes as well.

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**Teacher 1.** Barbara (pseudonym) is a Caucasian middle-aged 10<sup>th</sup> grade ELA female and is the teacher of all four of above students. Barbara is a veteran teacher who has been teaching at the school for eight years. Barbara is someone who her students relate to and with whom she has a good rapport with.

**Student 5.** Ashley (pseudonym) is a Caucasian, 16 year old, 11<sup>th</sup> grade female. Ashley is a very bright student who reads at a high level. While she is in a regents ELA course, she was in an honors 10<sup>th</sup> grade ELA course and was actually recommended for AP 11 ELA. She does very well in her ELA classes both in reading and writing assignments. She comes to class with all of her work prepared and shows interest in what they will be learning in upcoming units.

**Student 6.** Alex (pseudonym) is an African American, 16 year old, 11<sup>th</sup> grade male. Alex is reading at a lower level and does not show a lot of effort in his school work. Alex does not always hand in assignments and when he does, he is notorious for waiting until the last minute, not putting a lot of effort in and showing very little pride in what he turns in. Kevin has admitted to me and his teachers that he does not read what is assigned to him and seems to take pride in the fact that he has not completed a book in a number of years. While Kevin is overall a pleasure to be around his school work suffers as a result of a lack of understanding as well as a lack of effort. Alex has problems with comprehension and in class he is often confused and does not understand the points that were being discussed in class.

**Teacher 2.** Michelle (pseudonym) is a veteran teacher at the school and whose pedagogy reflects that of someone who is open-minded and willing to make changes to curriculum and teaching styles as she sees fit. Michelle teaches 11<sup>th</sup> grade ELA and shows that she takes her students interests into account and while keeping some of the curriculum the same from year to

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year she does change 1-2 books a year to reflect what is popular at that time and what she thinks will keep her students engaged.

**Student 7.** Andrea (pseudonym) is a Caucasian, 16 year old 12<sup>th</sup> grade female. Andrea is a very kind, though mostly quiet student who reads at a lower level. One thing that has been noted by Andrea's teacher is that she does not always self-advocate. Andrea does receive special education services and will often work with an adult in class, something she has never shown resistance toward. Andrea actually enjoys reading although she does struggle much of the time. She has a very supportive home life, one in which her parents are quick to work with Andrea as well as her teachers. Andrea has never had an issue with handing assignments in on time and in fact usually has them done a day or two early.

**Teacher 3.** Emily (pseudonym) is a veteran teacher at the school who approaches her teaching with an open mind. In interviews with Emily she has shown that she is willing to change to adapt to her student's needs and knows that student interest plays a big part in their success. Emily along with another teacher do most of the 12<sup>th</sup> grade ELA curriculum work and as a result are constantly changing it in an effort to improve it.

**Library Media Specialist 1.** Rachael (pseudonym) is a Caucasian female who has been working in the district for a number of years. She is very knowledgeable about literature that is popular both outside and inside of the school. She is an advocate for students who show an interest in reading and seek her guidance. She knows many of the students by name that come into the library and appears to have a good relationship with the students that do frequent the library.

## Researcher Stance

## LEISURE READING HABITS

I am currently a substitute teacher in the district and have had contact with many of the students in a teacher role. Throughout the course of this study, I therefore assumed the role of a privileged observer. The role of a privileged observer is one that is defined as a figure that students recognize from the school setting but, will not be directly responsible for instruction while data is being obtained (Mills, 2011). I am also currently a graduate student at a college near the high school and am working towards obtaining my Master's Degree in Literacy and currently have a Bachelor's Degree in Social Studies and Adolescent Education. I am also New York State certified in Social Studies and Special Education.

### **Methods**

Through this study, I determined what students' attitudes are toward out of school reading and how they compare it to in school reading. Initially, the Library Media Specialist was contacted to talk about the nature of the study and to receive help with access to contact information of ELA teachers who might be interested in participating. When ELA teachers were first contacted to see if they would like for their classes to be a part of this study, of those that responded affirmatively, three teachers were chosen, one from each grade level, grades 10-12, for their classes to participate. Initial data was collected through a questionnaire, handed out during class time, which investigated things such as: whether or not students are reading and why, what materials they like to read and what subjects they like to read about (see appendix). Following the questionnaires, the three teachers were interviewed about things like how often (if at all) students were able to choose their books, their perceptions of students' attitudes toward reading and how social relationships and demographics play a role in shaping those attitudes. The teachers then asked student volunteers to be a part of a student-based focus group which was investigated more specific reading habits and attitudes toward reading. It was requested that

teachers find four volunteers each, all at different reading levels. Focus groups were constructed around grade level and were conducted in the library. Once all data was collected it was analyzed in an effort to determine the nature of student's attitudes toward in-school reading and out of school reading.

### **Quality and Credibility of Research**

Throughout the course of this study, it was important to ensure the quality and credibility of the study. Credibility of one's study is defined as the researcher's ability to take into account things that cannot be easily explained by data alone (Mills, 2011). In order to ensure credibility of this study, I will be using peer debriefing in an effort to put new insights and ideas to the test by talking with other professionals. I also practiced triangulation to get three different forms of data in order to imply a system of checks against the data. I will be collecting raw data and artifacts as well (Mills, 2011). Transferability is the belief by the researcher that everything is "context bound" this meaning that the researcher is not in search of a "truth" that can be applied to large populations of people but rather that the experiences of all individuals are different (p. 104, Mills, 2011). Transferability will be facilitated by the researcher's detailed account of data as well as a detailed description of the context (Mills, 2011). Dependability is defined by Mills as being "the stability of data" and will be addressed by the researcher by using overlapping methods of data collection as well as the establishment of an audit trail so that others will be able to see the entire process of which data was collected, analyzed and interpreted (Mills, 2011). Confirmability guarantees that there is neutrality of the data which is being collected. Triangulation can again be applied in order to meet confirmability as well as the use of practice reflexivity in which the researcher will intentionally reveal any underlying biases or assumptions which could skew the implications or design of this study.

### **Informed Consent and Protecting the Rights of Participants**

Initially, a notice went out to parents telling them that their child may be asked to participate in a study about reading habits and attitudes toward reading. Any parent who did not wish their child be a part of this study was told to contact the district and their child would not be included. Parents were told that students would begin to be asked to participate in the study over the course of the following week and that even after the study had begun the parents could pull their child out at any time. Students who participated in this study were asked to sign a consent form to protect their rights. This study is a qualitative study, and I will work in classrooms and the school library in order to obtain data. The consent forms discussed the purpose of this study, how it can affect future students and ensured that there is no harm to any of the participants including all students as well as adults. I informed participants in the letter of consent and assent that all names will be anonymous, and pseudonyms will be used and all identifiable marks will be removed from student work. Also, any participant can opt out of the study at any time.

