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## An Investigation of Reading Interests of Fiction for Academically Gifted Students Grades Four Through Six

Kathy Kelly  
*University of Northern Iowa*

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## An Investigation of Reading Interests of Fiction for Academically Gifted Students Grades Four Through Six

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### Abstract

This study was concerned with how the media specialist could meet the leisure reading needs of gifted students. The specific purpose of the study was to find out what categories of fiction academically gifted students grades four through six choose to read. It was this writer's hypothesis that academically gifted students read all types of fiction on an equal basis, and there would be no variation among the types of categories that these students choose to read.

To test the hypothesis, each student with an I.Q. of 130 or above at Westridge Elementary School in Waterloo, Iowa, was given a questionnaire to fill out in regard to their interests. Students were given nine categories from which they could indicate if they choose to read the category often, sometimes, or seldom. Points were assigned each response and totals added up for each category. In order for the hypothesis to be accepted, there could not be more than a 20% variation between the most popular fiction category and the least popular category.

The researcher used the formula of dividing the most preferred category (mpc) by the least preferred category (lpc) to find the percentage of the difference. The percent the least preferred category was of the most preferred category was 40. Hence there was a 60% difference between the two. The hypothesis that there would be no more than a 20% variation between the two was rejected.

Students revealed definite likes and dislikes favoring humor and disfavoring poetry and folktales. Even though the hypothesis was rejected the study serves as a model for media specialists in accessing fiction reading interests of individual students. By using the questionnaire, a media specialist can determine trends or preferences, and assist each student through reading guidance on an individual basis. There was not enough students in the study to make generalizations as pertaining to grade level, age, or sex.

AN INVESTIGATION OF READING INTERESTS OF  
FICTION FOR ACADEMICALLY GIFTED STUDENTS  
GRADES FOUR THROUGH SIX

A Research Paper  
Presented to the  
Faculty of the Library Science Department

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In partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

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Kathy Kelly  
July 9, 1977

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Read and approved by

Elizabeth Martin

Mary Lou Mc Grew

Accepted by Department

Elizabeth Martin

Date July 18, 1977

## ABSTRACT

This study was concerned with how the media specialist could meet the leisure reading needs of gifted students. The specific purpose of the study was to find out what categories of fiction academically gifted students grades four through six choose to read. It was this writer's hypothesis that academically gifted students read all types of fiction on an equal basis, and there would be no variation among the types of categories that these students choose to read.

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The researcher used the formula of dividing the most preferred category (mpc) by the least preferred category (lpc) to find the percentage of difference. The percent the least preferred category was of the most preferred category, was 40. Hence there was a 60% difference between the two. The hypothesis that there would be no more than a 20% variation between the two was rejected.

Students revealed definite likes and dislikes favoring humor and disfavoring poetry and folktales. Even though the hypothesis was rejected the study serves as a model for media specialists in accessing fiction reading interests of individual students. By using the questionnaire, a media specialist can determine trends or preferences, and assist each student through reading guidance on an individual basis. There was not enough students in the study to make generalizations as pertaining to grade level, age, or sex.

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Chapter 1  
THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Concern for the gifted student in the United States has not been a recent development. As early as 1773 Thomas Jefferson advocated special education provisions as part of his School Plan for Virginia.<sup>1</sup> Between the years 1890 to 1900 the Three Track plan began to be utilized in a number of larger school districts.<sup>2</sup> Through this plan schools began to group bright students together in order that they might benefit from broader educational experiences. By the 1920's there was a big surge of interest in the gifted.<sup>3</sup> The classical studies of Louis Ferman, Genetic Studies of Genius, volumes one through five, were published in order to study the nature of intelligence of gifted students. In the 1930's due to the economic depression, school systems began to accelerate, or push students ahead a year, rather than to provide special enrichment classes for the gifted.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph P. Rice, The Gifted Developing Total Talent (Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas Publisher, 1970), p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

The attention paid to gifted students by American educators from the 1930's to the 1950's seems to have regressed from the attention paid to gifted students in the 1920's.

Between the years 1950 to 1960, school districts in California, Illinois, and New York began to emphasize experimental programs and program evaluation. In 1957 the Russian launching of Sputnik stimulated critical controversy over possible educational lag.<sup>5</sup>

From the 1960's to the present, many studies have been conducted dealing with characteristics of the gifted and the identification of the gifted. Strides have been made towards developing curricula for the gifted students. Yet, little attention has been given in the library science field to the development of programs or policies concerning the gifted.

This study attempted to look at the gifted student from a media specialist's point of view. The scope of the study was concerned with the media specialist and how he or she can meet the leisure reading needs of the academically gifted students, grades four through six.

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid.



