Read aloud practices in one Iowa middle school

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University of Northern Iowa

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Abstract
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Read Aloud Practices in One Iowa Middle School

A Graduate Research Paper

Submitted to the

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

By

Linda K. Balog

December 15, 1999
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Titled: Read Aloud Practices in One Iowa Middle School

Has been approved as meeting the research paper requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

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The purpose of this research was to determine whether or not teachers at Prairie Middle School in the College Community, Iowa School District were reading aloud to their students. Secondly, the research set out to determine whether those teachers surveyed knew the impact that reading aloud has on the development of vocabulary, language, and comprehension. Finally, the purpose of the research was to determine whether those teachers were choosing to read materials that would provide opportunity for growth in vocabulary, language, and comprehension. The middle school teachers in this district were surveyed to determine what current read aloud practices are. Survey results indicated that while a majority of teachers are reading aloud to their students these teachers do not seem to understand the impact reading aloud has on the development of vocabulary, language, and reading comprehension. The teachers are choosing to read materials that fall below the grade levels they actually teach. Current read aloud practices at this middle school will do little to improve the acquisition of vocabulary, development of language, or increase reading comprehension.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Reading aloud to children is an essential part of the educational process. As educators our goal should be to assure that there are plenty of books available for students and that time is scheduled for reading and sharing books aloud (Russell, 1997). Reading aloud to students is the activity most directly associated with reading success. Reading aloud to students improves listening skills, which in turn builds comprehension skills and ultimately improves reading skills (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott & Wilkinson, 1985; Popp, 1996).

Anderson et al. (1985) in *Becoming a Nation of Readers*, state “reading aloud to a child is the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in learning to read” (p.23). Paul (1996) concludes that all students have certain "Reading Rights". Among those rights is their right to have "...regular opportunities to hear books read aloud to them" (p. 27).

Langer, Applebee, Mullis and Foertsch (1990) found that 57 % of fourth grade teachers read aloud to their students on a daily basis. In a more recent study, Hoffman, Roser and Battle (1993) found that 76% of primary classrooms and 69% of intermediate classrooms actually engaged in the read
aloud process. While these statistics show some growth since the Langer et al. (1990) study, we can not assume that the practice of reading aloud to middle school students is occurring or that this modest growth in reading aloud to elementary students will continue.

Lesesne (1998) writes that when she first began teaching she used the read aloud experience to entertain and quiet her middle level students. Then she began to discover what primary teachers have always known, that reading aloud was an “important part of reading development” (p. 246). Educators need no longer consider reading aloud just a quieting activity after recess or as a reward for good classroom behavior during the school day. Because many students are appearing in the classroom without having been read to, it is essential for teachers to find time in the school day to fill this void. According to Routman (1988) it is never too late to make up for a lack of reading at home by reading at school.

Benefits of Literature

Being literate is considered basic to a child’s educational progress and achievement in school. It is also considered fundamental to an individual’s ability to function successfully in society (Robinson, Larsen, & Haupt, 1997). Many of our students come to the educational process without ever having heard a book read aloud. Huck, Hepler and Hickman (1987) believe
that children’s literature helps children learn to read by reinforcing narrative as a way of thinking, a way of bringing order. Reading develops the imagination. Huck et al. (1987) say, “reading helps children to entertain ideas they never considered before” (p.8). Through reading, children are transported to other places and times where they can vicariously experience events and people. Children experience adventures, overcome obstacles, gain insights into behavior of people in different cultures and eventually, “discover the bridge between themselves and the rest of the world” (Raines & Isbell, 1994, p.6). Atwell (1998) noted:

The teacher’s voice becomes a bridge for kids, taking them into territories they might never have explored because they don’t yet have schemas for a genre, subject, author, or period. Read-alouds point kids toward new options in their choices of books and authors. And they provide a communal reading experience in which we enter and love a book together. (p. 144)

“Reading aloud to a child is the single most important factor in raising a reader. It is also the best kept secret” (Trelease, 1995, p. xii). According to Trelease, the lack of interest in reading is evident across all socioeconomic levels. Learners from pre-school to college can benefit from the read-aloud experience. Reading aloud develops a positive attitude
toward reading and by developing this positive attitude, children increase their chances of establishing a solid foundation for future literacy development. Trelease goes on to say that reading should occur in all classrooms because it arouses the imagination, nurtures emotional development, stretches the attention span, and establishes the reading-writing connection. Because reading aloud is free, there is nothing else in education that will produce such spectacular results with such a minimal investment. Reading aloud does not always have to be tied to the curriculum. Reading a book for the sheer delight of hearing the words and seeing the pictures and letting those words and pictures transport us to new and exciting worlds is reward enough (Trelease, 1995).

Krashen (1992), says that reading aloud has both a direct and indirect effect on reading acquisition. He believes that hearing stories and discussing stories encourages reading, which in turn promotes literacy development. Krashen also states that children who are read to for several months make superior gains in reading comprehension and vocabulary.

**Middle Schools and the Read Aloud Experience**

The advent of the middle school is a relatively recent educational phenomenon of the late 1960s. Middle school “has its roots in the perceived need to create and develop appropriate, psychologically relevant, and
educationally stimulating learning environments for students between the elementary school and the high school” (Slatterly, 1999, p.26). Middle level schools support a student-centered curriculum because middle school students are largely interested in who they are and how they fit in with the rest of their peers.

Reading aloud provides opportunities for teachers in every curricular discipline to present ideas and concepts related to social development and life experiences students may not have had opportunities to experience first hand (Muth & Alverman, 1992). Anders and Pritchard (1993) suggest that “young adolescents should be read to every day, from a variety of texts, including non-fiction” (p.619). Books selected for reading aloud are often more challenging to students and require teacher explanation in order for students to fully understand the concepts. These types of books help students expand their abilities to think and reason (Irvin, 1999). Reading aloud creates a common experience and a forum for responding, giving students opportunities to develop vocabulary, enhance language abilities and strengthen comprehension of concepts unknown to them.

**Vocabulary Development**

Reading aloud presents children with a different way of listening to language. Eller, Pappas and Brown (1988) found that in casual everyday
conversation, the words a child hears are seldom beyond what he/she can understand. In written language, the words create a meaning that may not be familiar to the child (Eller et al., p. 6-7). This written language forces the child to listen in order to be able to construct new meaning. Sutherland (1996) suggests that the principal ingredient of all learning and teaching is language. Reading aloud produces better listeners and increases verbal skills. Reading aloud provides exposure to a wide variety of literature and is one of the best educational tools for vocabulary development (Irvin, 1997).

**Language Development**

Children come to school with a fairly good command of the spoken language (Cullinan, 1987). Stewig (1988) contends that children must experience language more complex than what they generally use if they are going to be able to expand the development of their language skills. Hearing stories read aloud gives children an opportunity to hear the tone and cadence of language and to learn about the structure of language. Reading aloud encourages children to incorporate the experiences heard in those stories into their own view of the world (Temple, Martinez, Yokota & Naylor, 1997). Surrounding children with the rich language of books provides them with mental images and story patterns from which they can draw to make their own expressions. Reading stories aloud to children presents them with new
ideas and information to plug into their already existing world of ideas. The ability to accept these new ideas and to incorporate them into their universe allows children to view the world in new ways (Temple et al., 1997). Literature educates the imagination and supplies language models upon which the child can build. Cohen (1968) states that language development has a direct correlation with how well a child reads. Both language development and reading can be significantly improved by regular exposure to stories read aloud. Books selected for read aloud need to be on the students' intellectual and social level but they do not necessarily need to be readable by the students (Stewig, 1988). Students are often more capable of listening to complex text than they are of reading it. Books chosen for reading aloud must be ones that “stretch students’ minds and imaginations” (Irvin, 1997, p.108). Literature educates the imagination and supplies language models upon which the child can build.

**Comprehension**

Roser and Martinez (1985) found that reading to children and talking with them about books fosters active reasoning about text and lays the foundations for later text comprehension. Children are able to focus on characteristic components of stories, and construct meaning from the stories
at a variety of levels including interpreting and making predications about the stories. Chomsky (1972) found that reading aloud seemed to improve children’s ability to understand and use complex sentence structures. The children were better able to understand the relationship between oral and written language. When introducing stories that contain new ideas or concepts, teachers often use highly interactive language with their students. Discussions often revolve around these new concepts or ideas in a way that allow students to take their real-life experiences and construct new knowledge based on the understandings they are able to grasp from the text (Sulzby, 1985). Good stories provide teachers with the opportunity to teach comprehension which is the basis of all learning (Trelease, 1995).

**Research Questions**

The following questions guided this research study:

1. Are teachers, in fact, reading aloud to their students?
2. Are teachers at a particular middle school aware of the impact reading aloud can have on the development of vocabulary, language and comprehension?
3. Are teachers choosing to read materials that provide opportunity for growth in vocabulary, language and comprehension?
**Problem Statement**

The purpose of this research is to determine whether or not reading aloud in every classroom is occurring at Prairie Middle School in the College Community Iowa School District.

The College Community School District is committed to increasing the reading abilities of its students. They have spent nearly $268,000 to hire three full-time reading teachers. In addition, three part time reading teachers will be hired to work on reading fluency and comprehension (Stover, 1999).

Prairie Middle School has a student body of slightly over 800 students. This middle school is comprised of $6^{th}$, $7^{th}$ and $8^{th}$ grade students. There is a certified teaching staff of fifty-five. The school is located in a campus setting where there are also three elementary buildings and one high school. The district serves students from five small communities as well as portions of three counties. Although the students in this district originally were from rural and low to middle income families, recent growth in population and white-collar employment opportunities within district borders has changed the make-up of the school. At the present time, the majority of the students who attend this school are white middle to upper middle class with parents who would be considered to be professionals (J. Steffen, personal communication, June 28, 1999).
**Hypothesis**

The following hypotheses were tested in this study:

1. The majority of teachers at Prairie Middle School know the impact of reading aloud to students with regard to development of vocabulary, language and comprehension.

2. The majority of teachers are not reading aloud to students.

3. The majority of books read aloud are not above grade level and will therefore have little effect on vocabulary, language and comprehension growth.

**Assumptions**

This researcher assumes that at least some teachers are reading to middle school students. For purposes of this study, it will be assumed that all respondents will reply honestly giving the researcher a fair picture of what is happening at one middle school.

**Limitations**

For the purpose of this study, the research will be limited in scope to Prairie Middle School in the College Community School District in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. The study will not consider sustained silent reading, free voluntary reading or oral reading by students. The study will not consider reading aloud of textbooks as part of the read aloud experience. The
research will not measure whether actual increases in language, vocabulary
or comprehension occurred among the students whose teachers read to them.

Because of these limitations, the survey will have little application
beyond the scope of the demographic area described.

**Definitions**

Comprehension “a process in which the reader constructs
meaning [in] interacting with text...through
a combination of prior knowledge and
previous experience; information available
in text; the stance [taken] in relationship to
the text; and immediate, remembered or
anticipated social interactions and
communications” (Harris & Hodges, 1995,

Free Voluntary Reading (FVR) “...reading because you want to. ...no book
report, no questions at the end of the
chapter, and no looking up every vocabulary
work... FVR means putting down a book
you don’t like and choosing another one
instead. It is the kind of reading highly
literate people do all the time” (Krashen,
1992, p. x).

Dale-Chall Readability
Formula "a method of estimating the difficulty level
of reading material based on the percentage
of words not on the Dale List of 3,000
Familiar Words and on the average number
of words in sample sentences” (Harris &
Hodges, 1995 p. 54).
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Entry</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>Entry</td>
<td>“a single chunk of text you key into the computer for immediate analysis-typically a few sentences or one or two paragraphs, consisting of no more than 150 words total. (Reading Calculations, 1995 p.5)</td>
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<td>Language Acquisition</td>
<td>“the process by which competence [oral and written] is obtained in the use of language” (Harris &amp; Hodges, 1995, p.133).</td>
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<td>Literature</td>
<td>“Imagine shap of life and thought into the forms and structure of language” (Huck, 1997, p.4).</td>
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<td>Middle School</td>
<td>“a school usually for grades 5 or 6 through 8” (Harris &amp; Hodges, 1995, p154).</td>
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<td>Oral Reading</td>
<td>“the process of reading aloud to communicate to another or to an audience” (Harris &amp; Hodges, 1995, p.173).</td>
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<td>Readability</td>
<td>“an objective estimate or prediction of reading comprehension of material, usually in terms of reading grade level, based on selected and quantified variables in text, especially some index of vocabulary difficulty and of sentence difficulty” (Harris &amp; Hodges, 1995, p.203).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readability Formula</td>
<td>“any of a number of objective methods of estimating or predicting the difficulty level of reading materials by analyzing samples from them, with results usually expressed as a reading grade level” (Harris &amp; Hodges, 1995, p.205).</td>
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Reading

“Process of constructing meaning from written text. It is a complex skill requiring the coordination of a number of related sources of information” (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott & Wilkinson, 1985, p.23).