### **Data Collection**

Initial data for this study came from a questionnaire that was be given to all participating students. I will be going into three different classes to hand out the questionnaire. Any student who does not, or whose parent does not, want them to participate will not be asked to fill out the questionnaire. Following the questionnaire, teachers will be asked to find four volunteers from each grade to be a part of a student-based focus group. The teacher will also be formally interviewed at a separate time when there is no class or other students around. Because the three classes are all taught by different teachers, three separate interviews will be conducted. All questionnaires will be collected for purposes of raw data. All interviews will be recorded and transcribed.

### **Data Analysis**

Following the collection of data, it was necessary to organize the different components. The survey data was quantified and put into a chart to see how many responses each question received. Because students were able to check as many answers as they felt applied to them for each question, it was important to look at each possible response individually. The data collection was put into a chart that was separated by males and females for each grade level and then each grade with male and female answers combined. This presentation of data made it clear where correlations and differences could be drawn across both gender and grade level.

After the interviews were transcribed, I was able to look at both the teacher responses as well as the students' and begin coding them to look for any patterns that emerged (Mills, 2011). After viewing the books lists provided by the library about most popular titles and genres with the highest circulation and comparing that data to the questionnaires and the interview data, I was able to code several different categories. Patterns emerged from the data including a disconnect between students and teachers conception of reading, student interest, the lack of use of different types or genres of books in the classroom, and the roots of student motivation. Based on the emerging patterns, the data is presented across four different themes: student interest, student choice, social relationships as motivation, and teachers' perceptions of students' interests and needs in reading.

### **Findings and Discussion**

While students' attitudes toward reading are based on a number of different variables, many students feel similarly concerning a number of different ideas. The purpose of this study was to determine with more understanding how students view their in school reading compared to their outside of school reading and examining if there is some disconnect between the two and

why that disconnect exists. The research presented initially looked at students' attitudes toward whether or not the students were reading and what their interests in reading were. Interviews were then carried out as a way to further examine the findings of the questionnaire. During interviews, students were asked more specifically about their reading habits and what they read both inside and outside of school and what they were interested in reading. This data was compared to data supplied by the school library showing what titles, authors, and genres were the most popular by ranking them highest in circulation. When comparing all of this data, four themes became apparent: student interest, student choice, social relationships as motivation, and the disconnect that exists between teachers' perceptions toward students' reading habits and needs, and students' own attitudes toward reading. The discussion of these themes will focus on similarities and differences between students' attitudes and perceptions of reading in school versus their out of school reading.

### **Student Interest**

The concept of student interest in terms of books is multi-faceted. Looking across questionnaire data, some interesting discoveries were found concerning reading habits of the different grade levels as well as differences based on gender. The first two questions on the questionnaire asked "If you read, why do you like to read? Check all that apply" (Table 1) and "If you don't read, why not? Check all that apply" (Table 2). Across all grade levels, females overwhelmingly chose more reasons why they like to read than males did. On top of that males overwhelmingly chose more reasons why they did not like to read. The following tables show the choices that students were given for both questions as well as the percentage of responses for each.

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Table 1						
<i>Reasons for Reading</i>						
Choice	10M	10F	11M	11F	12M	12F
For fun	8	58	22	60	15	63
To learn something/Its educational	21	42	39	30	38	50
It's Relaxing	25	17	13	55	15	58
Because I'm bored	29	50	30	50	38	21
It's exciting	8	25	9	20	4	25
I get attached to characters	17	50	9	55	19	42
For brain stimulation	13	0	9	10	0	4
For a time filler	25	50	13	30	35	29
For motivation	4	0	0	20	8	8
For escape	13	17	13	35	15	17

Table 2						
<i>Reasons for Not Reading</i>						
Choice	10M	10F	11M	11F	12M	12F
Rather watch TV	67	42	65	30	58	25
Rather spend time with friends	88	75	70	45	73	42
Like other activities better	79	67	78	40	85	38

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Trouble concentrating/not good at reading	42	50	43	15	31	25
Rather surf the web	63	42	52	45	50	25
Too busy/no time	58	67	65	25	46	25
Can't find a good book	42	58	35	45	27	17
Rather play video games	63	25	65	0	54	17
Reading makes me tired	42	50	48	20	19	17
Too much school work	46	75	52	30	35	38
Girls more interesting	67	8	65	0	46	0
Boys more interesting	8	25	4	10	4	4
Reading is boring/not fun	38	58	65	20	38	13
Can't get into stories	38	33	35	35	19	21

When asked, "If you read, why do you like to read? Check all that apply" all male responses combined, only 17% of responses reflected why they like to read, as for female responses across all grade levels as well, 33% of responses indicated why they liked to read, nearly double. Looking specifically at 10<sup>th</sup> grade, 16% of male choices indicated reasons why they like to read while 31% of females' chose reasons why they like to read, more than two times as many.

Focusing on 11<sup>th</sup> grade specifically, there was a huge difference between male and females responses. 53% of males' responses checked at least one reason why they don't read while only 26% of females' responses under this category were checked. The data from the questionnaires does not indicate that students overall do not like to read, as the data shown in Table 1 could be interpreted. Data from 12<sup>th</sup> grade shows a much lower percentage of students checked reasons why they do not like to read, so we see a big difference amongst grade levels.

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A contributing factor to these numbers is the fact that books read in 12<sup>th</sup> grade are more closely tied to students showing interest in what they are reading. The notion that 12<sup>th</sup> grade students are reading texts that are more closely tied to their interests is supported by statements made in an interview with Emily, a 12<sup>th</sup> grade teacher. When talking about the curriculum for seniors, she mentions books that are more widely accepted as being interesting to students: “also because [*The Lovely Bones*] is just a good book and because of the way that it opens and it’s just about the development of people, usually senior citizens. You know, they like reading about that stuff” (Interview, November 22, 2011). The statement made by Emily shows that time went into picking that particular book and it was chosen because of the connection to grief and the relevance to students’ lives, which ultimately led to higher interest in the book and more kids ultimately reading it. This novel is a contemporary and some consider it to be Young Adult Literature, which could also explain why students can connect to it and show interest in reading it.

The above data supports findings by Simpson (1996) who offers some insight into the differences between males’ and females’ reading habits, and the differences in interest in books. Simpson (1996) offers that while females prefer fiction and novels, males prefer non-fiction. Also females get many of their book recommendations from teachers and when females read their books they often connect to different characters or to different events that took place in the book, as opposed to males who choose books based on genre or topic (Simpson, 1996).

In an interview done with Barbara, a 10<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, she talked about the books that students were mandated to read as part of the curriculum: “we have been trying to get more contemporary book but still a lot of the original classics are there too” (Interview, November 22,

2011). When asked about students' reaction to mandatory books referred to as the "classics"

Barbara added:

Shakespeare is an immediate 'I hate this', *Lord of the Flies*, I think sounds really exciting at first but the reading level is so hard, once we get into it they are like 'this sucks' so it depends we try to talk it up but you never know (Interview, November 22, 2011).

This statement implies that the books that students are reading are not interesting to them. The fact that these books are not appealing to students could be because the books are too difficult to read; students don't think that the topics discussed in these books are relevant to their lives; or that perhaps they would just prefer to read something more contemporary. The idea that student would like to see more contemporary literature or young adult literature in the classroom supports Bushman (1997) who states that students would rather read texts that the student can relate to.