### Purpose of the Study

This writer attempted to determine through this study whether or not there were certain preferences for types of fiction as revealed by academically gifted students in grades four through six. Aside from relying on scattered requests from individual students and literary reviews written by adults, this study was designed to give academically gifted students a chance to indicate their own reading interests. If it is possible to generalize a preference for specific categories of fiction that the students indicate they choose to read, the media specialist may begin to adjust her reading guidance to better meet the needs of academically gifted students.

### Problem Statement

In order to test whether the media specialist can assist the academically gifted student through the means of reading guidance, certain types of fiction categories were established according to those designated by May Hill Arbuthnot. In using Arbuthnot's categories as a reference point, the writer of this paper then posed the following problem: Among Arbuthnot's nine categories of fiction, what types of fiction categories will academically gifted elementary students

grades four through six indicate they will choose to read?

### Hypothesis

Because academically gifted students have varied interests <sup>6</sup>, it was hypothesized that they read all types of fiction on an equal basis. The writer of this paper hypothesized that there would be no variation among the types of fiction categories that academically gifted students grades four through six indicate they choose to read.

### Significance of Study

The strongest factor for this study's significance concerns a longitudinal study done by Paul A. Witty and Harvey Lehman in the 1930's that dealt with reading interests of gifted children. The Witty-Lehman research was the only study found so far that dealt exclusively with the reading interests of gifted students from the ages of ten through eighteen. Not only does the study include reading interests for students of upper elementary grades, but it includes very specific interests of gifted students pertaining to various types of fiction.

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<sup>6</sup>James J. Gallagher, Teaching the Gifted Child (Boston, N.J.:Allyn and Bacon Inc., 1975), p. 34.

The choice of Westridge Elementary School in Waterloo, Iowa was another significant factor in the study. Westridge was chosen to be used in the study because it is in an economically advantaged area, and has been identified by Carolyn Hoffman, head of the Committee for the Gifted in Waterloo, as one of three elementary schools in the city having a high proportion of gifted students. The teachers of Westridge along with the consultant, Bruce Hopkins from the Area Education Agency applied for a Federal Grant which would have been used to develop programs for the gifted.

The Witty-Lehman study, although dated, served as a guide and reference point from which this writer conducted her study. Westridge School had previously been designated as a target school for the gifted. Combining these two factors, this writer was more assured of reliable findings which will help in meeting the needs of academically gifted students.

Experts in the field such as Guilford, believe that gifted students have the potential to assume leadership roles in society. By the time gifted students become adults, their capabilities should be developed to their fullest potential. If gifted students are not inspired or motivated, they become disillusioned, bored

and unproductive. Schools have responded to the needs of the gifted by developing curricula, yet little has been done on an organized basis by school media specialists to meet the leisure reading needs of gifted students. This study was designed to propose a way in which the needs of these students could be measured by allowing the students to express their own reading interests by means of a questionnaire.

### Assumptions

In conducting this study of fiction choices of academically gifted students, one major assumption must be acknowledged. The writer of this paper assumed that the student population involved in the study was accurately identified as academically gifted students. Because identification was based on I.Q. scores, it was assumed that all test scores were reliable and valid.

### Limitations

This study was limited to academically gifted students in grades four through six. Students in the primary grades (kindergarten through grade three) and students in secondary schools were not being considered. The study was conducted with students from Westridge Elementary School in Waterloo, Iowa. The study, therefore, cannot be interpreted to represent all gifted

students grades four through six. To increase the external validity, the study would have to be done in widely diverse schools in geographically distant districts.

This study was limited to academically gifted students. The study did not take into account kinesthetically or creatively gifted students. The subjects of this study were members of an economically advantaged area, and fiction choices could differ from students of other economic areas. The student population being studied was a highly homogeneous group.

#### Definition of Terms

In conducting this study, several terms needed to be defined. "Academically gifted students" were those who had previously had been identified as such by the school involved and based on I.Q. scores of 130 or above. The term "reading interest" was operationally defined as those types of fiction that children revealed a positive attitude towards, and fiction books which children indicated they chose to read. "Types of fiction" referred to the following list of types as indicated by Arbuthnot:<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>May Hill Arbuthnot, Children and Books, (Glenview, Illinois:Scott Foresman and Company, 1972), p. 35.

1. Folktales
2. Fables, myths, epics
3. Humor
4. Poetry
5. Animal stories
6. Realistic stories
7. Adventure tales
8. Fantasy
9. Historical fiction

The nine categories as described by Arbuthnot are generalizations. For example, there may be a combination of several categories within one book such as humorous poetry, or an adventure tale that is realistic. The students who filled out the questionnaire were asked to think of each category as being the most prominent element in the book.