Reading Aloud

Sharing a piece of literature with a group or with a single person usually by a teacher or other adult for the purpose of introducing students to new concepts such as “knowledge of tunes and pattern of written language, knowledge of the language of books, knowledge of story structures, and familiarity with a growing range of text” (Barrs & Thomas, 1993).

Reading Comprehension

“Understanding new information in light of what is already known” (Temple, Martinez, Yokota & Naylor, 1997).

Sample

“...consists of one or more entries. Though there is no minimum or maximum length, they should consist of at least 300 words.” (Readability Calculations, 1995, p.5)

Sustained Silent Reading

“a period of time during the school day when children in a class or in the entire school read books of their own choosing” (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p.266).

Vocabulary

“meanings, concepts, and ideas that are represented by words” (Feathers, 1998, p. 276).

Vocabulary Development

“the growth of a person’s stock of known words and meanings” (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p.275).
Significance of Study

Results of this study are intended for administrators, teachers and librarians. It is the intention of this research to suggest to these professionals that there is a need to include reading aloud as part of the middle school experience. The importance of choosing materials that are slightly more difficult than materials that a student might choose to read for himself will also be addressed.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

The benefits of reading aloud to students are numerous and include development of vocabulary, language, and comprehension skills. In addition, there is evidence to suggest that reading just beyond the reading capability of a student provides the most gains in these three areas.

Vocabulary Development

As early as 1968, Cohen conducted an experiment to determine whether or not reading aloud to children could improve their competencies in reading. Cohen specifically set out to determine if reading aloud to students would increase and strengthen vocabulary.

Seven schools comprised of low socio-economic students with academic retardation and high percentages of racial and ethnic populations were selected for this study. At the beginning of the experiment, 580 students in the second grade were tested. An equal number of boys and girls were tested. Post-test data was obtained on 285 students. Of those, 130 results were from the control group and 155 results were from the experimental group. To avoid contamination of test results, experimental and control groups were established in separate schools.
Fifty books were chosen following an established criteria, ranked according to increasing difficulty and placed in the experimental classrooms. The teachers in these classrooms were asked to read aloud from among these books every day of the school year and were also to complete follow-up activities appropriate for each story. These follow-up activities may have included a trip, construction of a project, craft or other activities that would strengthen comprehension of the story and of individual words. Once a book was read, it could be reread as often as the teacher or the class desired. Teachers from the control group were asked to proceed with their usual reading habits.

Tinker, Hacker and Wesley’s Free Association Vocabulary test (as cited in Cohen, 1968) was used as the quantitative measure for both the pre- and post-test results. Lists of the total number of different words for each classroom were recorded for both the experimental and control groups. Those pre-and post-experimental control word lists were compared to Risland’s frequency ratings of words (as cited in Cohen, 1968) used by children in free composition. These scores were then converted to quality points for each child. Statistical treatment was then based on Word Knowledge, Word Discrimination, and Reading Comprehension from The Metropolitan Reading Achievement Test and Vocabulary, Numerical Count
and Vocabulary, Qualitative Count from the Free Association Vocabulary Test (as cited in Cohen, 1968).

Based on the research by Cohen, the experimental group showed an increase in vocabulary when compared with the control group as well as superiority in the quality of vocabulary used. The importance of reading aloud to children who come from socially disadvantaged backgrounds particularly when they do not have experiences with books and a relationship between hearing books read aloud and vocabulary development and use was established.

A more recent experimental study by Eller, Pappas, and Brown (1988) investigated how children obtain their knowledge about words (vocabulary) from written text. Twenty children both boys and girls were read stories. The children were from middle-class backgrounds and attended one half day of kindergarten every day at a public school. This school was located in northwestern United States. There was also a small university located in this city. The same teacher instructed all the students but no formal reading program was in used.

The authors used two stories in the study. Wildsmith’s *The Lazy Bear* (1973) was read first on three consecutive days followed by the same author’s *The Owl and the Woodpecker* (1971) three to four weeks later. The
children were read to individually outside the classroom setting and each
time a book was read the child was asked to take a turn at reading it. A
discussion was initiated by the researchers concerning the fact that the child
might not be able to read the words but that they could “pretend read” (p. 9)
if they wished. As children asked questions or made comments about the
story, the adult reader responded appropriately. The children reading these
books were audiotaped.

The study used ten target words from each book yielding a total of
120 responses from the study group. The criteria for choosing these words
were based on three criteria (a) The words chosen were judged to be
unfamiliar to the students, (b) The words chosen were judged to contribute
significant meaning to the text, and (c) The words selected were used often
enough to document growth. No pre-or post-tests of vocabulary items were
done and no vocabulary instruction was provided. Instead, Eller et al.,
(1988) compared the verbal items used in the child’s first reading with those
in the second and third readings. A rating system was established based on
the ways children might learn words. Five general categories were
established: (a) No/Faulty Knowledge; (b) Developing Knowledge; (c)
Synonym; (d) Accurate Knowledge; and (e) Generalized Knowledge.
Children as young as kindergarten age were able to learn new vocabulary based on hearing stories read aloud to them. The study also supports the notion that vocabulary development is a gradual process made possible by a child repeatedly hearing the word read in a specific context. Written context provides important cues for the acquisition of vocabulary. The study suggests that children need to have exposure to a wide variety of written texts in order for vocabulary development to occur.

An experimental design study by Elley (1989) measured the extent of new vocabulary acquired from reading aloud. One hundred fifty-seven students from seven classrooms who were seven years old from Christchurch, New Zealand were studied. The children all spoke English as their first language and were from both urban and suburban backgrounds. The teachers were instructed to follow the same experimental procedures. Those who conducted the oral reading were not the children’s regular classroom teachers although they were teachers from the same school. The teachers participated in the selection of the story, and assisted in the design and piloting of the vocabulary test.

*Gumdrop at Sea* by Val Biro (1983) was chosen because it contained at least 20 words judged to be unknown to the children. It was also considered to be a story that was appealing with attractive pictures. A
multiple-choice vocabulary test was prepared and piloted on seven and eight year old students. This test contained ten picture items from which students were to select the best meaning when a word was read aloud and ten verbal synonym items with four options were also included. The words were presented in context different from that of the story. Widely known words were removed from the piloted test and replaced by words less likely to be recognized by the children in the study.

The pretest was given seven days before the first reading of the story. The story was then read three times over a period of one week. The first reading was done by the experimental teachers and involved a discussion of the title, cover picture and main characters. No definitions or explanation of the words chosen as part of the experiment were given during this reading or any subsequent readings. The pictures were shown briefly. The second reading three days later by the classroom teacher followed exactly the same pattern. During the third reading, the experimental teachers allowed some time for predictions and remarks by the children. The post-test followed two days after the final reading. There was no control group.

Scores were higher on the post-test than they were on the pre-test for most targeted words. Some of the targeted words showed as much as a 30% gain while others showed as little as a 1.3% gain. One word showed no gain
and one word showed a $-7.6\%$ reduction. The words that were most easily learned were the words in which the surrounding context supplied some help and for those that occurred more than once in the story. Those students who pre-tested the lowest gained just as much as those students who scored higher on the pre-test. The net gain by students following three readings over a one-week period was between 15 and 20 percent.

Stories read aloud in this manner appear to be a possible source of vocabulary development. Repeated contact with unknown words along with context that is helpful seem to be significant factors in the acquisition of vocabulary. Because a control group was not used and the study was limited to one book, a second study was conducted by Elley to address these limitations.

In this second study, Elley (1989) again used an experimental design to confirm the results found in his first experiment using two different storybooks. A second purpose of this study was to determine whether teacher explanation of unknown words influenced the acquisition of vocabulary “over and above the effects of story reading alone” (p. 180). In addition, the permanence of vocabulary growth was also studied.

Six schools in Christchurch, New Zealand were chosen for this experiment. Six classes of eight-year-old students were selected. The
project involved 126 students in 2 experimental groups. A control group was established using 51 students of similar age and background from two of the schools. The teachers selected two storybooks. These books were Rapscallion Jones by James Marshall (1983) and The White Crane (1983) translated by Helen Smith. Each story was to be read aloud three times. A thirty-six item multiple-choice test was constructed and pre-tested to determine the difficult words from each story. In order to provide an additional check on possible learning from the pre-testing experience, five control words that did not appear in either story were scattered throughout the test. The items were a mixture of picture items and synonym items. The words were presented in context different from that of the story.

The pre-test was administered as one test while the post-tests were administered as two separate tests. Each post-test was administered one week after the book was read to the experimental groups. The same two post-tests were administered three months later.

There were two strategies offered for the reading of these stories. The teachers of Group A could read the story and offered explanations for target words as they occurred. Explanations offered by teachers were to meet one of three standards: (a) they could use a phrase that would mean the same thing, (b) they could explain the word by role-playing, or (c) the word
could be explained by pointing to a picture. Group B received no explanation. The story was simply read from beginning to end. All post-tests were taken seven days after the last reading. Group C (control group) took all the tests at the same time as the other two group but heard neither of the stories. Three months after the last reading and without hearing either story again, the post-test for Rapscallion Jones was repeated to one class in Group A and The White Crane was repeated to one class in Group B.

Results of this study were conducted separately for each story. The vocabulary gain after hearing Rapscallion Jones read without explanation was 14.8 %. For the group that heard the story read aloud with explanations, the gain was much larger with total growth at 39.9 %. The control group showed an improvement in vocabulary growth of less than 2 %. The growth measured by the five control words was nearly zero for all groups.

Results from the reading of The White Crane were disappointing. The group that heard the story read without explanation showed a vocabulary growth of 4.4 %. The group that heard the story read with explanation showed a vocabulary gain of 17.1 %. While the pattern of results was the same, the actual growth was much less.

Elley (1989) concluded that children could learn new vocabulary by having stories read to them. Reading aloud coupled with explanations of
unknown words can significantly increase these vocabulary gains. Several conclusions can be drawn from Elley’s research:

For new learning to occur, the text must contain some vocabulary beyond the pupil’s present understanding. Moreover, the unfamiliar words should be supported by a helpful verbal or pictorial context, and there should normally be more than one exposure to each word. (p. 184)

**Language Development**

Learning to read is first and foremost an extension of the ability to express oneself using language (Halliday, 1978). As the following studies suggest, young children acquire this essential ability to express themselves by hearing written language read aloud. Research indicates that by hearing stories read aloud children also learn about written language.

Pappas and Brown (1987) wanted to study young children who were in the beginning stages of their literacy development to determine if reading aloud to these children would increase their ability to acquire and use language different from what they use and hear daily.

This experimental design study focused on the “pretend readings” (Pappas & Brown, 1987) of one kindergarten child in a public school. This child was the youngest in her class and she did not read in the traditional
sense. The book chosen for this experiment was Wildsmith’s *The Owl and the Woodpecker*. The child was not familiar with this story.

The story was read to the subject on three consecutive days. After each reading the child was asked to take a turn at reading the book. She was told that she might not be able to read it for real but that pretend reading or reading it her own way was acceptable. The adult reader responded to any questions or comments the child made during the adult readings. The subject’s readings were audiotaped as were her questions and comments and the adult readers’ responses.

The authors of this study used text analysis to compare her wording patterns with those found in the book. Attention was placed on the child’s ability to sequence the events of the story and on her ability to approximate and extrapolate information in such a way that she could then retell the story in much the same way as the written version.

The results of the subject’s third reading showed textual gains in placement and sequencing the events of the story. The authors believed that these increases are due in large part to the child’s requests for clarification of events and the motivations of the characters in the story following the third reading of the story. The purpose of this research, to identify and describe
the textual indices in the early stages of literacy was confirmed (Pappas & Brown, 1987).

Children seem to learn to read by reading. In the subject’s pretend readings she was able to extend the language of the story into her own language. Hearing stories read aloud exposes children to language and literary structure they might not otherwise hear. Pappas and Brown (1987) found that for young children to become literate they must come to terms with the features of written language – its organization, its characteristic rhythms, and structures, and the intangible qualities of written language.

Feitelson, Kita and Goldstein (1986) conducted an experimental study to investigate the effects of reading aloud to children in school. These researchers believe that being read to introduces children to a way of using language that is not familiar to them from face-to-face encounters of daily life. Through read aloud sessions, children are exposed to different types of literary language. As adults interpret the reading, the child acquires language that will be useful as they begin to read on their own.

All 139 first grade students in 5 classes in this study were from a disadvantaged suburb of Haifa, Israel. These students came from families with multiple problems and many of the families were on welfare. Three of the classrooms were designated as the experimental groups while the other
two were designated as the control groups. Two of the experimental groups had to be dropped from the study which left an experimental population of 31 children and a control population of 57 children.

The Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence (WPPSI) (as cited in Feitelson, Kita and Goldstein, 1986) vocabulary subtest, was administered for the pre-test. Trained testers administered this test. The children were assigned to testers randomly. The teachers in this school were asked to read a series of action stories about the pranks of a monkey named Kofiko. The teachers of the experimental classrooms were asked to read to the students the last twenty minutes of the day five times a week. Teachers of the control classrooms were asked to continue reading as they had before the study began and not to increase their reading time. The experimental portion of this research lasted for six months. The post-test measured technical reading, comprehension, and a picture-story telling task. The children were tested individually. In addition to the technical data available to the researchers, the school counselor kept a journal, classrooms were observed, and interviews were conducted with both teachers and students.

The experimental group of students had significantly better results in the active use of language measure than did the students in the control groups. Additionally there were two unexpected results from this research.
The experimental group outperformed the control groups in technical reading. Secondly, many children in the experimental group convinced their parents to purchase copies of the books they were reading aloud.

This study found that reading aloud to children could influence the way a child uses language. The ability to use language is a beneficial skill when children begin to read on their own (Feitelson et al., 1986). During the read aloud experience, children are exposed to a more formal and descriptive flow of language than that of everyday conversation. Talking about the story during and after reading can foster informal communication about words, language, ideas, and real-life experiences.

**Comprehension**

Reading to children and talking with them about books fosters active reasoning about text and lays the foundation for later text comprehension. Children are able to focus on characteristic components of stories, and construct meaning from the stories at a variety of different levels including interpreting and making predictions about the stories. Reading aloud seems to improve children’s ability to understand and use complex sentence structures. They are better able to understand the relationship between oral and written language.
Roser and Martinez (1985) conducted a case study to discover how children construct meaning and make sense from hearing stories read aloud. Additionally, the authors wanted to discover what role adults serve in the read aloud event. Two classes of five-year-olds were the subjects of this study. None of the children could read independently. A school in central Texas was chosen for this study. The children's classroom teachers served as the read aloud model.

The classroom study involved the audiotaping of children as they listened to and responded to ten stories read aloud. The teacher read each story aloud three times. For a total of ten months, the authors collected and categorized children's language responses weekly. This included the children's comments, questions, and answers as the text was read and discussed. These involved discussion of title, setting, characters, and plot.

The transcripts were analyzed for a variety of responses. The children's comments were grouped according to their verbal responses such as (a) narrative responses, (b) interpretive responses, and (c) predictive responses. The adult's roles were grouped according to identifiable roles such as (a) co-responders, (b) informers/monitors, and (c) directors. (Roser & Martinez, 1985). The researchers found that the children in this study followed the role set by the teacher. If the teacher glossed over the pictures
so did the children, if the teacher commented heavily on the pictures then so did the children. If the teacher asked word meaning then the children tended to follow that example. If teachers said little about stories, children tended to say little. The children who were with teachers who took on the role of co-responder and informer/monitor responded more to the text. Roser and Martinez found that adults fostered comprehensiveness of response in the role of informer/monitor. Adult explanations served as a means of model inferring and predicting what would happen in a story.

Summary

Research on the effects of reading aloud to students is largely based on studies conducted on students in the early grades using picture books as the medium. This research indicates that reading aloud provides significant benefits to students in the areas of vocabulary development, language development and reading comprehension. The research also suggests that in order for reading aloud to have its greatest impact the materials selected must be just beyond the reading ability of the students.

Teachers have known intuitively of the benefits of reading aloud to students. Experimental evidence exists that reading stories aloud can expand a child’s vocabulary. Reading aloud can be one method of
increasing the vocabulary of students. Reading aloud with teacher explanations can increase this acquisition even more.

Although common sense and empirical evidence related to reading aloud to young children would tell us that reading aloud to middle school students should improve their reading performance, there is little research at the middle school level on this topic. Text books that accommodate the readability levels of students so they can read independently do little to excite children, while stories read aloud provide rich language that stimulate growth of vocabulary, language and comprehension.

Children learn about book language by being read to. They need to hear written language read aloud. When children are exposed to extensive, repetitive experiences with books, they learn the protocol of written language, develop patterns for using language and begin to acquire an awareness of written text. Through listening to stories, children become familiar with story structure. The resulting expectations with regard to stories helps children cope successfully whenever they encounter new story structures.

Additionally, the roles adults play in developing the ability of a child to comprehend what is happening appears to be vital. Through language
interactions of adults and children as literature is shared, the ability of children to interpret and predict is increased.

Teachers and parents in the United States need to make strides toward implementing the read aloud experience for children (Langer, Applebee, Mullis & Foertsch, 1990). Books have the power to create new worlds based on words and story structure. Reading aloud develops the basis for a student’s ability to read well and to become a lifelong learner. As Cullinan (1987) noted, “the heritage of humankind lies in books; we endow the students with the key to their legacy when we teach them to read” (p.6).
Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this research was to determine whether teachers in a selected middle school were reading aloud to their students. Secondly, the research set out to determine whether those teachers surveyed knew the impact that reading aloud has on the development of vocabulary, language, and comprehension. Finally, the purpose of the research was to determine whether those teachers were choosing to read materials that would provide opportunity for growth in vocabulary, language, and comprehension.

By design, survey research allows for the questioning of a large group of people about a particular topic or issue over a relatively short period of time (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1996). According to Rea (1992), surveys have broad appeal because they are perceived as a reflection of the attitudes, preferences, and opinions of the people who are being studied. Survey research has derived considerable credibility from its widespread acceptance and use in the academic field. At the heart of survey research are carefully designed and administered questions which relate directly to the review of literature and the stated research problem. As Gustafson and Smith (1993) point out, the survey method of collecting data appears to be a simple
process but in reality it is difficult to construct the questions in such a way that the resulting data are meaningful and significant.

For survey research to have validity, the data collected must follow a systematic, scientific application of the techniques associated with sample survey research (Rea, 1992). Survey research involves soliciting self-reported verbal or written information from people about themselves. This type of research allows for a wide variety of data to be collected to aid in the decision-making process and for planning future activities. Surveys are inexpensive and relatively easy to administer.

According to Rea (1992) the mail-out system of data collection has several advantages. It is convenient, the respondents have an adequate amount of time to respond, it assures anonymity, and reduces the likelihood that the researcher will introduce his/her own bias into the data being gathered. Rea goes on to say that there are also disadvantages. For example, there is always a lower response rate with mail-out surveys. Additionally, it takes a relatively long time for all the information to be gathered and returned. There is also a lack of interviewer involvement in the questioning and the use of the follow-up questions to clarify is not possibly.
Method of Research

For purposes of this study, the survey research method was used. A survey was constructed and sent to the selected population via the internal campus mail system. Anonymity of all respondents was respected and only one campus mailing was sent. Surveys were returned through campus mail no later than one week thereafter.

Data Collection Schedule

The following time schedule was adhered to for the collection of the data.

1. 3 weeks  Prepare and pretest the survey instrument
2. 1 week  Print survey
3. 1 week  Send mailing and receive completed surveys
4. 2 weeks  Process survey responses by coding answers
5. 1 week  Computer input and analysis

Selection of Sample

The only school sampled was the middle school in the College Community School District, Cedar Rapids, Iowa. The sample consisted of only those teachers who met with the same students on a daily basis. The following certified staff were exempted from the survey (a) the guidance counselors, (b) the ELP (gifted and talented) teacher, (c) the librarian (d) the administrators and (e) the Success Center teachers who monitor at-risk
students. The focus of the success center is to assure that students who have been identified as at-risk for success in school are not falling behind their classmates in academic classes. The time spent with these teachers is strictly to work on completing assignments, taking tests and finishing projects.

**Instrumentation**

In preparing for this survey, permission was sought from the superintendent of the College Community School District, Cedar Rapids, Iowa as well as the principal of the middle school. The survey was carefully constructed and pre-tested, revised and pre-tested again. A cover letter (Appendix A) was attached to each survey describing the reason for the survey, when the results needed to be returned and the measure that would be taken to maintain the confidentiality of all responses. The survey was distributed to the teachers via campus mail and was returned in the same way.

**Design of Survey Instrument**

The questions in the survey needed to be carefully worded (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1996; Gustafson & Smith, 1993; Rea, 1992). Care was taken to ensure that the questions were placed in such a way that they did not lead the respondent to answer in a biased way. So as not confuse the respondents,
bias the responses, and/or jeopardize the quality of research, poorly worded questions were rewritten (Rea, 1992).

In accordance with Rea, (1992) the survey began with questions which were related to the subject but were easy to answer and straightforward. More sensitive questions were placed later in the survey. All related questions were placed together but care was taken not to create a pattern bias (p. 47). In addition, sequencing of questions was considered (See Appendix B for a copy of the survey.)

**Pretest of Survey Instrument**

The survey was pre-tested using a small population of elementary and secondary teachers from the College Community School District, Cedar Rapids, Iowa. A total of five teachers were surveyed, three teachers from the high school and two teachers from the elementary school. These teachers were not part of the primary study. The teachers were handed a copy of the cover letter and the survey during a teacher workday before school began. These teachers were instructed to note any problems they encountered as they completed the survey. After all pre-test surveys were completed, a discussion was held to determine what areas of the survey needed clarification and revision.
A revised survey was constructed using both verbal and written feedback obtained from these five teachers. This revised survey was also pre-tested by three teachers, two from the elementary school and one from the high school. These teachers were also handed a copy of the cover letter and the survey and asked to complete the questions noting problems they encountered as they completed the survey. During the follow up discussion all three teachers indicated that they believed the survey was ready for distribution.

**Analysis of Data**

Once the research surveys were returned, they were scrutinized for obvious problems such as incomplete or invalid responses. All the surveys returned were useable for data collection although some respondents chose not to answer some questions. This accounts for the variation in total number of responses for some questions. All survey questions were tallied by responses according to the question asked. Unanswered questions were marked “no response” and were not considered as part of the analysis.

Titles of books read aloud to students by teachers were analyzed using the Dale-Chall readability formula portion of the computer program, *Readability Calculations, (1995)*. Using this program, a readability level for each of the books teachers indicated they read aloud was obtained. The
following guidelines were used in order to acquire a valid and reliable sample. Three entries from each title were randomly chosen. One entry was selected from near the beginning of the book, one from near the middle of the book and one entry was chosen from near the end of the book. Each of these entries consisting of no more than 150 words were keyed into the program. These three entries comprised the sample to be analyzed. Only the “Sample Counts” option was used to conduct the analysis. This option displays the total number of words in the sample, the total number of difficult words, the total number of sentences, the percentage of words not on the Dale-Challe list of 3000 well-known words, the average number of words per sentence, and the Dale-Chall Readability Level.

The Dale-Chall Formula uses a list of 3000 words well known to most American eight-year-olds. In addition, the formula factors in the total number of words and sentences in the sample. This formula is typically used to obtain reliable results when assessing upper elementary and secondary materials.

Specific guidelines for keying entries were followed to ensure accuracy. Each proper noun and all other words NOT to be counted as “difficult” were preceded with a backslash \. No semicolons, colons or trailing periods were included unless they were used to separate a complete
thought. Hyphens were replaced with spaces in compound words. All punctuation except apostrophes and marks ending complete thoughts were omitted. Each sample was carefully checked for spelling errors prior to applying the formula. The entries keyed into the Dale-Chall Readability Formula using the computer program Readability Calculations (1995) have been included in Appendix C.
Chapter 4

Analysis of Data

Read Aloud surveys were distributed to 48 teachers who met with students on a daily basis. Success Center teachers, counselors, the ELP (gifted and talented) teacher, the administrators and the librarian were omitted from the survey. Of these 48 surveys, 40 were returned for an 84% response. Question two asked the respondents to indicate the number of years taught at other grade levels. Only 11 or 23% of the respondents completed this question correctly. This question was not used in the analysis for the hypotheses.

Survey results indicate that the majority of teachers at Prairie Middle School have taught at the middle school level 15 years or less. Of the teachers who responded, 23% have taught less than five years, 29% have taught between six and ten years and 13% of the teachers have taught between 11 and 15 years. Thirty-five percent (35%) of the teachers have taught at the middle school level longer than 15 years.
Currently the majority of these teachers are assigned to one particular grade level. However, 20% of the teachers do teach some combination of sixth, seventh and eighth grade students. Twenty-three percent of the teachers are assigned to the eighth grade, 25% are assigned to the seventh grade and 32% of the teachers are assigned to the sixth grade.
These same teachers have also taught at a variety of levels. A majority, 50% have taught at the high school level. Two percent of the teachers taught at the pre-kindergarten level, 13% have taught at the lower elementary level, and 35% have taught in grades 3-5.