Differences concerning reading habits can be cited in interviews from all different grades. Michelle, an 11<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, speaks to its existence: "I can't speak to why it happens across the board, but I do notice in my classes that the girls tend to read more than the guys do. I don't know what causes it, but yes I do notice it" (Interview, November 22, 2011) and Emily, a 12<sup>th</sup> grade teacher comments more specifically: "in my experience, more boys are non-readers than girls. That's no by any means a hard and fast rule, but in general I would say that I have more students who are women who are big readers, and that's across Honors and Regents level" (Interview, November 22, 2011). What both Michelle and Emily are implying is that gender does in fact play at least some sort of role in the reading habits of students, which supports the questionnaire data which illustrates the idea that girls are more interested in reading than males are (Tables 1 & 2). This information is also supported by Marinak & Gambrell (2010) who

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claim that males regardless of achievement were less motivated to read and that females put more value on reading.

In an interview with Ashley, an 11<sup>th</sup> grade student, she discusses her thoughts on the books that are chosen for her to read by her teacher. She is asked whether or not she likes the books that she is asked to read in her ELA class to which she responds “yeah so far, like our teacher isn’t doing the same books that every other class is doing, and they’re good, so far” (Interview, November 23, 2011). Ashley indicated that she considers her teacher’s recommendations for the class to read in a positive way. She says that overall she likes what the teacher chooses for them to read and indicates that the teacher at least makes some attempt to choose books that she thinks her class will like. These statements reflect the decision by Michelle, Ashley’s 11<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, to use more contemporary, young adult literature in her class. Using these specific kinds of literature has allowed Ashley to feel a connection with what she is reading and has been allowed to read something that tie in with her interests.

One common theme that became apparent looking at the questionnaire data was what students wanted to read and what they wanted to read about. Table 3 depicts the types of text that both male and female students are interested in reading. The following table represents the percentages that each answer received and shows a big difference in the interests of males and females.

Table 3		
<i>Reading Interests</i>		
Choice	Male	Female

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Magazines	44	64
Fashion/Beauty	1	66
Sports	73	21
News magazines (Like <i>Time</i> or <i>Newsweek</i> )	21	16
Video games	37	7
Music	38	43
Entertainment	45	54
Puzzle	7	14
Science	12	13
Comics	23	23
Internet	55	48
Books for pleasure	16	48
Newspapers	29	13

The information gathered from this particular question has a lot of different implications. Magazines are clearly the preferred reading material for students, both male and female, which student interest plays a role in. With magazines being such an ambiguous term, students could have marked it with any number of interests in mind that they would read about. Internet, sports, entertainment and music being the next most popular, more specific to particular interests, these give us more insight into what students want to read about specifically.

Internet was also a very popular choice among both groups, which shows us that technology plays a big role in the lives of students today. This data supports the findings of Schmar-Dobler (2003) and Considine, Horton & Moorman (2009) who both talk about the constantly changing role of technology in education and literacy. Considine, Horton &

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Moorman (2009) specifically mention that outside of school, students are being exposed to different types of text which has expanded from books and written to text, to new digital forms of text such as webpages and blogs.

Sports is a topic that was touched on in interviews both with a student as well as a teacher. In a discussion with Emily, a 12<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, when asked about student interest in books, she discusses the role of interest and specifically how the topic of sports impacts readers in her class: “absolutely, you know kids who took *Deadline* but who are capable of reading [unintelligible]. And one kid mentioned that it is the only one that has sports in it and that’s really all he likes to read” (Interview, November 22, 2012). This conversation shows that for many students, reading something that they are interested in plays a big part in what they read, it can even trump the level of difficulty of a book if it means reading about the topic that they want to read about. Alex, an 11<sup>th</sup> grade student, also discusses the role that the topic of sports plays in his reading habits, when he was asked if he considered himself a reader he responded “no, well if it was a sports magazine probably...I like *Sports Illustrated*...I like seeing what it’s about” (Interview, November 23, 2012). Clearly, reading about sports is something that Alex is interested in and is willing to do. What Alex says that is interesting is that he likes to read *Sports Illustrated*, and it is a possibility that Alex may read a book in ELA that had sports as a topic, and taking the comment made by Emily into account, perhaps a book that would challenge him and encourage growth in his reading ability and interest.

One number that raises questions with the questionnaire data is the comic book numbers, as only 23% of responders chose this option as something they are interested in reading. According to information gathered from the school library about circulations of different titles,

authors and genres, the top ten circulations, with no parameters set, all ten titles were all graphic novels. The Table 4 represents the top ten title statistics with circulation information:

Title of Book	Author	Type of Text/Genre	Number of Circulations
Fullmetal Alchemist	Arakawa, H.	Graphic Novel	135
D. Gray-man	Hoshino, K.	Graphic Novel	82
Black Cat. Volume 2	Yabuki, K.	Graphic Novel	75
One Piece	Oda, E.	Graphic Novel	68
Ouran High School	Hatori, B.	Graphic Novel	66
Wild Ones	Fujiwara, K.	Graphic Novel	61
Black Bird	Sakurakoji, K.	Graphic Novel	60
Love.com	Nakahara, A.	Graphic Novel	52
Maid Sama!	Fujiwara, H.	Graphic Novel	52
Pandora Hearts	Mochizuki, J.	Graphic Novel	48

The information provided by the library is inconsistent with the findings of the questionnaire which states that just a fairly small percentage of students are reading these books. With the number 1 book being circulated 135 times, and all 10 books being graphic novel titles, there should be no doubt that these books are being read and enjoyed by students. Nippold, Duthie & Larsen (2005) specifically mention that students are reading more than just books and that they prefer many different types of literature. The data also supports the work of Edwards (2009), Norton (2003) and Versaci (2001) who all regard comics and graphic novels as a legitimate form of text that students regard with high interest.

When looking at the list of top fiction novels circulated through the library, the top 3 selections are all realistic fiction. This data points to the notion that students are interested in reading about characters are facing real life events, and things that students could one day face themselves or have had some experience with already.

Table 5			
<i>Top 10 Fiction</i>			
Title of Book	Author	Type of Text/Genre	Number of Circulations
Crank	Hopkins, E.	Fiction	20
Identical	Hopkins, E.	Fiction	20
The Lovely Bones: a novel	Sebold, A.	Fiction	19

When comparing the top 10 circulated titles overall and the top fiction titles, the fiction selections have only been circulated a fraction of the times that any of the graphic novel titles have. With the number 1 and 2 fiction titles only being circulated 20 times it is only half the circulations of the number 10 graphic novel title. The information provided by interviews as well as the information regarding library circulations, is consistent with findings cited by Nippold, Duthie & Larsen (2005) and Worthy, Moorman & Turner (1999) who both talk about the importance of students having access to reading materials that interest them. Emily, a 12<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, expands on this idea with comments made concerning students and her students' interest in Manga:

In our book talks we had kids who didn't finish their books even though they had 7 weeks. So you know it was plenty of time...you know it was like 2 weeks before and I mentioned that book talks were coming up and they are like oh no, I better get my book and they've had [the assignment] for a month already. But I've had tons of kids who walk in with stacks of Manga that they are reading overnight, whether at the consequence of their schoolwork or not, I've definitely seen that. You know they take 8 Manga books out and they are returning them all the next morning. So they're reading. It's just...that's that a choice. So I think that choice has a lot to do with it. And no assignment (Interview, November 22, 2011).