In order to clarify the findings and interpret data, the author defined "variation" of students' choice in books. "Variation" referred to a twenty percent or more difference between the most popular and least popular category of fiction.

## Chapter 2

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The review of related literature focused on three major topics ranging from general to specific. First, attempts were made to locate information about research conducted under the broad topic of "reading interests." This writer chose a broad retrospective study to cover this facet of related literature. Secondly, the writer of this paper tried to locate literature concerned with school libraries and their relationship to gifted students. Thirdly, this writer tried to locate literature concerned specifically with reading interests as they directly pertained to gifted students.

Helen Robinson made an extensive study of the research related to children's interest and to the developmental values of reading.<sup>8</sup> In the first section of her paper, Robinson did a general literature review of research studies concerning reading interests and children. This section of her paper was most extensive,

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<sup>8</sup> Helen Robinson, "Research Related to Children's Interests and to the Developmental Values of Reading," Library Trends, October 1973, p. 81.

and contained much information relevant to this paper.

Before writing on past studies of reading interests, Robinson listed the methods of investigations used to identify children's reading interests. Such methods have included personal interviews; written logs, diaries and inventories; records of library books chosen; asking for children's favorites among selections read to them; asking for reasons for their choices and/or the most interesting episodes or characters.<sup>9</sup>

According to Robinson, each of these methods has its limitations. When children are asked to choose among two or several alternatives, it is possible that their real choice is not represented. When using unstructured methods of investigations such as diaries, the accuracy of records depends upon the cooperation given by the subjects. Moreover, many children do not have access to materials of primary interest to them.

The use of library circulation records to determine the reading interests is subject to limitations. Books checked out may not be indicative of what children actually read. Another problem in attempting to synthesize research dealing with children's interests in reading is that different investigators may have defined

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<sup>9</sup>  
Ibid.



their interest categories in different ways.<sup>10</sup>

Robinson wrote about past research in reading interest done on the grade levels of preschool, primary, middle grades, junior high, and senior high. The level relevant to the scope of this paper is the middle grades. The earliest studies done on the middle grades were done by Terman in 1921 and Washburne in 1926.<sup>11</sup> They revealed the dominant reading interests for children ages nine through twelve were in the area of fiction. The divergence of reading interests of boys and girls which began as a tendency in the later primary grades became predominant during the middle grades.<sup>12</sup>

A more recent study done by Schulte included 6,538 middle grade pupils from four geographical areas of the United States. Based on their responses, the girl's inventory revealed an interest in realistic fiction and fanciful tales. The boys revealed an interest in historical fiction, history, science and health. Poetry and social studies were the least selected categories by both groups.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

Ashley in a study in 1970, asked students for dislikes among forty topics or genres of literature. He found boys disliked love stories, and girls disliked stories about war, pirates and westerns.<sup>14</sup> Also in 1970, Meisel and Glass reported on fifth graders library choices over a five month period. No assignments were made in class, so investigators assumed books withdrawn from the library were of interest to pupils. Contents of books were classified into forty-two separate interest areas. Boys showed a strong interest in history, geography and biography. Girls showed strong interests in adventure, humor and fantasy.<sup>15</sup>

Robinson summarized her review of studies done on reading interests by reporting the findings of a comprehensive study done by Zimet in 1966. Zimet reviewed research dealing with children's interests and story preferences of young children from the 1920's to the early 1950's. Zimet noted a conflict of findings depending upon the methods of investigations used. She stated the need for the refinement of evaluation instruments in the studies. Zimet noted that sex

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

differences in reading interests appear early in primary grades and become increasingly more prominent through elementary and secondary school.<sup>16</sup>

Robinson's study is important to the scope of this paper for two reasons. First, it lists the limitations of methods of investigation that have been previously used in measuring reading interests. Secondly, Robinson has presented a brief overview of past studies dealing with reading interests of students in the middle grades.

The second major emphasis on related literature was concerned with school libraries and their relationship with gifted students. In the American Library Association (ALA) Bulletin, February 1958, there was a series of six articles concerning school libraries and the gifted. The articles were all written one year after the Russian launching of Sputnik, and with general concern for the development of America's best minds to catch up with the Russians.

All articles stressed the urgent need for school libraries to meet the needs of gifted students. Frary was the only author of the six who dealt directly with the school library and the gifted elementary student.<sup>17</sup>

The articles revealed information about a school library

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Mildred Frary, "The Elementary School Library and the Gifted," ALA Bulletin, February 1968, p. 100.

program for the gifted in Los Angeles. Special interest in non-fiction was expressed by the gifted students including books on archeology, history of mathematics and languages, and chemistry. From informal discussion on fiction between the children and the librarians, Frary concluded that children were reading and enjoying fiction at their own age level. While their readings were advanced in non-fiction "they are still children and relish the antics of Carolyn Haywood's Eddie, and MacGregor's Miss Pickerell on her reluctant way to Mars."<sup>18</sup> Miss Frary did not delve into the reading interests of fiction books as much as she expressed reading interests in non-fiction. The article did not distinguish between interests of lower elementary grade students as opposed to intermediate grade level students.