Graph 3

Hypothesis 1 stated that the majority of teachers at Prairie Middle School know the impact of reading aloud to students with regard to development of vocabulary, language and comprehension. The teachers were asked to indicate the reasons that they might choose to read aloud to their students. In addition to the choices given in the survey, 2% of the teachers indicated they had other reasons for reading aloud. Those included: as a change of pace (2 responses), to show historical context, to get students to use their imaginations, and to help students see story outline. The largest percentage of teachers thought that reading aloud provided a transition
period between activities (19%) or served as a useful tool to help students learn to sit still (16%). Teachers also indicated that they believed reading aloud provided students an opportunity to learn to listen (11%). Survey results indicate no evidence that most teachers at Prairie Middle School understand the impact reading aloud to students has on the development of vocabulary (7%), language (9%) and reading comprehension (7%). Hypothesis 1 was rejected.

Hypothesis 2 stated that the majority of teachers are not reading aloud to students. Survey results indicated that the majority of teachers surveyed at Prairie Middle School are reading aloud to students and that they are choosing to do so at least frequently (42%), while 20% indicate that they read aloud to their students daily.
As indicated by the survey, the majority of teachers (57%) read aloud less than 10 minutes, while 28% read aloud from ten to twenty minutes. Nine percent of those surveyed did not respond to this question. No teacher reads longer than thirty minutes. Based on the results of the survey, hypothesis 2 was rejected.
Hypothesis 3 stated that the majority of books read aloud are not above grade level and therefore have little effect on vocabulary, language and comprehension growth.

The survey asked those teachers who are currently reading aloud to students to indicate the types of materials they are reading aloud. Teachers at Prairie Middle School are choosing to read newspapers and magazines to their students 40% of the time. The reading of novels ranked third in the types of materials read aloud. Three percent (3%) of the respondents did not answer this question.
Teachers indicated that they are reading a variety of different books to their students. Most teachers indicated specific titles that are used as read alouds. Some teachers indicated a series of books such as Wayside School or Bill Wallace titles. To facilitate data collection, a book from each named series or author was selected at random to include in the sampling to obtain reading level information of books read aloud to students. The Dale-Chall formula from the computer software program Readability Calculations (1995) was used to determine the grade level readability of the books teachers are reading aloud to students.
### Titles Read Aloud to Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Total Words</th>
<th>Difficult Words</th>
<th>Total Sentences</th>
<th>% of Words Not On List</th>
<th>Words Per Sentence</th>
<th>Dale-Chall Readability Level</th>
<th>Grade Level Where Title is Read Aloud</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Tale of Two Cities</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10.31</td>
<td>27.71</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belle Prater’s Boy</td>
<td>378</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bully of Barkham Street</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>8.09</td>
<td>15.32</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canyons</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5.04</td>
<td>19.83</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catherine, Called Birdy</td>
<td>394</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10.66</td>
<td>18.76</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Daniel’s Story</td>
<td>348</td>
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<td>28</td>
<td>6.32</td>
<td>12.43</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Daphne’s Book</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>18.89</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eye of the Great Bear</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>12.69</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growing Up Native American</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15.75</td>
<td>21.17</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heart of a Champion</td>
<td>361</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>4.71</td>
<td>11.65</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incident at Hawk’s Hill</td>
<td>387</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14.73</td>
<td>24.19</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Into the Land of the Unicorns</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>8.29</td>
<td>13.36</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Into Thin Air</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>20.89</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jeremy Thatcher, Dragon Hatcher</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>18.67</td>
<td>5.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nightjohn</td>
<td>324</td>
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<td>28</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>11.57</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Old Yeller</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>19.86</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Playing For Keeps</td>
<td>397</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9.57</td>
<td>23.35</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Dead Man At Indian Creek</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>13.48</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Giver</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9.97</td>
<td>18.55</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Indian in the Cupboard</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>13.57</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Magnificent Mummy Maker</td>
<td>425</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5.41</td>
<td>15.74</td>
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<td>The Man Who Loved Clowns</td>
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<td>6.74</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Music of Dolphins</td>
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<td>45</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12.13</td>
<td>19.53</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Other Side of Dark</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>7.22</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Outsiders</td>
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<td>29</td>
<td>4.84</td>
<td>12.83</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>The Three Muskateers</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13.71</td>
<td>23.33</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There's A Girl In My Hammerlock</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3.64</td>
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<td>4.8</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Through the Hidden Door</td>
<td>367</td>
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<td>29</td>
<td>8.45</td>
<td>12.66</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuck Everlasting</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8.24</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wait Till Helen Comes</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4.58</td>
<td>15.17</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wayside Schools is Falling Down</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>11.55</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9
Fifty percent of those who are reading aloud are sixth grade teachers while 16% of teachers reading aloud are 7th grade teacher and 34% of teachers reading aloud are 8th grade teachers. At all grades the readability level of most book read aloud falls well below actual grade level where they are being read. Hypothesis 3 was accepted.

![Graph 10](image)

Although 40% of the teachers who were surveyed indicated that they were choosing to read magazines and newspapers to their students, the focus of this research was on the impact that reading of books had on the development of vocabulary, language and comprehension of students. No data were obtained to determine what magazine or newspaper titles were being read aloud.
Chapter 5

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Summary
The purpose of this research was to determine whether or not reading aloud was occurring at Prairie Middle School in the College Community School District Cedar Rapids, Iowa. In addition, the research investigated whether the amount of time and the material selected were choices that would provide opportunity for students to achieve growth in vocabulary development, language acquisition and reading comprehension. The research also sought to determine whether or not teachers understood the impact reading aloud can have on growth in vocabulary, language and reading comprehension.

Conclusions
The data produced from this research project were both expected and unexpected. The teachers at Prairie Middle School are in fact reading aloud to their students. However, as indicated by the research of Feitelson, Kita, and Goldstein (1986) in order for reading aloud to have significant influence on language development students must hear stories read aloud on a daily basis. Reading aloud is occurring at least frequently at this school but it is not occurring frequently enough to produce the increases in vocabulary,
language development and reading comprehension as found in the research of Cohen (1968); Eller, Pappas and Brown; Elley (1989); Pappas and Brown (1987); Feitelson, Kita and Goldstein (1968); and Roser and Martinez (1985).

Most of these teachers do not believe that reading aloud to students has a significant impact on the development of vocabulary, language and comprehension. Instead they see reading aloud as a transition from one activity to the next and as an opportunity for students to learn to sit still. These results are somewhat disappointing in light of the district’s commitment to the improvement of the reading abilities of all middle school students. The teachers in this middle school seem to have left the teaching of reading to the reading teachers and as a result, the classroom teachers have little understanding of the impact reading aloud can have on students. This situation may have come about because of the increased emphasis on test scores and the mandate that all students at every grade level must be able to pass specific curriculum competencies. Little time is left to the classroom teacher to concentrate on the reading competencies of vocabulary development, acquisition of language, and comprehension.

As expected, teachers are not selecting books to read aloud that are above grade level and therefore the reading aloud of these materials will
have little impact on the development of vocabulary, language or comprehension. As the survey results indicate, 50% of the teachers have taught previously at the elementary level. These teachers may be choosing to read material with which they are accustomed rather than choosing to familiarize themselves with materials that are appropriate for reading aloud at the middle school level. These teachers may also believe that reading aloud material that is at or below grade level will encourage students to read the same or similar books independently. Because the research did not address the reading level of students but instead simply looked at grade level readability of books, teachers may in fact be choosing material for reading aloud that is slightly above the students reading level. An additional scenario may be that teachers simply do not know that reading aloud at a higher reading level can be a useful tool in the improvement of vocabulary, language and comprehension.

The other 50% of the teachers indicated that they had previously taught at the high school level. This may account for the fact that some teachers are choosing to read magazines and newspapers. These teachers may be hoping to encourage students to read and use these types of texts as a means of providing challenging vocabulary and ideas. Unfortunately these teachers are more often choosing not to read aloud at all. The fact that
seventh grade teachers are reading aloud so infrequently to their students was an unexpected result. It was expected that the percentage of teachers reading aloud would be greatest at the sixth grade level with smaller decreases seen in both the seventh and eighth grades. Instead there was a large discrepancy between the number of teachers reading aloud in the seventh grade when compared with those reading aloud in the eighth grade.

The kinds of materials being read aloud produced the most unexpected results. It was expected that the majority of materials read aloud to students would fall into the novel genre. Instead, those surveyed indicated that they read newspapers and magazines more often. It appears from the results of the survey that teachers are using the read aloud experience as a means of providing students with information rather than as a tool to achieve better growth in the reading abilities of their students.

While some of the results from this research were disappointing the data obtained from the survey can be used as a springboard to assist this middle school as it attempts to increase the reading abilities of its students. Providing teachers and administrators with survey results may increase the amount of time spent reading aloud to students. The media specialist should make every effort to provide materials for reading aloud that are above grade level in an effort to increase growth in vocabulary, language and reading
comprehension. In addition, the media specialist should spend some time with the seventh grade teachers to help them find ways of incorporating reading aloud into their weekly schedules.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

Research focusing on the reading of newspapers and magazines and the readability level of those genres might provide interesting data and conclusions. Although newspapers and magazines have traditionally been thought of as a means of providing information to students perhaps the reading aloud of materials from these sources will also prove to be as beneficial to the growth of vocabulary, language and comprehension as the reading aloud of the more traditional story. An additional research study should be done to determine the reading level of students in each of the middle school grade levels. Comparing those reading levels with the materials that teachers are choosing to read aloud may indicate that teachers are reading materials that are slightly above the reading level of their students.

Questions not directly related to the hypothesis none the less provide some interesting opportunities for further study. Teachers responded to question thirteen “What degree(s) do you have and in what areas of certification? Please indicate hours earned beyond your last degree
awarded” and question fourteen “How many college credits do you have in the area of reading? If possible, list the specific classes you have taken and indicate if they are undergraduate (u) or graduate (g)”, provided further clarification. Some teachers indicated they had taken graduate classes specifically related to reading while others did not mention any reading classes at all. In response to question fifteen, “What college credit courses have you completed during the last five years that pertain to reading?” and question sixteen, “List all workshops, conferences or AEA courses you have taken in the past five years that pertain to the teaching of reading”, some teachers indicated they had taken courses during the past five years that pertained directly to the teaching of reading. Whether or not those classes discussed the importance of reading aloud was not determined. Research on pre-service training of all teachers about the importance of reading might provide some interesting conclusions with regard to those teachers who choose to read aloud in their classrooms as opposed to those who choose not to read aloud.

Research focusing on the implementation of grade level competencies and the impact that testing has had on the classroom teacher’s ability or desire to read aloud to his or her students might also illicit valuable insights into the read aloud experience of students.
An intervention program initiated by the media specialist might produce different results and should be investigated. Additional research should also be conducted in other middle schools in order to compare results.

Reading aloud may not be the panacea for solving the problems associated with reading but choosing books with a reading level higher than the students current grade level will build vocabulary, stimulate language development, and provide opportunity for growth in reading comprehension.
References


Reading Research Quarterly, 24 (2), 175-186.


Appendix A

Cover Letter
To: Prairie Middle School Staff  
From: Linda Balog  
Date: September 24, 1999  
Re: Reading Aloud Survey

As most of you know, I am in the process of completing my M. A. in School Library Media Studies at the University of Northern Iowa. In order to complete this program I am required to complete a graduate research paper on a topic of my choice. I have chosen to conduct my research on the read aloud practices of teachers at the middle school here at Prairie.

The following survey will take about 10 minutes of your time and I appreciate your willingness to help me in this matter. All of your responses will be kept confidential and all surveys will be destroyed at the conclusion of this research.

Please return your survey to me on or before October 1, 1999. Again, thank you for your participation. If you would like a copy of my research paper, please submit that request in writing on a separate sheet of paper.
Appendix B

Reading Aloud Survey
Reading Aloud

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. I would ask you not to think about your responses but to answer as quickly as you can your first responses.

1. How many years have you taught at the middle level (grades 6-8)?
   [ ] less than 5 years [ ] 16 years – 20 years
   [ ] 6 years – 10 years [ ] 21 - 25 years
   [ ] 11 years – 15 years [ ] More than 25 years

2. What other levels of teaching experience have you had? Please mark all that apply.
   [ ] Pre-kindergarten [ ] Third-Fifth
   [ ] Kindergarten-Second [ ] Ninth – Twelfth

3. What grade level do you currently teach? Please mark all that apply.
   [ ] 6th [ ] 7th [ ] 8th

4. Please rank from 1 to 11 your responses to the following statement. (1 would be the most important and 11 would be the least important.)

   If I were to choose to read aloud to my students I would do it because it would...

   [ ] Help them learn to sit still [ ] Increase vocabulary development
   [ ] Develop reading comprehension [ ] Help them learn new ideas and concepts
   [ ] Provide a transition period [ ] Motivation for the beginning of a unit
   [ ] Help them learn to listen [ ] Provide curricular information
   [ ] Increase language development [ ] Provide enjoyment
   [ ] Other (please specify) ______________________________________________________

5. Do you read aloud to your students?
   Yes [ ] No [ ]
   If no, skip to question #13.

6. How often do you read aloud to your students?
   [ ] Daily [ ] Seldom
   [ ] Frequently [ ] Never
7. When you read aloud, on average how long do you read?