So looking at the three pieces of data, some inconsistencies do appear however, teachers are noticing its popularity and the numbers of library circulations indicate that despite what students wrote on their questionnaire these books are quite popular.

## **Student Choice**

Student choice simply deals with giving students the option of choosing what they read in school. The idea of student choice incorporates the idea of interest as well because it gives students different options to encourage them to read in school, and tie their interests from out of school back in. Student choice was a common theme among many of the interviews, both of teachers and of students. In an interview with Alex, an 11<sup>th</sup> grade student, he makes claims about the existence of a disconnect between his interests and what his teachers ask him to read. When asked about what he would change in his ELA classrooms he responded:

like to get a vote on what we like. Like I don't want to read something I have no interest in because then we are just going to be bored and feel forced. Like they should be like you can read this book about this or this book about this and then we can just choose. I'd be happy if I was reading something about sports (Interview, November 23, 2011).

Alex's statements speak to his frustration about what he is asked to read in his ELA classes and what he would like to read. He doesn't specifically say that he doesn't like to read, but rather that he would prefer to read something that he is interested in. He even offers that the teacher can be involved in what books are acceptable for him to read for the class. When Alex says that the material offered in his class causes him to be "bored" and that he has "no interest" in it he is showing us potentially why males feel disconnected from the literature that is read in schools.

Research done by Worthy, Moorman & Turner (1999) supports the idea of connecting student choice and student interest in what they read. The researchers state that students should have access to the types of materials that they have interest in. Jones (2007) also talks about the need for teachers and librarians specifically to make sure that the books that students want to read are on the shelves and that students can access them. When students have the choice to pick

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a book that they want to read, it is important that classroom and school libraries stock these titles so that students have them to read.

During an interview with 10<sup>th</sup> grade students, the concept of student choice and its potential effect on reading habits was a common theme among all the subjects. When asked about potentially giving their ELA teachers advice concerning reading or book selection the students all responded similarly, one student said “Maybe she could ask like what types of books interest us and try to find books like that, then I would read them more” (Interview, November 23, 2011). While another agreed “same thing, I think she should ask us and we can pick what we want” (Interview, November 23, 2011). Patrick, a 10<sup>th</sup> grade student, cites specifically what he would like to see “newer stuff, not like all the old stuff like Shakespeare...I would like to go out and find my own book to read (Interview, November 23, 2011).

In this exchange it becomes clear that giving students’ choice in what they read would encourage them to read more of their assigned reading. While in this interview, it was clearly stated that it would be preferable for a student to go out and find whatever book they want to read, this idea was not the consensus among all students. During an interview with Ashley, an 11<sup>th</sup> grade student, she felt slightly different about how student choice should be incorporated, saying: “I would want a choice, but I wouldn’t want it to be totally up to myself” (Interview, November 23, 2011). These findings concerning student choice in the classroom supports findings by Gambrell (2011) who claims that when students are given a choice in classroom activities, student motivation increased and students were more engaged in the assignments.

These students say that they would actually prefer to have a group of books that were selected by the teacher to choose from first, as opposed to going out to find their own selections.

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This thinking could be evidence that supports that students do value the choices that their teachers make, and this could be affected by a reputation that the teacher could have, as was mentioned earlier, Ashley likes the books that her teacher has chosen so far for her class to read. It could also be argued however perhaps these students don't really know what it is that they want to read and that they rely on teachers to give them options for them to choose from because the thought of choosing a book to read for the class is overwhelming.

These interviews show that there is a distinct difference between the preference and attitudes of males and females when it comes to reading. Ashley, takes recommendations from her friends for good books and likes the books that are chosen by her ELA teacher, while Alex has trouble connecting to the literature that is chosen by the same teacher and would like to choose his own books, he gives us insight into the types of genre he would prefer, sports.

Teachers also see the value of choice in classes as evidenced by Emily, a 12<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, and Barbara, a 10<sup>th</sup> grade teacher. Barbara talked about the literature circle unit where students were given a group of books that were pre-selected based on different criteria, and their reaction to receiving choice in what they read:

They are excited about it. It's by level and by interest, so the books are identified for them as you know, low, medium, difficult, and then we talk about the topic, the subject matter and so they're...they like that on both ends... Yeah, they are more apt [to read]. I have done a survey before, similar to yours, which was, I talked about the books we've read and asked how much of them they actually read. You know did you read half of this book? Did you not read any of it? And the literature circle books get the highest amount, like they read most of it (Interview, November 22, 2011).

When presented with a choice, it is evident that kids are more willing to read and are actually reading more of their assignments. Emily uses a similar plan with two units and some element of choice in each:

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Well the first book we read, we did *The Lovely Bones* and everybody read that but we're just finishing up our book talks and they can pick any book they want but because the class is Contemporary Lit, it has to be after 1950, which most of them don't pick anything before 2000. So they get any choice they want with that. Our second unit...is a literature circle so we have 6 books for them to choose from...some of them don't know what to do, like today I had kids who had to take 2 books because they couldn't decide, but they like having the option. Most often with choice, I think they actually end up choosing a book they like. Or at least like one more than one that has been thrown at them (Interview, November 22, 2011).

With this particular class, we see that students react not only by the excitement of having the power to choose which book they read, but some are even picking two books to read at a time and have to choose later which one they will use for their literature circle. It is clear that the fact that students were able to choose a book that they wanted out of a group of texts that the students felt connected to impacted attitudes toward reading in a major way. The connection to the different texts and being able to choose one that the students felt connected to supports the findings by Owen (2003) who discusses the importance of both contemporary and young adult literature, and the necessity of having it available in the classroom.

What Barbara and Emily both do that is interesting is offer two separate units with choice in them, but offer choice each in two separate ways. Both teachers have a literature circle unit, where they each offer a choice of a select number of books, and they both also have an independent reading book unit where students get the choice to go and find any book that they want. In the interview with Patrick, it was stated that he would prefer the choice to go out and find his own book that he wanted to read, where in the interview with Ashley and Alex, they stated that they would both prefer to be able to select books out of a group that the teacher already selected. So we see two different concepts of choice being used that apply to different students, but which ever method of student choice that a teacher uses, it seems to have more positive effects on student interest, and student reading their in school assignments. The concept

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of student choice uses student interest but allows students more freedom to select what they would like to read. Allowing students the option of several books, none of which interest them does help with trying to get students to read in school.

Kirby, Ball & Geier (2011) focus more on teachers encouraging and allowing students to read a variety of different types of text. These different texts can include different formats of books and different genres. The researchers claim is that when students are given access and permission to read from different texts, they can more easily apply their own interests to what they read and this may result in more reading.

Part of the questionnaire data looked at what specific topics student enjoyed reading about. The questionnaire data easily supports what the literature says about reading a variety of texts as students, both male female and across all grades posted a varied response to topics they enjoyed. The question asked “What do you like to read about? Check all that apply.” The following table represents if students were given a choice in what they read, these are most likely the types of things that they would want to read about. The numbers represent the percentage of total responses for each gender across all grades:

Choice	%
People/Characters Like Me	48
Sports Figures	43
People/Characters My Age Who Are Wrestling With Tough Issues Like Drug Abuse Or Crime	41
People My Age Who Have Done Something Cool or Amazing	35
Celebrities	33
People/Characters A Lot Different Than Me	26
Musicians	22
Fantasy Characters	22
Historical Figures	19
Animals	16

What is perhaps most telling from this chart is that every choice received some response from students. With the highest response being “People/Characters Like Me” at 48% and the lowest being “Animals” at 16%, there is not really a lot of difference between number 1 and number 10. What is even more telling however is the fact that so many of the choices made by students are realistic fiction, according to the data shown, realistic fiction is the apparent favorite genre of these students.

While the table above represents the total percentages for combined scores of males and females and all grade levels, there was a lot of discrepancy between males and females in their choices as reflected in the follow table:

Choice	Percentage of Male Responses	Percentage of Females Responses
Celebrities	19	52
Sports Figures	66	13
People/Characters Like Me	33	68
Musicians	22	23
People My Age Who Have Done Something Cool or Amazing	30	41
Animals	11	21
Fantasy Characters	21	19
People/Characters My Age Who Are Wrestling With Tough Issues Like Drug Abuse Or Crime	26	47
People/Characters A Lot Different Than Me	16	39
Historical Figures	26	11

The significance of these numbers shows that student interest is hardly an easy thing to generalize. Students only had these 10 choices to choose from and it is very clear that even across these choice responses, different students are interested in different things, something that student choice can alleviate. Girls strongly prefer reading about celebrities (52%), people/characters like me (68%) and people/characters a lot different from me (39%). These findings are consistent with Simpson (1996) who discusses how girls read to connect to characters or events that take place in the book. Males on the other hand, had preferences in the areas of sports figures (66%) and historical figures (26%). These numbers too are consistent with Simpson (1996) who also talks about the preferences of males being more in line with specific genres. Sullivan (2001) touches on the place for nonfiction in schools. Sullivan (2001)

says that nonfiction is not always valued by teachers, but clearly there are students who do place value on this particular type of text.

Looking specifically at “People/Characters My Age Who Are Wrestling with Tough Issues like Drug Abuse or Crime,” students, both male and female, showed interest in these books. Males chose that they are interested in reading these types of books 16% of the time and females checked it 39% of the time. This data reflects the findings of Hughes-Hassell & Guild (2002) who say that students are interested in reading “Urban Literature,” a particular type of text that often deal with teenagers that are dealing with real life scenarios where drugs, gangs and crime can be a real part of everyday life.

### **Social Relationships as Motivation**

A number of relationships exist between students and their peers, teachers, administrators and parents or other family that affect their reading habits (Gee, 1989; Knoester, 2009). These relationships play a major role in whether or not students read in the first place, and even beyond that to what types of text they read and how often they are reading (Marin, 2009; Kim, 2004).

The idea there are a number of relationships that affect a students’ reading habits was cited across interviews of students as well as teachers. However, there was some disagreement from statement to statement concerning which relationships have a large effect on reading, or if some do at all. Barbara, a 10<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, when asked if different relationships with both adults and peers affects how much, and what students read, made the following comments, “Oh yeah, definitely, I think so. I mean if you have a culture of complaining and now wanting to do work, then that’s what it’s like. If you have a culture of where students think that a kid who

doesn't do his work is an idiot, then those kids will do their work" (Interview. November 22, 2011).

According to these comments, Barbara seems to think that relationships with peers and that certain cliques tend to read more. Michelle, an 11<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, in comments made on the subject thinks that peer relationships also have an impact but in a different way, instead of certain cliques or groups of kids reading she explains that technology and social networking sites can have an impact with the help of some students:

Yeah definitely. I think that if words gets around that it is a really good book or that its scandalous that kids are doing drugs in this book, that students would be more liable to pick it up. I mean if I tell them this book is awesome they are going to be like that's English teacher speak. I think it has to depend on the students. Actually, once I handed this book out and I heard that one of the kids said that there were a lot of Facebook statuses about it yesterday, so word gets out!

This particular statement is different in that this teacher thinks that it is not necessarily a specific groups of friends that will encourage each other to read their assignments, but rather that children are motivated by things like content of the book and dealing with scenarios that can be perceived as "scandalous" as well as technology and internet that can get word around about a particular book. What these two accounts from teachers seem to convey is that relationships between peers can affect motivation to read.

Comments made by students actually seem to differ. When talking to a group of 10<sup>th</sup> grade boys, and asked if they considered their friends to be readers, Patrick speaks for all the boys in his statement, "absolutely not!" (Interview, November 23, 2011). When asked if their friends had any effect on how much they read all four boys answered unanimously, "no" (Interview, Novmeber 23, 2011). Because this particular group was made up of all males, it is possible that their answers do not accurately represent the effects of one's friends on their

reading habits. It is possible that as a group of males, they may not all sit around and talk about the latest books that they have all read.

When talking to Ashley, an 11<sup>th</sup> grade female student, comments are made that differ than that of her male counterparts. When asked what motivates her to read, Ashley responded, “if something is popular and everyone says how good it is then I will give it a try...like if I hear its good then I will give it a try because we are friends and we like the same things” (Interview, November 23, 2011). Comments made by students are in stark contrast to the statements made by teachers. Ashley indicates that she takes book recommendations from her friends, and that she trusts her friends to give her good recommendations based on the fact that they should have similar tastes because of their relationship.

Testimony by teachers that relationships among peers play at least some sort of role in the reading habits of students is supported by plenty of research. Nippold, Duthie & Larsen (2005) discuss the activities of students during their free time. The authors looked into how adolescents were spending their free time, and they wanted to see if reading was a part of it. What they discovered is that reading was on the list however, it was somewhere in the middle of a long list of social activities, such as spending time with friends, spending time on the computer and listening to music. Marin (2009) looked specifically at a group of adolescent boys in order to discover how social relationships shaped reading behaviors. Marin (2009) discovered that often these boys would focus on what types of behaviors made them popular at school, and that had a direct impact on whether or not they would read, both for in school as well as outside.