[ ] Less than 10 minutes [ ] 21 – 30 minutes

[ ] 11 – 20 minutes [ ] More than 30 minutes

8. Excluding textbooks, what kinds of materials do you read aloud to your students? Please mark all that apply.

[ ] Novels [ ] Plays

[ ] Poetry [ ] Short Stories

[ ] Biographies [ ] Memoirs

[ ] Essays [ ] Historical Documents

[ ] Magazine Articles [ ] Newspaper Articles

[ ] Other Please specify

The next several questions refer to the reading of books only. If you do not read books aloud to your students, please skip to question #13. If you need more space please attach another sheet of paper to this survey.

9. What book are you presently reading aloud to your students? Please give title and author if possible.

10. What book did you last read aloud to your students? Please give title and author if possible.

11. What book do you plan to read aloud next? Please give title and author if possible.

12. What books have you read aloud in the past?
When answering the next four questions, list as many responses as you can remember.

13. What degree(s) do you have and in what areas of certification? Please indicate hours earned beyond your last degree awarded.

14. How many college credits do you have in the area of reading? If possible, list the specific classes you have taken and indicate if they are undergraduate (u) or graduate (g) credit.

15. What college credit courses have you completed during the last five years that pertain to reading?

16. List all workshops, conferences or AEA courses you have taken in the past five years that pertain to the teaching of reading.

Return survey to:

Linda Balog
Media Specialist
Prairie Middle School
401 76th Avenue SW
Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52404
Appendix C

Readability Passages
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...took the hesitating little hand that confidingly advanced to take his, and he put it with some ceremony to his lips. He then conducted the young lady straightway to her chair again, and, holding the chair-back with his left hand, and using his right by turns to rub his chin, pull his wig at the ears, or point what he said, stood looking down into her face while she sat looking up into his.

"Miss Manette, it was I. And you will see how truly I spoke of myself just now, in saying I had no feelings, and that all the relations I hold with my fellow-creatures are mere business relations, when you reflect that I have never seen you since. No; you have been the ward of Tellson's House since, and I have been busy with the other business…

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Next noontide saw the admirable woman in her usual place in the wine-shop, knitting away assiduously. A rose lay beside her, and if she now and then glanced at the flower, it was with no infraction of her usual preoccupied air. There were a few customers, drinking or not drinking, standing or seated, sprinkled about. The day was very hot, and heaps of flies, who were extending their inquisitive and adventurous perquisitions into all the glutinous little glasses near madame, fell dead at the bottom. Their decease made no impression on the other flies out promenading, who looked at them in the coolest manner (as if they themselves were elephants, or something as far removed), until they met the same fate.

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Though he said it with a grave smile of earnestness, and though he even put the old man's hand to his lips, he did not part from him then. He helped him so far to arouse the rocking figure before the dying embers, as to get a cloak and hat put upon it, and to tempt it forth to find where the bench and work were hidden that it still moaningly besought to have. He walked on the other side of it and protected it to the courtyard of the house where the afflicted hear-so happy in the memorable time when he had revealed his own desolate heart to it – outwatched the awful night.
It was a mystic twilight I found myself in that first of the many times to follow when I raced across our yards to go visit Woodrow. The apple trees sprinkled tiny petals on me. The breeze whipped them and their sweet aroma around me so that I was heady with a strange excitement as I entered the door, yelled hello to Granny and Grandpa, and galloped up the stairs to Woodrow's room at the front of the house.

His shaggy blond hair was hanging down in his eyes, and he kept tossing it to the side. He was putting his few pitiful belongings into a dresser drawer. And in the middle of the bed was Grandpa's German shepherd, who had no name but Dawg.

"When she ran away with Everett Prater, she was feeling low... like she couldn't do any better – not that there's anything wrong with Everett. Nothing a'tall. But Belle didn't even know him. And she hadn't a clue what she was getting into, moving up in the shadow of those hills where the sun don't even shine till noon.

"And here with us she had everything she needed and lots of things she wanted besides. We had hopes of sending her out into the world to study piano with the best of them. She was better than good. You're a lot like her in that way, Gypsy."

I was surprised and pleased. It was the first time Grandpa had ever mentioned my piano playing. And it reminded me that nobody ever bragged on me for anything except my looks.

It was another birthday dinner at our house-this time for Granny, and a somewhat special occasion because Porter had promised a couple of surprise announcements.

It was a Saturday night, still in September, and mine and Woodrow's confinement would be ending next Tuesday. We were given a temporary reprieve for this dinner. I suspected none of the adults cared if we observed our confinement rules anyway.

In school Mr. Collins had given us the assignment of writing a paper about a person we admire and why. I still had not done mine. Grandpa, having proofread Woodrow's paper, was so impressed he had insisted Woodrow read it at the birthday dinner.
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“Doesn’t it say good things? I mean, isn’t it all right?” As a matter of fact Martin had been a bit proud of the paper. It was a nice imaginative account of a fight between a buffalo and a sea lion, with some tough conversation between the two that had seemed to him just the sort of thing creatures would say to each other in battle times. It had ended with the sea lion pulling the buffalo into the ocean and drowning him. It was a paper for Mr. Foran’s “creative writing” class.

“Isn’t it creative enough?” he asked, and added, “I mean, Mr. Foran?”

“Martin, this paper is so full of misspellings that it’s almost as if you’d gone out of your way to achieve them.

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Caught up in this dream of the future, the present became somehow less important. Even the fact that tonight he would be performing alone—well, anyway, not with his parents there didn’t matter so much. He felt so set up and confident that on the way home he ignored Rod Graham, who popped out from behind a tree and yelled, “Ya big balloon. Why don’t you go somewhere and bust?”

Martin clutched his bugle case tighter and kept walking. At home he took the stairs two at a time. He was going to take a good long shower before dinner and get out his clean clothes, all ready to put on afterward.

There was a sign on Marietta’s door. Martin walked over, curious to see what it was this time.

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Martin lied less and less lately. But he made a distinction between lies—which were told to escape punishment—and exaggerations—which were, well just exaggerations. Tales and fables, told to make life more interesting. But he’d learned that not all people made this distinction. So probably writing his stories out and calling them stories would be one way to satisfy everybody.

Martin Hastings, Editor-in-Chief. It sounded great, no question about it.

Martin had made, recently, the surprising discovery that admitting a thing, anything, made it somehow easier to cope with. When, for instance, people kidded him about his weight, or even when they were not kidding but unkind, he no longer blew up and said angry things in return.
It is all I need to do – to run is all there is. When I am running it is all, everything. Nothing matters. Not the father that I do not know or the mother that does not know me or the school that I hate or money or not money-all of that disappears when I run.

When I float. When I run and float. God, he thought, his legs felt like they belonged to somebody else, somebody who never became tired, and when he looked down at them pumping, driving, moving him forward they marveled him. From all the running, from the daily running in the streets and up the hills they had become so strong he didn’t know them.

John Homesley was a biology teacher in Cardiff School. Brennan had taken biology from him the year before and an almost-friendship had developed.

Well, Brennan thought, jogging down the street that led to Homesley’s house, cooling from his run –it hadn’t started that way.

Brennan had nearly flunked, had trouble in school, and Homesley had stopped him in front of the school one day as he was heading home at the end of the day.

He was an enormous man, tall and very heavy, bordering on fat but in a controlled way. Like a bear. He had rounded shoulders that somehow looked massively strong, with a heavy head of dark curly hair that always seemed a little long and a neatly trimmed beard filled with gray streaks.

He had stopped at a convenience store and purchased a small knapsack and a couple of granola bars and a quart of bottled water. He put the skull and water in the pack and adjusted it to ride loosely on his back.

When darkness had first caught him he stopped and lay against the side of a sand dune to rest and stretch his legs. He had rested several times during the day just for ten or fifteen minutes each time to keep his legs from cramping. He had also drunk most of the water – amazed how fast a quart seemed to go.
Master Lack-Wit comes today, despite my mother's objections. Although she is wed to a knight of no significance, her fathers were kings in Britain long ago, she says. And my suitor is but a wool merchant from Great Yarmouth who aspires to be mayor and thinks a wife with noble relations, no matter how distant, will be an advantage.

My father bellowed, "Sweet Judas, lady, think you we can eat your royal ancestors or plant your family name? The man stinks of gold. If he will have her and pay well for the privilege, your daughter will be a wife."

When there is money involved, my father can be quite well spoken.

All afternoon they swung until finally they were near too tired to lift their heavy weapons again. Gilbert heaved one last swipe at Richard, which knocked him off his feet. Bellowing about who did what unfairly to whom, their friends joined in shouting and cursing and grunting along. Then we all joined in, even the cooks and servers swinging their ladles and pothooks. I with no weapon hurled food at whoever was near, pretending I was a crusader battling the heathens with leftover pig's stomach and almond cream.

One group of fighters stumbled into the fire, scattering the burning brands and smoldering ashes into the rushes, which burst into flame. Suddenly the hall floor was ablaze, as the dry rushes caught fire. Even William Stewards' shoes were........

I was at Meg's father's cottage before light this day to bring her the gift of my second-best blue kirtle, her only one being old and patched and green, a color sure to bring bad luck to a bride. I then went to the church to await everyone at the church door, where William Steward and I would represent my father on this occasion. Meg said it would bring them great honor and great luck. I think the luck is that my father did not come himself.

Soon I heard the sound of laughter and singing and the strumming of gitterns as Meg and Alf led the villagers up the path to the church. Meg's yellow hair, usually tightly plaited and pinned up so as not to hang in the milk or become tangled in the butter churn, fell loose in a river of gold to her knees.
“People think he will make Germany strong again—give it back its dignity. Come, let’s go help your father wash that sign off.”

The boycott of Jewish stores lasted only three days, and like any six-year-old, I quickly forgot all about it and went back to my happy life. My mother and father must have started to worry then, but they hid it well and I had other things to worry about—such as whether or not I would make the school soccer team and if I could convince Father to buy me the beautiful model car that was displayed in the shop window next to his.

Rosa was actually from Lodz. Her family had lived in a beautiful house, had been very well off. Her father had owned three fur stores. He had been a member of the Jewish Council that was appointed when the Germans invaded Poland in September of 1939, but in November most of the leaders were deported, her father among them. That left her mother, an older brother, Nathan, who was twenty, and a younger brother, Isaac. By the time the ghetto was sealed off from the rest of the world, in April 1940, there were 160,500 people there. By 1943 there were around 80,000 of us left, the rest having died or been sent away in one of the many transports.

And so here I sit on the train. It is May and we are on our way to Lodz. I am much stronger now. I am clean and dressed in clothes that are not lice infested. Peter sits beside me. Father across the way. We don’t talk much. We are all thinking about those we love. Are they alive? Who has survived? How much more suffering is in store for us? I have never before now even entertained the possibility of Rosa’s being dead. But of course she could be. She could have been captured and shot. Or sent to Auschwitz. Father is thinking that Erika could be dead too. And he is feeling the pain of Mother’s death.
What was the matter with me? I'd always thought of myself as a writer. In my closet were boxes full of stories I'd written, some of them dating back to the second grade, but none of them seemed good enough to haul out and rewrite.

Turning onto my back, I stared at the moon outside my window. The size of a quarter, its full face seemed to return my stare. "It must be Daphne's fault," I said to the moon. "If I had a different partner, I'd have my story all written by now. I know I would. And it would be good too. A lot better than 'The Nightmare Slumber Party.'"

The sun set slowly behind our townhouses and the air lost its warmth as I trudged slowly up the hill toward home. When I opened the front door, I heard Mom and Ed laughing in the kitchen. They were working on dinner together, chopping up peppers and onions and making silly jokes like a couple of teenagers. Luckily they were more interested in each other than they were in me. It wouldn't have taken much attention from Mom to make me break down and tell her everything. I wanted to talk to her so badly, but I had to keep my promise. I'd let Daphne down too many times already.

Hope led me outside, past the daffodils and tulips, to a nicely mulched path that wound off into the trees. Away from the big stone house, it was very quiet. The new leaves made lacy shadows on the ground, and the sunlight gleamed on Hope's hair. The air had a fresh, damp smell, filled with the odors of leaf mold and earth and growing things.

Being in the woods reminded me of the times that Daphne and I had climbed the trail leading to our rocks above the Patapsco River Valley, and I found myself walking quietly, hoping the three deer would slip out from among the silent trees.
I curled up on the blankets again. The twins would get me, that was for sure. But it wouldn’t be tonight. They were patient. They’d wait, pick a fight, or blame me for something else next week. It didn’t matter. I wasn’t afraid of them. I’d take my licking for what I did. I might even get in a few good punches of my own along the way.

Well, back in the early spring of 1866,” Daddy began, “this fella name of Nelson Story rounded up about fifteen hundred head of the nastiest, rankest Texas longhorns you ever set eyes on. His plan was to drive ’em to Montana. There was plenty of land to be had up there. Plenty of free grass, too.