While discussion of the effect of peer relationships differed between interviews, one theme that was much more common among all the subjects was the effect of parents on reading

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habits, grades, and motivation. Nearly all interviews had comments made about how parents or immediate family had a direct influence on reading habits. Even when students, or their teachers, did not consider them to be readers when asked, many had parents that read and their parents were perhaps a big motivator for getting good grades, and why they read their classroom assignments. When a group of 10<sup>th</sup> grade students were asked if they considered their parents readers, everyone responded that their mother in fact was:

Calvin: My mom sometimes. I don't live with my dad, but my mom yeah.

Michael: Same with me, my mom does

Tim: Yeah, my mom

Patrick: Yeah, my mom

Ashley: Yeah, my mom is a huge reader

Alex: Yeah, my mom reads a lot

While none of these students considered themselves to be readers, they all specifically stated that their mother was a reader. What is interesting about this statement is that all students responded saying that their mother was a reader, but none of the responses mentioned how their dad was, extending support of Simpson (1996) who claims that females read more than males do. While, initially this may look as though it would be evidence that a parent's influence may not be that great on a child's reading habits, it became more clear that the influence of parents did not necessarily make their children readers but it motivated them to read in order to get good grades. When asked if they read the books that are assigned in ELA classes, regardless of the fact that it was mentioned that they do not typically like the books that are assigned, the 10<sup>th</sup> grade students interviewed responded:

Michael: Yeah, because I don't want to get a bad grade on my project

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Patrick: Yeah...I don't want to get in trouble at home

Tim: Yeah...I get both. I get a bad grade and then I get in trouble at school and from my parents

Calvin: Yeah...same...I get both

So after this exchange, it became clear that these students are willing to do their assigned reading from school, but not because they like the books and not usually because they themselves are motivated by good grades, but rather because they are encouraged by their parents to get good grades and these students don't want to have to go home with a bad grade on a project or report card.

Grades are not the only motivators for reading inside or outside of school. According to comments made by teachers, students read for different reasons but whether the students are reading or not usually starts in the home. According to one teacher, subcategories exist when it comes to "readers" and "nonreaders" and what they are motivated by,

The distinction that there are kids who read who are not "readers," the kids who read for the assignment because they know it's the expectation, they want to do well and they want to achieve. So there are kids who are not readers, but they read because it's an expectation. The kids who are just readers because they like to read, usually they are much more involved, much more engaged in everything, because they are better readers...I think there's categories under the non-readers too. A non-reader could just not be reading because they don't enjoy it. I have kids who are perfectly capable and if I put [text] in front of them, they could read it, comprehend it and analyze it...but they won't read an assignment for homework because they just don't want to...they want to do something else instead (Interview, November 22, 2011).

The comments made by Emily, a 12<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, do a good job of describing how complex students' reading identities are. While many teachers would consider the students who read for school to be readers, this teacher would actually disagree, just because a student is reading, does not necessarily make them a reader. What Emily is saying here is that the students who are only picking up books in order to fulfill the expectations set by teachers are not truly readers.

Therefore we see the definition of what a reader truly is. According to the quote, a reader is someone who reads because they want to or because they enjoy it. She goes on to say that these are the students who get more out of the books they read and that the “readers” are the students who enjoy the books and actually get engaged with the stories, they are not just students who view reading as a means to an end but rather enjoy the journey.

Another teacher, Michelle, an 11<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, discusses the role of parents more and how they can impact student reading. When asked specifically what motivates students she responded. “I would like to say that it’s always intrinsic, but I think that it is motivated by grades. By parents or education. If parents are big into education, then that will rub off on students. Fear of parents will also do it too though” (Interview, November 22, 2011). Michelle’s statement about parents supports comments made by other teachers as well as students during their interviews. This data supports findings by Kirby, Ball & Geier (2011) who say that parents push their children to read, because of the conception that students who read are more successful in school. Kim (2004) and Fisher (2004) also discuss the role that immediate family can play in the reading habits of children. The authors discuss that if a family put little to no value on literacy then the child will go to school with the same attitude, however if parents and other family openly value reading then these attitudes will be reflected in their children’s reading habits and motivation to do well in school.

### **Teachers’ Perceptions of Students’ Interests and Needs in Reading**

During the course of these interviews it became clear that teachers either think students want one thing, when they really want something else, or teachers try to perceive the “needs” of students and therefore try to meet those needs. When asked about how much choice students get in a particular teacher’s classroom, the answers were mostly some choice at some point during

the year. However, what was common throughout teacher's interviews was the use of Shakespeare at some point during the year.

When asked about possibly changing books from year to year, one teacher responded that "there are some books we have to do, like *Hamlet*" (Interview, November 22, 2011). Later when asked if these books could be changed the response was that it could be changed but "I think honestly it's a great Shakespeare novel to do in 11<sup>th</sup> grade, so I think we just kind of keep it" (Interview, November 22, 2011). When asked about student reaction to the use of Shakespeare, the familiar theme arose with,

Well, if it's Shakespeare, they are not very happy, however I just assigned them a book that is more to their liking and so a lot of them had finished the book already and I just gave it like a day ago because they liked it so much. So it depends on the novel. So obviously Shakespeare they are going to be like ugh, I hate this stuff (Interview, November 22, 2011).

In that one comment, the teacher talked about the hugely negative reaction to Shakespeare and in the next sentence said that she assigned a book that was "more to their liking" and how students were reading the book in a day. Another teacher talks about a similar reaction when assigning Shakespeare that there is "groaning, and rolling of the eyes. That sort of thing" (Interview, November 22, 2011). Regardless of the fact that the majority of students do not want to read these texts and that they are making that clear to their teachers, teachers continue to assign these books. Because of statements made like how *Hamlet* is "a great Shakespeare novel to do in 11<sup>th</sup> grade" it could be that teachers continue to assign these novels because they think that it is somehow important for students to have read these books in high school. It appears as though teachers seem to think that a "well-read" person will have read these stories and that is why they continue to be a part of the curriculum.

As educators in ELA, it is their job to plan lessons and come up with the day to day activities and at least for the most part decide how book selection will go in the classroom. Most teachers have some sort of options, or allow students to make a choice of what they want to read, however, it is clear that students' book choice, even when given the freedom to find their own must meet some sort of criteria or standards in order to be used for the project. One teacher states "in terms of difficulty, as long as the rigor is there, I don't care what they read. If they want to read Dr. Seuss, I would say no because they read that 15 years ago" (Interview, November 22, 2011). What these statements could mean is that there must be some accountability in terms of what books students choose however, it is possible for teachers to push what their idea of what they think is an acceptable book choice. Fiction or novels are often the choice among teachers and this is reflected in an interview with Barbara, a 10<sup>th</sup> grade teacher. When asked about if there are certain types of text that she would not allow students to read in her class she responded, "For the independent reading project that I was talking about, the work that goes along with it is set up for a fiction novel. But I always say that if you are dying to read some non-fiction I am not going to say no. So I guess I do lean towards a novel but they can come to me with whatever" (Interview, November 22, 2011). These comments made by Barbara show how teachers can push one particular genre, in this case fiction, and that all the work is designed for that type of genre which can potentially push students to choose that particular genre even if they are not interested in it. What Barbara goes on to say is that if students are set on one type of text that she is open to allowing them to choose something like non-fiction for their project. So she does show that she is willing to work with students and allow them to find something they are interested in. In the interview with Michelle, an 11<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, she comments specifically on maybe not allowing so much choice in her classes, but she does try to

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find books that she thinks the students will like, not necessarily what she thinks is good or necessary for her students. She chose for her class *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* and justifies it for her students by saying that “it’s actually an MTV novel and it has a great moral at the end and it kind of talks about a kid in high school and stuff” (Interview, November 22, 2011).