“I’ll get up a couple of times during the night,” he said with a sigh. “Keep it going so the ’coons won’t crawl down the chimney, but keep it small enough so it doesn’t bum us out.”

Far as I was concerned, there was no worry about burning us out. Once finished shoveling a whole mountain to fill in the washout in the road, I got downright cold. My bedroll was a sheet and two blankets. One blanket was for laying on, the other for wrapping up. I already had both blankets bunched around e. And right before I dozed off, I’d seriously though of trying to snitch Matthew’s blanket.

Just the glow of the fire seemed to warm the room. I lay back own and closed my eyes. Sleep came quick and sweet.

Once I was breathing easier and feeling better, I followed the road over a little rise. From there I could see the whole basin. Kimmerly was no place in sight. I looked around. There weren’t as many flowers as I thought-just a patch of blue and yellow out to the right side of the cabin. The patch seemed bigger back behind, but I couldn’t tell for sure.

I bet the little stink is back there, I though, glaring at the flowers. And if Daddy don’t switch her for running off and scaring us-I’m going to. There’s no sense in her being so spoiled.
Both my mother and father were good storytellers and singers (as my mother is to this day—my father died in 1978), and for their generation, which was born soon after the turn of the century, they were relatively educated in the American system. Catholic missionaries had taken both of them as children to a parochial boarding school far from Acoma, and they imparted their discipline for study and quest for education to us children when we started school. But it was their indigenous sense of gaining knowledge that was most meaningful to me. Acquiring knowledge about life was above all the most important item; it was a value that one had to have in order to be fulfilled personally and on behalf of his community.

Now such fights as did break out from time to time were in the main instigated merely to infuse some excitement into the monotony of institutional life, a monotony that may have suited the clergy, but was not to the liking of the boys.

Like many other pursuits and diversion in the school, fights were conducted according to certain customs and codes. They never broke out amid the shouts and accusations that usually precede fights, nor did one aggressor, as from ambush, spring upon his victim to deliver the coup de grace with one blow. Nor yet was a fight conducted to the finish. Not allowed during the course of a fight were kicking, biting, hitting an opponent from behind or striking an opponent while he was on the ground.

That morning Innis had actually been home. We had been playing in the mountain. The mountain was this mound of dirt that had been dug out for my aunt's patio, which had never actually gotten built beyond the cinder block foundation. The mountain was on the patch of land between our two houses. It was small, I guess, but to us it seemed like another whole world. We had dug a hole into one of the interior folds of the mountain for later use as a cave for the six-inch plastic Indian figures we all played with. We could never quite figure out who those Indians were. They were all peach-colored and they didn't really look like anyone from our reservation.
Heart of a Champion
Carl Deuker
New York: Avon Books
1993
0-380-72269-0
Dale-Chall Readability Level: 5

Page 14

Jimmy told me about Little League signups. He'd made the major leagues the year before. He played shortstop and batted third for the Woodside Plaza Merchants. He didn't have to try out, but I did.

He had it worked out. I'd get assigned to his team, play second base. We'd be a great double-play combo. He'd bat third and lead the league in hitting and runs batted in. I'd bat second and lead in runs scored. Our team would win the title.

It sounded great to me.

On the day of tryouts, there were probably one hundred guys at Red Morton Park. Some man took my name, pinned a number on my back, and asked how old I was and whether I wanted to play infield or outfield.

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She frowned when she looked over her shoulder and saw Jimmy slumped down in the backseat, but she didn't push it.

The second close call came over Christmas break. We were in Todd's room one Tuesday afternoon when his father, who'd come home early from work, knocked on the door. It was bad enough madly trying to hide the beer bottles under chairs and behind the stereo. But the worst part was trying to act calm with his father in the room. Mr. Franks shot pool with us for half an hour or so. He was laughing and joking, and we tried to laugh and joke with him. But Jimmy and I were sweating bullets, and Todd was ten times worse.

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Willis nodded. Fear was in his eyes.

"You can do it, Alan," Jimmy said. He paused. "You can. Low. No matter how hard they hit the ball, if it's on the ground, Seth and me will get it."

Willis didn't have much on the ball, but he kept it down. That meant a lot of hard ground balls to Jimmy and me. It was like taking fielding practice, only it was for real. In the fourth I snagged a hot shot up the middle, and in the fifth Jimmy made a backhand stop deep in the hole and threw the guy out by half a step.
Even though it was a young country here, already it was steeped with a rich tradition of history. This was Indian land, or at least it still had been when first they arrived. Roving bands of Crees had then lived on these prairies, frequently moving their impermanent villages as they fished in the rivers, hunted across the plains for buffalo, netted great numbers of ducks and gees on the multitude of marshy potholes which dotted the landscape, trapped the fox, mink, beaver, otter, badger, marten and other furbearers for trade with the white men of the Hudson’s Bay Company. That had changed, too. In just this score of years the Indians had nearly disappeared, moving westward with the ever-diminishing herds of buffalo until now it had become something of a rarity to see one of those great shaggy animals or one of the red men who hunted them.

The female badger nuzzled them for a while longer but after an hour or so she gave up. Moving to the emergency escape shaft, she tore at the tunneling until it collapsed and sealed itself and then, backing from the main entrance, she paused a foot or so from the den chamber and plugged this passageway in a similar manner. It was an instinctive maneuver, done mechanically with no real understanding on her part of why she did it. Not infrequently she had done the same things even when abandoning a temporary den. Occasionally, especially in winter, she would plug an entrance while she was inside and thereby benefit from the added warmth and protection this afforded.

As his accounts continued and expanded, the degree of vocabulary Ben possessed impressed and astounded them, especially in view of the fact that he had always been so monosyllabic in his speech before. It was evident now that while he had previously not spoken much he had listened much better than anyone thought and he learned from the family’s conversation around him. And though he weighed somewhat less than when he left, he had somehow-in his own eyes and in theirs-grown considerably. His pride in this feeling was evident in one of his comments.

“I used to be so small when everyone else was so big,” he told them seriously. “It was like everybody, even Coral and Beth, knew more than I did and there wasn’t anything I could say that
Hand on the rail, she spiraled up through the darkness, counting off the fourth and fifth chimes.
And their pursuer—was he running up the stairs now, too? Running toward Grandmother Morris?
What if he caught her before she could toll the bell the twelfth time? What then?
She was breathing in great gasps. The back of her legs felt as if they were on fire. She heard the
sixth chime—or was it the seventh? No, it was the sixth; it had to be the sixth. She mustn't lose count!

Her free hand, the one not on the rail, clutched the amulet hanging from her neck. It felt warm.
She opened her fingers. To her astonishment, the amulet was starting to glow.

She beat down her suspicions and tried to spot the Dimblethum. But the limited view offered by
the peephole made it impossible to see him. She hoped she would be able to find him fast enough when the
time came!

As she watched, one of the delvers reluctantly handed Thomas his spear. The Tinker took
something from his pouch and made a series of swift strokes over the spearhead. Then he tested it against
his thumb, and with a smile handed it back to the delver, who did the same thing. His hideous face broke
into a wide grin and he nodded to the others.

Wonderful, Thomas, thought Cara. Sharpen their weapons for them. That's going to do us a lot
of good!

The sorrow in his voice pierced her, and she wanted to run to him. But she saw that even as he
mourned her loss, he was judging the distance between them, preparing to leap.
She took another step back, then turned and ran.
She wanted to call on Firethroat for help, but feared that if she unleashed the dragon's wrath, the
beast would destroy her father. She didn't want to destroy him, merely wanted him sent back to Earth, far
from her and the unicorns. She hadn't thought further ahead than keeping the amulet out of his grasp.
His leap brought him within inches of her. She ran faster, heading for the front of the cave,
uncertain where she would go after that.
Instead of turning my oxygen off, Harris, in his hypoxically impaired state, had mistakenly cranked the valve open to full flow, draining the tank. I'd just squandered the last of my gas going nowhere. There was another tank waiting for me at the South Summit, 250 feet below, but to get there I would have to descend the most exposed terrain on the entire route without the benefit of supplemental oxygen.

And first I had to wait for the mob to disperse. I removed my now useless mask, planted my ice ax into the mountain's frozen hide, and hunkered on the ridge. As I exchanged banal congratulation with the climbers filing past, inwardly I was frantic: "hurry it up, hurry it up!" I silently pleaded.

I tramped out of camp by headlamp behind Rob and Frank, wending between ice towers and piles of rock rubble to reach the main body of the glacier. For the next two hours we ascended an incline pitched as gently as a beginner's ski slope, eventually arriving at the bergsehrund that delineated the Khumbu Glacier's upper end. Immediately above rose the Lhostse Face, a vast, tilted sea of ice that gleamed like dirty chrome in the dawn's slanting light. Snaking down the frozen expanse as if suspended from heaven, a single strand of nine-millimeter rope beckoned like Jack's beanstalk. I picked up the bottom end of it, attached my jumar to the slightly frayed line, and began to climb.

Three hundred feet below the Balcony, the gentle snow gully they'd been gingerly descending gave way to outcroppings of loose, steep shale, and Fischer was unable to handle the challenging terrain in his ailing condition. "Scott cannot walk now, I have big problem," says Lopsang. "I try to carry, but I am also very tired. He tell to me, 'Lopsang, you go down. You go down.' I tell to him, 'No, I stay together here with you.'"

About 8:00 P.M., Lopsang was huddling with Fischer on a snow-covered ledge when Makalu Gau and his two Sherpas appeared out of the howling blizzard, Gau was nearly as debilitated as Fischer and was like wise...
For the life of him, he could not remember. One minute he had been in that weird shop. The next—here he was, less than a block from home.

At least he was safe. Howard and Freddy rarely came this far from the center of town. Of course, living out here meant Jeremy had to walk farther to get to school than most of his friends. But the fact that he had a backyard that was more like a back field made up for it. The place had been a working farm once and his father, who was a veterinarian, used the main barn as an office.

While Jeremy doctored Mary Lou’s hand they started to talk about books. By the time they returned to the house they were deep in an argument about the Chronicles of Narnia. Jeremy ran up to his room to get Prince Caspian to prove a point to Mary Lou.

He found one of Tiamat’s’s teeth beside the bookshelf, and deposited it in the collection he had started in his desk.

When he left the room he closed the door carefully, to avoid a repeat of the disaster with Grief. Unfortunately, while he was concentrating on shutting the dog out, he forgot to worry about keeping the dragon in.

He could feel Tiamat’s amusement. They can’t see you, she told him, using the same kind of images she had used to explain why his mother hadn’t seen her. Jeremy wondered if that meant he was invisible while she carried him. He liked the idea.

The flight was the greatest adventure of his life, and Jeremy couldn’t wait to repeat it.

That night, after everyone was asleep, he slipped out of the house and walked down to the barn. Tiamat was waiting for him.

Let me try riding, he thought, sending a picture of himself mounted on her back. Tiamat agreed, and Jeremy found it far more comfortable to straddle he back than to be carried in her claws.
I’m Sarny and the other part of my name be the same as old Waller who wants to be master but is nothing. Nothing. I don’t count the back part of my name no more than I count old Waller himself. No more than I count spit.

My mammy she told me that my birthing mammy was sold when I was four years old because she was a good breeder and Waller he needed the money. My mammy said that my birthing mammy brought enough for four field hands and that she cried when the man bought her. My mammy stood in the back of a wagon and watched back and ...

Suddenly he’s gone. One second he’s there, the next he’s slammed sideways and gone.

“What in the hell are you doing to her?”

Mammy was standing there, big and black and tall in the moonlight. “What you doing to this girl?”

She had come from the side and fetched John such a blow on his head that it knocked him back into the wall and on his back.

He come up quick and didn’t cower none.

“What in the hell are you doing? Don’t you know what they do to her if they find her trying to read? We already got ...

Wrong again.

Only not right away.

He made it clean away. The next day Waller he took the dogs and two field hands and his horse and set off swearing and stinking. Two days he be gone, and he come back and make a storm around the place so we all know John he made it. He be gone.

Mammy she cried in a happy way and I smiled some for a time and hoped him well, though he left me hangin. I had only the same letters as on both hands.
Old Yeller
Fred Gipson
New York: Harper and Row
1957
LC 56-8780
Dale-Chall Readability Level: 5.1

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The dog run was an open roofed-over space between the two rooms of our log cabin. It was a good place to eat watermelons in the hot summer or to sleep when the night breezes weren't strong enough to push through the cracks between the cabin logs. Sometimes we hung up fresh-killed meat there to cool out.

Little Arlis sat in the dog run and sulked while I packed water from the spring. I packed the water in a bucket that Papa had made out of the hide of a cow’s leg. I poured the water into the ash hopper that stood beside the cabin. That was so the water could trickle down through the wood ashes and become lye water. Later Mama would mix this lye water with hog fat and boil it in an iron pot when she wanted to make soap.

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Papa always said that breathing skunk scent was the best way in the world to cure a head cold. But this was summertime, when Old Yeller and I didn’t have head colds. We would just as soon that the skunks stayed out of the watermelons and let us alone.

Working there, night after night, guarding our precious bread corn from the varmints, I came to see what I would have been up against if I’d had it to do without the help of Old Yeller. By myself, I’d have been run to death and still probably wouldn’t have saved the corn. Also, look at all the fun I would have missed if I’d been alone, and how lonesome I would have been. I had to admit Papa had been right when he’d told me how bad I needed a dog.

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Mama’d pack water to him in my hat. He was too weak to get up and drink; so Mama would hold the water right under his nose and I’d lift him up off the pillows and hold him close enough that he could reach down and lap the water up with his tongue.

Having to travel so far and so slow and with so many halts, it looked like we’d never get him home. But we finally made it just about the time it got dark enough for the stars to show.

By then, my hurt leg was plenty stiff, stiff and numb. It was all swelled up and felt as dead as a chunk of wood. When I slid down off Jumper’s back, it wouldn’t hold me. I fell clear to the ground and lay in the dirt, too tired and hurt to get up.
Now that Jackson was signed, the way was cleared for Reinsdorf to go after Jordan. First, there was some residual tension to deal with. Reinsdorf heard that Jordan was angry at him. Was that true? Jordan said it was. Reinsdorf asked why, and Jordan mentioned that when they signed the previous contract, the one for $30 million, Reinsdorf had apparently said that he might live to regret it. Reinsdorf said he did not remember saying it, but if he did, he apologized. With that, the disagreement was in his mind over. It was not. About the same time, Jordan met with Henry Louis Gates, the distinguished Harvard historian and writer, and brought up the statement. After all those years of being underpaid but carrying the Bulls in the worst of times and then helping to carry them to five...

If anything made his job easier in those first two years, Collins thought, it was Jordan’s very presence at practice, his daily example as the hardest-working player on the team, and his unwillingness to let his teammates coast through their drills. That made him a coach’s dream, because not only was he setting an example, the voice the others were hearing was often his instead of Collins’s. Collins knew he was an emotional coach, and he was aware of the danger of overcoaching young players—that if he did nothing but correct them all day he would sooner rather than later lose his authority, and they would tune out. The fact that so much of the coaching was being done almost unconsciously by the team’s best player allowed him to concentrate on one or ....

One of the reasons Jordan continued to be hard on Jerry Krause was because of the way Krause dealt with other members of the Bulls who were important parts of the team but somewhat vulnerable in their contract leverage. It was Jordan’s way of being a good teammate. In these instances, he believed, Krause was not only unnecessarily tough and ungenerous but also demeaning. It was a feeling that went back to Krause’s negotiations with John Paxson, even after Paxson had proved to be a valuable member of a championship team. Paxson was by NBA standards badly underpaid for a starting guard on a champion team, making perhaps $500,000 a year, and it was Jordan’s belief that Krause was much too tough in their dealings, as if ....
I picked up one of the victims. The dark brows painted right above her eyes gave her face a
criminal look reminding me of old photographs of outlaws, sort of ruthless and stupid. “Did you ever see
that TV show about the killer doll?” I called to Parker.

But he was too busy pulling camping gear out from under his bed to be interested in what I was
saying. Dumping a sweatshirt and some other things into his backpack, he returned to the kitchen and
grabbed a couple of cans of Dinty Moore Stew, half a loaf of bread, and some brown bananas. “You got
any cash?” he asked.

I checked my pockets. “Three dollars,” I said, glad I hadn’t spent all my lawn-raking money.
“And some change.”

After the living dead had killed off just about everybody, Parker called the pizza place and ordered
a large tomato and cheese with mushrooms, green peppers, meatballs, onions, and anchovies on top. Since
the delivery man came to Parker’s house pretty regularly, he got it to us in less than fifteen minutes.

“Those dead guys in the movie,” Parker said after we’d devoured most of the pizza. “Didn’t they
remind you of the man we found in the creek?”

The man’s face flashed before me, and I had to force myself to swallow my pizza. “Hey, Parker,”
I said, “not while we’re eating.”

That afternoon, Parker and I were sitting on my back steps. He had been unusually quiet ever
since we left the hospital, and I wondered what he was thinking about.

After a long stretch of silence, Parker looked at me. Mom had trimmed his hair, and I could
actually see his eyes.

“What do you think will happen to Pam?” He pulled Otis close and gave him a hug.

“Dad’s going to talk to a lawyer,” I said. “he thinks if Pam gives evidence against Evans and
Flynn, the judge might go easy on her.”

“Will they put her in jail?”
Jonas nodded. He could remember the Decembers back to when he had become, well, probably a Four. The earlier ones were lost to him. But he observed them each year, and he remembered Lily’s earliest Decembers. He remembered when his family received Lily, the day she was named, the day that she had become a One.

The Ceremony for the Ones was always noisy and fun. Each December, all the newchildren born in the previous year turned One. One at a time—there were always fifty in each year’s group, if none had been released—they had been brought to the stage by the Nurturers who had cared for them since birth. Some were already walking, wobbly on their unsteady legs; others were no more than a few days old, wrapped in blankets, held by.....

Days went by, and weeks. Jonas learned, through the memories, the names of colors; and now he began to see them all, in his ordinary life though he knew it was ordinary no longer, and would never be again). But they didn’t last. There would be a glimpse of green—the landscaped lawn around the Central Plaza; a bush on the riverbank. The bright orange of pumpkins being trucked in from the agricultural fields beyond the community boundary—seen in an instant, the flash of brilliant color, but gone again, retelling to their flat and hueless shade.

The Giver told him that it would be a very long time before he had the colors to keep.

Usually the aircraft came by day, when they were hiding. But he was alert at night, too, on the road, always listening intently for the sound of the engines. Even Gabriel listened, and would call out, “Plane! Plane!” sometimes before Jonas had heard the terrifying noise. When the aircraft searchers came, as they did occasionally, during the night as they rode, Jonas sped to the nearest tree or bush, dropped to the ground, and made himself and Gabriel cold. But it was sometimes a frighteningly close call.

As he pedaled through the nights, through isolated landscape now, with the communities far behind and no sign of human habitation around him or ahead, he was...
You might have expected Omri to laugh at this absurd threat from a tiny creature scarcely bigger than his middle finger, armed with only a pinpoint. But Omri didn’t laugh. He didn’t even feel like laughing. This Indian—his Indian—was behaving in every way like a real live Indian brave, and despite the vast difference in their sizes and strengths, Omri respected him and even, odd as it sounded, feared him at that moment.

“Okay, I won’t then. But there’s no need to get angry. I don’t want to hurt you.” Then, as the Indian looked baffled, he said, in what he supposed was Indian English, “Me-no-hurt-you.”

“You come near, I hurt you,” said the Indian swiftly.

Just at that moment there was the sound of steps on the stairs. They froze. Then Omri swiftly moved the dressing-up crate enough to hide Little Bear, and Patrick sat down on the end of the bed, masking the poor cowboy, who was still toiling along over the humps in the quilt.

Just in time! Omri’s mother opened the door the next second and said, “Patrick, that was your mum on the phone. She wants you to come home right away. And Omri—it’s supper.” And she went.

Omri open his mouth to protest, but Patrick at once said, “Oh, okay.” With one quick movement he had scooped up cowboy and horse in his left hand and thrust them into his pocket.

To be safe, they sat Boone on his horse. Cowboys often ride in their sleep, and he didn’t stir as Little Bear led him down the ramp, across the table, and up another ramp that Omri stood against the rim of the cupboard. Then Little Bear went back to the seed box. Carefully he and Bright Stars put out the fire with earth. Little Bear took a last look at his longhouse. Then he put Bright Stars onto his horse’s back and led them after Boone.

They stood all together in the bottom of the cupboard. Nobody spoke. Omri had his hand on the door when Patrick suddenly said, “I’m going to wake Boone up. I don’t care, I’ve got to say good-by to him!”
I don’t remember my real mother. She died when I was only two months old. My dad and I lived alone until he married Marie four years ago.

The best part of living with Marie is that I don’t have to go to day care or to my aunt’s house after school, because Marie is always home. She takes care of my new little sister, Winks. I never thought I’d like having a baby sister so much, but Winks is special. She has this funny look, as if she knows exactly what I’m saying to her, even though she’s only a baby.

Winks is a great listener. Sometimes I baby-sit while Marie is doing housework. I take Winks out to her little red swing in the side yard. My dad hung the swing from a low branch of our old oak tree.

I woke up the next morning and the first thing I thought of was my mother. What would she be like? Would she look like me? Would she sound like me? Would she like me? A thousand questions went through my mind, as I search for my good shirt in my drawer. I wanted to look my best, because I knew that mothers liked their kids to have clean teeth. I would have brushed them more, if Jason hadn’t begun to whine that I was hogging the sink.

Wiley, the mummy, was almost as big a success as my paper mummy. At school, the next day, all the kids gathered around the little cardboard pyramid, to peek inside at the perfectly wrapped miniature mummy, lying in a coffin that had once been a Cracker Jacks box. Bits of the Cracker Jacks were lovingly laid out, along with the prize that had been at the bottom of the box. It was still in its paper wrapper. Keg felt that by not opening the prize, he was making a supreme gesture of respect. He wanted Wiley’s ka to be able to enjoy the thrill of opening it himself. There were also some pieces of lettuce and an old hamster wheel that had once been a favorite of Wiley’s. All this attention to detail did not go unnoticed.
Across the street, a man was mowing a ditch, and I caught a faint whiff of dust and dried weeds. Usually I felt relief when the school day was behind me, but today the cloud didn’t lift, because Avanelle was trying to get chummy. Mom had been after me to make friends since we’d moved to Tangle Nook, but I couldn’t. Not after that incident with Georgina Gregory and her bratty little brother, who lived on our street.

“Like what?” Avanelle repeated. “What do you do on weekends?”

“Oh, the regular. Chores.”

“Your folks make you work all weekend?”

“They don’t make me work. I do it because I want to.”

Finally Uncle Bert said, “It’s too soon, Queenie. Let’s give it some time.”

I went to the family room and sat beside Punky on the floor.

“Look, D. J.,” he said, laughing at a commercial where a kitten was streaking through a house toward some cat food.

I smiled absentmindedly and started picking up the crayon papers that were littering the carpet. Maybe if I tried harder to keep things neat, Aunt Queenie would forget about the workshop. Maybe I could even talk Punky into giving up his table. After all, it was just a sawed-off piece of junk, and it did look out of place.

I sat down, still tingling from where his hand had touched my arm. For some reason, it was suddenly too warm, and I shrugged out of my jacket.

“You’ve got to understand something about Avanelle,” Tree said, straddling a bleacher. “She’s got a couple of real bad hang-ups—about us being on welfare, and about Dad. She’s not like me. I just go with the flow. She thought it was the end of the world, being embarrassed in front of those airheaded girls.”

“I didn’t deliberately show them the letter. It slipped out of a book, and they grabbed it.”

“I figured it had to be something like that. I told Avanelle that Birdie let the cat out of the bag about Dad a long time ago.”
True wild children are a rare occurrence, said Dr. Elizabeth Beck, research professor of cognitive and neural systems at Boston University. "Feral children are an invaluable resource for studying the role language and socialization play in the making of a human being."

Beck has designed a unique facility at the Charles River campus to stimulate a "human" response in these children. She attributes the public's interest in them to the fact that wild children like Shay, the fragile girl discovered in Idaho's Salmon River Mountains, and Mila have much to teach us about ourselves.

On the short flight back from Anguila Cays to the mainland, the distraught girl kept thumping her cheek against the window of the Jay Hawk and squealing.

The mother guides it to the surface, but the calf knows what to do, and breaking through to the air takes a first gasp through the top of its head.

The calf is wrinkled from being folded inside its mother; its tail curls like an underwater weed, opening slowly with the gentle tug of the tide.

The calf bumps against its mother, searching.

The mother studies her calf, stroking it. They nuzzle, skin to skin. The mother hums, sounding her baby, inside and out, while the calf pokes its new self along the length of its mother, until the mother rolls on her side and the calf finds milk, a great stream of thick, sweet milk, rushing reward for the pressure of lips.

I don't understand anymore what it was I tried to do with the music and dolphin talk for Doctor Beck. My mind cannot grasp the way the music flows unless I read it note for note on the page, following along slowly, simply, like the dicky bird song.

Shay is going away. The government funding for her to stay here has stopped. When I come into the room, she looks at me. She looks at me and I see her fear. She looks at me the way a solitary dolphin looks at a shark. Have I become one of the sharks? But then her fear disappears and I see only an empty look in the eyes of Shay and I know she is already gone.
I hear the words, but I don't feel them. I am in a tunnel, but I can still hear what Dad says. Except that his words get mixed up with the other sounds and voices that are in my head.