When teachers were asked who decided what the mandatory texts would be for their class, it was stated multiple times that these decisions were made before these particular teachers were hired. The implications of the fact that decisions were made about curriculum before many of these teachers were even employed, and nothing has been done about them, means that someone sat down and decided that Shakespeare should be part of the curriculum, and while teachers stated that the assignment was met with resistance from students, there are no plans to make any changes.

When asked if adding more interesting books to the curriculum would change students’ attitude about reading, students made it clear that it would make a difference and stated more clearly how they feel about the novels that are currently being read, one student stated “Yeah. I can’t stand *Of Mice and Men*” (Interview, November 23, 2011), while another added “or *Romeo and Juliet*” (Interview, November 23, 2011). Patrick, a 10<sup>th</sup> grade student summed up his feelings toward the literature read in ELA, “I don’t care. I just don’t care for all the books we read. It’s like you know if you’re going to find a job it’s like ok...I don’t want to read an entire book about you finding one job. Or I don’t care that you two love each other and try to go against everybody” (Interview, November 23, 2011).

While the first two students both make statements about the book choices that they must read as part of their classes, Patrick appears to be very frustrated about the kinds of literature that he is

being asked to read. The two novels cited in this quote that all the students seem to be frustrated with are two examples of canonical literature. When asked if more interesting books would change their attitudes and they talk about the literature that they do not like, it would appear that more young adult literature is what these students are interested in reading.

Things like student interest, student choice, social relationships that students have and a teachers perceptions of what are necessary texts can all affect a student's reading habits, both inside and outside of school. Students come to school with particular attitudes toward reading that they learned from those closes to them, both family and friends. Once in school, their perceptions will begin to change based on the experiences that they have. The purpose of this study was to learn more about what students are interested in reading about, and comparing their attitudes toward in school reading versus the reading that they do out of school. By examining the difference in attitudes we can come hopefully tie the two together, making their in school reading more enjoyable and perhaps make lifelong readers out of our students.

### **Implications and Conclusions**

Having looked at students different experiences with toward reading, in and outside of school, and what their attitudes are toward each as a result, it has been found that trying to incorporate aspects of their out of school reading into the reading that they are asked to do in school can yield more positive attitudes toward reading in both realms. Using a sociocultural lens while examining this topic allowed to the study to look at the impact of different social practices on students and how they affected attitudes toward reading.

Research done by Heath (1982) and Luke (1995, 1998) displayed evidence of the effects of how society and culture can impact attitudes toward reading. Whether or not an individual values reading, what they read and how often we read are all practices that are a result of the

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culture we grew up in and the people closest to us. Everyone from parents, to teachers, and our peers all affect our attitudes and practices toward reading, and because reading is considered to be such a highly social practice, not only will our attitudes change as we experience new things, but as teachers, we can affect students attitudes toward reading both inside and outside of the classroom.

After a review of the literature themes related to how social relationships affect students' attitudes toward reading, what students attitudes are toward their in school reading and what types of reading students are interested in. It was found that different relationships will affect students' attitudes toward reading in a variety of ways. While parents can affect their children's reading habits early on, when the child is very young, once the students become school age their peers begin to play a major role as well, especially once these students his adolescence, a time when relationships with their friends becomes a high priority.

It has also been show that many students do now view the reading that is done at school very positively, even when students say they enjoy reading out of school. A big motivation for students to read is interest. When students can read about something that they are interested in, they are much more likely to read. The problem is that what students are being asked to read in school often does not interest them and this shows in how they view their in school reading overall. Students like to read different types of materials and trying to meet the needs and interests of all students with just one type or one format of text is very difficult to do because different students are all interested in so many different things.

Based on the findings of this study it became clear that while students are more often to have a positive attitude toward reading that is done outside of the classroom, the opposite is true

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of reading that is done in school. The reason for the difference in attitude is because these two types of reading are too different. The reading is done outside of school is done because students want to. This can be for reasons of relaxation, entertainment and escapement, students are interested in what they read outside of school because they can find something that they like to read about and choose that one. The difference, when compared to their in school reading is that students are not always asked to read about something that they are interested in.

Because schools are so diverse, it would be nearly impossible to find one book that all students would find interesting, this is why, in addition to student interest, student choice also becomes important. Student interest can be based on a number of factors, and interest can change based on students different experiences, age or grade level, even gender can have a big impact on what a particular student is interested in reading. This is why allowing students to have some sort of choice in what they read will allow students to view their in school reading with a much more open mind and positive attitude.

Why some students are more motivated to read, what these motivations are and where this motivation comes from was also examined. It was found that students are largely motivated to read by different relationships that exist between them and those close to them. Parents can play a large role in reading, often because the student wants to get good grades for themselves or for their parents. Relationships with their friends can also play a role in whether or not a student is reading and how much they read. Since adolescence is a time that is characterized by social activity and a lot of time is spent with friends, the culture of the group can affect attitudes toward reading.

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A lot of the evidence pointed to the fact that there was some sort of disconnect between students and teachers when it came to reading. There were many instances where teachers wanted students to read something because they felt it would be beneficial for the student to read it, or teachers choose books that they think students might be interested in, when in fact they are not. It is this difference in thinking that is having a major impact on students' attitudes toward reading in school.

While the study shows that there is a big difference in attitude between reading that students are doing outside of school and reading that is done in school, there are some things that can be done. Teachers must look at the differences between in school reading and outside of school reading and think about how to tie to two closer together. When we consider that students that are reading purely for pleasure outside of school, then teachers should be thinking how to make reading that is done in school more pleasurable for students. Keeping in mind that outside of school students have a choice in what they read and they are able to find books that interest them, teachers should do their best to find books that will be of interest to students. Young adult literature is growing in popularity among students and often these books deal with issues that adolescents can relate to and want to read about.

It is important to remember that what one student finds interesting, another may not. While there is literature out there whose themes do apply to large groups of students and that many teens would find interesting and want to read, there is not necessarily one book out there that will get every student in the class interested in reading. Trying to get to know the students in the classroom and what their interests are and if they have any insight into what they like to read would all be helpful information regarding choosing books for the class to read. If a teacher

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knows the audience they are trying to please there is likely to be much more success when trying to choose a book that will engage students.

While learning about what students are overall interested in, it will be hard to find a book that all students will enjoy. Therefore, whenever possible, allow students a choice in what they read. Literature circles or an independent reading unit will allow students more choice in what they read. This can be done either with a choice of predetermined titles or allowing students to bring a book in from home or from the library that they have decided on totally independently. The concept of book choice incorporates student interest in that it allows students to choose the book that they most want to read, instead of imposing a title on them that may or may not grab their attention. Findings have shown that there is a big difference between males and females' reading habits specifically that these two groups have two different sets of criteria in what interests them in books. Incorporating the concepts of student interest and choice will allow these two groups to more actively engage in reading assignments in school.

Student motivation plays a big role in one's reading habits. One teacher talked about the idea that there is a split among students: those who are readers and those who are non-readers. However, that this is not where it ends. That within these two categories, exist sub-categories, and which category a particular student belongs to as well as what sub-category they belong to as well all depends on a student's motivation to read. While it can be said that a reader is a reader, upon further investigation it was found that just because a student is doing their assigned reading in school, may not necessarily make them a reader. If a student does their assignments simply because they don't want to get bad grades, then according to the statements of this teacher, this person would not really be considered to be a reader. There are however students who do their reading for school and read on their own time for pleasure, simply because of the

fact that they like reading. Teachers should recognize the fact that these types of students exist. Students' attitudes toward reading cannot simply be measured by just the reading that they are doing for school assignments, when in fact it is much more complicated than this.

The research that was completed did have some limitations. Expanded focus groups consisting of students from a wider demographic could have provided a better opportunity to look for trends across data. While I asked teachers originally to supply the names of four students from each grade, and while an attempt was made to have all four students present for the focus group interview, only one focus group was done with all four participants present. The cause of this was partially due to absence and partially due to scheduling circumstances that left other students unable to attend. With more time and better coordination between me and the participants it may have been possible for all the students to attend.

If I were to do this study again, I would perhaps make more specific requests pertaining to the students who I would like to be a part of the focus groups. When I asked teachers for ideas with students, I simply asked for 4 students, 2 who are reading at a high level, and 2 that are reading at a lower level. Next time I would build my focus groups around gender and reading level. Since there was so much data that showed the differences in gender, I would be curious to see the trends that may exist when gender plays a more central role in the research question.

Due to the fact that there were limitations and there are things that could have been done differently, I am left with more questions. After reviewing some of the literature, as well as the findings from this study, it became clear that gender can play a big role in how attitudes differ. I am therefore curious to see what gender differences exist specifically when it comes to differences in attitudes toward reading. I would also like to talk to the teachers more specifically

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about the concept of being students either being a reader, or non-reader, and what teachers ideas would be about the different criteria and classifications of each.

Through this research I have developed a better understanding of the differences between students' attitudes toward in school reading and out of school reading. I have discovered that some overlap does exist between the two, and how important it is that teachers go into school and plan their book choices with students in mind. Take into account what they may be interested in, get to know students so that you can ensure that the books chosen are topical, and don't forget that students are reading outside of school, and that there is a reason for that. Understanding the motivation behind why students read outside of school can help with understanding why they may not be doing their reading in school; with that information we can change students' attitudes toward their reading in school.

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## LEISURE READING HABITS

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**Appendix A**

Student Questionnaire

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_ **ELA Teacher** \_\_\_\_\_

**Age** \_\_\_\_\_ **Grade Level** \_\_\_\_\_ **Please Circle:**                      **Male**                      **Female**

1. If you read, why do you like to read? Check all that apply.

- For Fun \_\_\_\_\_
- To learn something/it's educational \_\_\_\_\_
- It's relaxing \_\_\_\_\_
- Because I'm bored \_\_\_\_\_
- It's exciting \_\_\_\_\_
- I get attached to characters \_\_\_\_\_
- For brain stimulation \_\_\_\_\_
- For a time filler \_\_\_\_\_
- For motivation \_\_\_\_\_
- For escape \_\_\_\_\_

2. If you don't read, why not? Check all that apply.

- Rather watch TV \_\_\_\_\_
- Rather spend time with friends \_\_\_\_\_
- Like other activities better \_\_\_\_\_
- Trouble concentrating/not good at reading \_\_\_\_\_
- Rather surf the web \_\_\_\_\_
- Too busy/no time \_\_\_\_\_
- Can't find a good book \_\_\_\_\_
- Rather play video games \_\_\_\_\_
- Reading makes me tired \_\_\_\_\_

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- Too much school work \_\_\_\_\_
- Girls more interesting \_\_\_\_\_
- Boys more interesting \_\_\_\_\_
- Reading is boring/not fun \_\_\_\_\_
- Can't get into stories \_\_\_\_\_

3. What do you like to read? Check all that apply.

- Magazines: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Fashion/Beauty \_\_\_\_\_
  - Sports \_\_\_\_\_
  - News, like *Time* or *Newsweek* \_\_\_\_\_
  - Video games \_\_\_\_\_
  - Music \_\_\_\_\_
  - Entertainment \_\_\_\_\_
  - Puzzle \_\_\_\_\_
  - Science \_\_\_\_\_
- Comics \_\_\_\_\_
- Internet \_\_\_\_\_
- Books for pleasure \_\_\_\_\_
- Newspapers \_\_\_\_\_

4. What do you like to read about? Check all that apply.

- Celebrities \_\_\_\_\_
- Sports figures \_\_\_\_\_
- People/characters like me \_\_\_\_\_
- Musicians \_\_\_\_\_
- People my age who have done something cool or amazing \_\_\_\_\_

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Animals \_\_\_\_\_

Fantasy characters \_\_\_\_\_

People/characters my age who are wrestling with tough issues like drug abuse or crime  
\_\_\_\_\_

People/characters a lot different from me \_\_\_\_\_

Historical figures \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix B**

### Teacher Interview Questions

How much choice are students given in what they read in this class? What are the guidelines if any?

How are mandatory books chosen for students to read? Who decides this?

When mandatory books are assigned how do students react?

If students are given a choice in the books they can read how do they react?

Do social relationships (peers, teachers, administrators, aides) affect how much/what students read? How so?

How do you think that students' attitudes are similar/different when looking at in school reading versus reading they do that is not school related?

Do you take any steps toward encouraging students to read? If so, what?

Thinking about "readers" in your class, what do you think motivates them to read compared to "non-readers"?

How do you feel about the censorship of books that interest teens? Should this be allowed?

Does gender play any kind of role in the reading habits of students?

Are there any materials/types of reading that you would not allow/encourage students to read either in school or outside of school?

## LEISURE READING HABITS

What is the role of technology in today's ELA classroom?

## Appendix C

### Student Interview Questions

Do you consider yourself a reader? **Call them on the idea of reading magazines, etc. as a type of “reading”**

Are your friends readers?

Are your parents readers?

Do you like the books that your ELA teachers ask you to read? Why/ why not?

If you could choose your own books to read in school would that change your attitude towards reading for school? Why/How?

Who reads their assigned books in school? What motivates you to read?

Who reads outside of school? What motivates you?

What do you wish there was more of in ELA?

What do you wish there was less of?

What advice would you give your ELA teacher about reading/book selection?

Do your friends affect how much/how little you read? How so?

How can technology be used better to help you with reading?