There's a weird noise, like a yelp. It's coming from inside our house.

But a hand begins stroking my forehead. A deep voice says, "Go to sleep now, Stacy. Relax and sleep." I want to open my eyes, but I can't.

I run toward our back porch, and the screen door bangs open. Somebody runs out. He stares at me.

"Is she asleep?" Dad asks, and the voice murmurs, "Not yet."

I fight back the hot pressure behind my eyes, answering. "I wish she were here too," and adding quickly, "but you're doing a great job, Dad. And Jan will be glad to see you."

He carries his coffee cup and empty cereal bowl to the sink. "Not tonight, I'm afraid I almost forgot to tell you. I'll get a hamburger for dinner because we've got to go over some reports that came in from one of the branches. It's going to mean that I'll be there later than usual, maybe until eleven or even midnight."

"I may get home before you do," I tell him. He bends down to kiss my forehead. "Have a good time at the party, Stacy."

"Thanks," I answer, wishing I didn't have to go.

I can't quite follow everything that goes on. I do hear Jarrod's attorney claim that Jarrod has been arrested four times on charges of possession of drugs, he's been given probation in all cases, and he has no record of violence. The attorney asks that Jarrod be released without bail. I want to jump up and yell at the attorney, but Mrs. Latham is talking to the judge, and the judge gives these little nods as if he were keeping time. I hope he's agreeing with her.

But suddenly Jarrod flings himself up, twists, and groans. All the people in the court stare at him like openmouthed statues. He shudders and makes a horrible, retching noise, drops facedown on the floor with a loud plop, twitches, and is still.
Hence his name. Even his teachers forgot his real name was Keith, and we hardly remembered he had one. Life was one big joke to Two-Bit. He was famous for shoplifting and his black-handled switchblade which he couldn't have acquired without his first talent, and he was always smarting off to the cops. He really couldn't help it. Everything he said was so irresistible funny that he just had to let the police in on it to brighten up their dull lives. (That's the way he explained it to me.) He liked fights, blondes, and for some unfathomable reason, school. He was still a junior at eighteen and a half and he never learned anything. He just went for kicks. I liked him real well because he kept us laughing at ourselves as well as at other things.

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... "I'm sick of it because it doesn't do any good. You can't win, you know that, don't you?" And when I remained silent he went on: "You can't win, even if you whip us. You'll still be where you were before—at the bottom. And we'll still be the lucky ones with all the breaks. So it doesn't do any good, the fighting and the killing. It doesn't prove a thing. We'll forget it if you win, or if you don't Greasers will still be greasers and Socs will still be Socs. Sometimes I think it's the ones in the middle that are really the lucky stiffs...."

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Darry looked real worried. I suddenly realized that Darry was only twenty, that he wasn't so much older that he couldn't feel scared or hurt and as lost as the rest of us. I saw that I had expected Darry to do all the understanding without even trying to understand him. And he had given up a lot for Soda and me.

"Sure, little buddy," Darry said softly. "We're not going to fight anymore."
"Hey, Ponyboy" — Soda gave me a tearful grin — "don't you start crying, too. One bawl-baby in the family's enough."
"I'm not crying," I said. Maybe I was. I don't remember. Soda gave me a playful punch on the shoulder.
The two musketeers were already there, and were playing together. Athos, who was very expert in all bodily exercises passed with D'Artagnan to the opposite side, and challenged them; but at the first effort he made, although he played with his left hand, he found that his wound was yet too recent to allow of such exertion. D'Artagnan remained, therefore, alone; and as he declared he was too ignorant of the game to play it regularly, they only continued giving balls to each other, without counting; but one of these balls, launched by Porthos' Herculean hand, passed so close to D'Artagnan's face that he thought if, instead of passing near, it had hit him, his audience would have been probably lost, as it would have been impossible for him to have presented himself before the king.

The hour being come, they, with their four lackeys, repaired to a spot behind the Luxembourg given up to the feeding of goats. Athos threw a piece of money to the goatkeeper to remove his flock to a distance. The lackeys were charged to act as sentinels.

A silent party soon drew near to the same enclosure, penetrated into it, and joined the musketeers; then, according to the English custom, the presentations took place.

The Englishmen were all men of rank; consequently, the extraordinary name of their adversaries were, for them, not only a matter of surprise, but uneasiness.

It was one of those rare and beautiful days in which England remembers that there is a sun. The star of day, pale, but nevertheless still splendid, was declining toward the horizon, empurpling at once the heavens and the sea with bands of fire, and casting upon the towers and the old houses of the city a last ray of gold, which made the windows sparkly like the reflection of a conflagration. Milady, on respiring that sea breeze, so much more lovely and balsamic as the land is approached, while contemplating all the power of those preparations she was commissioned to destroy, all the power of that army which she was to combat alone.....
There's A Girl in My Hammerlock
Jerry Spinelli
New York: Simon & Schuster
1991
0-671-86695-8
Dale-Chall Readability Level: 4.8

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We waited in the gym. The stands were pulled down on one side, I sat on the top row, at the end. I felt better with the wall behind me. The others all sat lower, in a bunch. Mr. Cappelli had said there were fifty-five of us. I wondered if that included me. There were seven empty rows in front of me. I counted them. On the gym floor, the boys' basketball team was trying out. John was one of them. He kept glaring up at me. The doctor was in Mr. Cappelli's office. Every five minutes or so, Mr. Cappelli would pop out and call three names. Each time three guys got up and headed for the office, others in the stands would hoot stuff like....

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The next day, Saturday, I went back to St. Jude's for some basketball. It was pretty much the same scene as before, with one colossal exception; Luscious Liz was there from the start. And this time she wasn't on the sidelines.

Thanks to her, we almost never got to the game. After sides were picked, Lizard started pulling off her jeans. Somebody whistled, and another somebody called, "Take it off!" And next thing you knew, she was up on the stage.

The audience became a gang of chimpanzees, not just the guys but the girls too, hooting and whistling and clapping. It seemed that it took an hour for each leg to slither out of the jeans.

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But I knew I had him thinking about it now, because we stayed in that wing of the mall and were never far from La Roma. Then, as we were cruising by Wee Three Records, he looked back, stopped, and said, "let's get some."

We each ordered a plain slice. They were just out of the oven, so we didn't have to wait. Eric carried the slices, I carried the sodas. That's when I saw them, at a table in the back, Lizard Lampley and my former best friend, Holly Gish.

The way we sat, Eric's back was to them. I was facing them. That didn't mean I had to look at them.
Boys feel on the floor, holding their noses and mouths, keening like widows at a wake. Mr. Silks replaced his hair immediately. He had no choice. In a voice like a police siren he ordered me to copy out the Gettysburg address one hundred times.

Rudy and his friends thought I had done this on purpose. I became a minor hero. Mr. Silks was instantly nicknamed Eggnog, school-wide. After that I leapt at every challenge thrown my way. Rudy's gang accepted me as a comedian and handy brain. From that day in sixth grade on I was a full member. We called ourselves "the guys". The rest of the boys called us "the untouchables." We did terrible things.

Just than a groan – half pain, half anger-cut into the winter night. So like the collie's cry, but human. Rudy Sader's voice. I felt for him and his stupid wrecked dreams of being a pro quarterback. I don't know why, I just did, and I wanted to tell him, man to man, that I was sorry about what had happened and that I had not turned him in. I sprinted up two flights and knocked on Sader's door.

Very slowly I opened the door. Rudy and his friends froze. The five boys stared at me as if I were a zebra. I imagined hearing the seconds, loud and angry, tick by in the air. Were they all planning to spike me chipped beef on toast with ground glass?

During school hours I kept to myself. I did not show the boys in school my chopped-off finger anymore, I did not want anyone to ask why I had calluses like a dirt farmer on my hands.

The week before finals classes would be given over to review. Afternoons and evenings would be spent cramming. If I did not cram, I would not get above a B average. No one could, except for Snowy, who seemed to know the work that he liked by heart and settled for a C plus for the rest. On my last day for two weeks in the cave, I dug like a starving dog in search of a marrowbone.
In the end, however, it was the cows who were responsible for the wood's isolation, and the cows, through some wisdom they were not wise enough to know that they possessed, were very wise indeed. If they had made their road through the wood instead of around it, then the people would have followed the road. The people would have noticed the giant ash tree at the center of the wood, and then, in time, they'd have noticed the little spring bubbling up among its roots in spite of the pebbles piled there to conceal it. And that would have been a disaster so immense that this weary old earth, owned or not to its fiery core, would have trembled on its axis like a beetle on a pin.

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"...Left behind, growing and changing. You, for instance. A child now, but someday a woman. And after that, moving on to make room for the new children."

Winnie blinked, and all at once her mind was drowned with understanding of what he was saying. For she—yes, even she—would go out of the world willy-nilly someday. Just go out, like the flame of a candle, and no use protesting. It was a certainty. She would try very hard not to think of it, but sometimes, as now, it would be forced upon her. She raged against it, helpless and insulted, and blurted at last, "I don't want to die."

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The sign said WELCOME TO TREEGAP, but it was hard to believe that this was really Treegap. The main street hadn't changed so very much, but there were many other streets now, crossing the main street. The road itself was blacktopped. There was a white line painted down its center.

Mae and Tuck, on the seat of a clattering wooden wagon, bumped slowly into Treegap behind the fat old horse. They had seen continuous change and were accustomed to it, but here it seemed shocking and sad.

"Look." said Tuck. "Look, Mae. Ain't that where the wood used to be? It's gone! Not a stick or a stump left! And her cottage—that's gone, too."
On the first day of summer vacation, Dave and a bunch of his friends loaded everything we owned in a U-Haul truck and headed toward our new home in Holwell, Maryland. Dave drove the truck with Heather sitting beside him, looking very pleased with herself, and Mom, Michael, and I followed in our old van. Behind us was another van in even worse shape than ours, filled with Dave's friends.

After we turned off the Beltway, the roads narrowed and wound up and down hills, curved past farms, tunneled through forests. As we bounced along over ruts, and bumps, Mom pointed out the scenic spots. "See that old barn over there?" she'd exclaim, pointing to a building on the verge of collapse. "Isn't that a perfect subject for a painting?"

As Michael and I rode our bikes down the driveway, we saw Mom standing on the back porch, her hands on her hips. "Where have you been?" she said as we braked to a stop.

"At the library," I said, wheeling my bike to its place under the porch.

"And then we saw Mr. Simmons." Michael was too excited to notice that Mom was not smiling. "Guess what? He's going to take me fishing the next time he comes to cut the grass."

"But you were supposed to be here watching Heather." Mom folded her arms tightly across her chest and frowned at me. "Didn't we talk about that just the other day?"

Tangled together, Heather and I landed on a dirt floor. For a few seconds, neither of us moved nor spoke, too shocked to understand what had happened. Finally I opened my eyes and looked up. Above my head was the hole we had fallen through, its edges ragged. A gray light shone down through it, but all around us was darkness smelling of mold and damp earth and age. Shivering, I turned to Heather. "Are you all right?"

"Helen put us here," Heather whispered. "She hates me now because of you and what you did."

She crouched beside me, trembling with fear and cold.
Mrs. Jewis rang her cowbell. "I would like you to meet Mark Miller," she said. "He and his family just moved here all the way from Magadonia!"

Everybody stared at the new kid.
He stood at the front of the room. His knees were shaking.
He hated having to stand in front of the class. It was as if Mrs. Jewis had brought him in for show-and-tell. He felt like some kind of weirdo. He just wanted to sit at a desk and be like everybody else.
But worst of all, his name wasn’t Mark Miller.
He was Benjamin Nushmutt. And he had moved from Hempleton, not Magadonia.

Mrs. Jewis looked up from the story she had been reading to the class. "You’re late," she said.
She hopped off the bike in front of Wayside School and charged up the stairs. Her stomach was still going up and down as she opened the door to Mrs. Jewis’s room.
She put on her helmet; then her father drove her to school on the back of his motorcycle. It was a very bumpy ride.
"Put on your helmet," said her father. "I’ll drive you to school on the back of my motorcycle."
"I missed the bus," Jenny grumbled.
"What are you doing home?" asked her mother.
She finally got it all down, then hurried as fast as she could to the bus stop. When she got there, the bus was just pulling away. She sighed, then turned around and ran all the way back home.

A week later, Maurecia was eating lunch alone. She was eating a piece of sweet potato pie. Joy was crawling around in the dirt looking for more bags of money.
"Maurecia," said Louis. "I’d like you to meet someone. This is Mr. Finch."
Mr. Finch was an old man with white hair and a long white beard. He shook Maurecia’s hand with both of his hands.
"It’s your money, isn’t it?" asked Maurecia.
Mr. Finch nodded. It was my life’s savings," he said. "For fifty years I made pencils. I got a penny for every pencil I made. I hate pencils! But finally I saved enough money to quit my job and do what I always wanted to do."