Another article dealing with the school library and the role of reading guidance was written by Ladley. "Research indicates there is an urgent need to cultivate within elementary children a strong desire to read and appreciate worthwhile reading material."<sup>19</sup> It is the librarian's role to find the right book for the right child. Ladley makes the distinction between the act of reading and the art of reading. The art of reading implies a more intensified involvement than the mere act.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 101

<sup>19</sup> Winifred C. Ladley, "The Right Book," Children, Books, and Reading ERIC ED076948, 1974, p. 45.

The art of reading consists of the ability to read literature of power with such sympathy and insight that one is thereby educated for a living. The individual reading guidance must place the focus on the child himself. In order to find the right book for the right child, the librarian must know the child's tastes, mentality and social development.

Ladley's article is important to the scope of this paper because it clearly defines the role of the school media specialist as a catalyst in helping motivate children to read. Ladley stressed the importance in knowing the intellectual, emotional and social background, along with likes and dislikes. The function of the school media specialist in assisting students with reading guidance is appropos to the underlying purpose of this paper.

The third major emphasis on related literature concerns information on reading interests as directly pertaining to gifted students. Limper supplied an annotated bibliography in the Gifted Child Quarterly for books she would recommend for gifted fifth and sixth grade students.<sup>20</sup> On the list, only six fiction books were mentioned along with thirty-six non-fiction books. There was a brief phrase explaining the content of each book. No mention

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<sup>20</sup>Hilda Limper, "Suggestions of Books for the Gifted Children in Fifth and Sixth Grades," Gifted Child Quarterly Summer 1971, pp. 123-126.

was made of how or why Limper came to the conclusions that these books should be read by gifted children.

Donald Cushenbery in his book Reading and the Gifted writes "the degree of reading interests is a criteria to be considered in determining giftedness."<sup>21</sup> In his book, Cushenbery included a reading interest inventory designed by himself which he says has been used with a high degree of success. While Cushenbery made no attempts to rank categories or preferences of reading choices, he did make the following generalizations about the students who have filled out his inventory:

1. Books read will be secured from two or more sources.
2. There will be evidence that a larger than average number of books have been read and that they have been read completely.
3. A wide variety of books on a number of subjects will be indicated.
4. Other pieces of information will support the idea that the respondent enjoys both functional and leisure time reading activities.<sup>22</sup>

Cushenbery's book is relevant to this paper because he emphasizes the importance of finding out reading interests of gifted students.

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<sup>21</sup> Donald C. Cushenbery, Reading and the Gifted Child (Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas Publisher, 1974), p. 8.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

The most important study dealing with the reading interests as expressed by gifted students was conducted by Witty and Lehman.<sup>23</sup> This study was longitudinal and used the same population three times over a period of eight years. The average age of the children at the time of the first study was  $10\frac{1}{2}$ . For the second study the average age was  $15\frac{1}{2}$ , and for the third study the average age was  $17\frac{1}{2}$ .

Among the findings of the children's reports, it was noted that gifted girls consistently read more than boys. However, the boys read more magazines and newspapers than did the girls. During the eight year study there was a marked change in the reading interests of both boys and girls. During the first study boys preferred adventure novels, mystery and science stories. The top three categories preferred in the last study by boys were adventure, romance, and science stories. In the first study, girls preferred romance, novels of home and school life, and adventure novels. By the time of the last study, emphasis had shifted to poetry, romance novels, and short stories.

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<sup>23</sup> Paul Witty and Harvey Lehman, "A Study of the Reading and Reading Interests of Gifted Children," Journal of Genetic Psychology, June 1932, pp. 473-483.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

The author of this paper must recognize this extensive study done by Witty and Lehman in the 1930's as the only study available dealing exclusively with reading interests of gifted children. The original study along with two follow-up studies of the same children traced the interests and attempted to draw patterns and conclusions.

Due to the long time that has elapsed since 1931, there is no way of knowing how valid and reliable this study is as it applies to gifted children grades four through six in 1977. The books listed in the tables are not applicable today. Popular fiction titles have changed much in forty years. Children of today would have difficulty understanding the categories that Witty and Lehman give for the types of books.

### Summary

Helen Robinson gave a retrospective view of research conducted that was related to reading interests and mentioned limitations to the methods of investigation used in such studies. ALA Bulletin of February, 1958 contained a series of six articles dealing with the gifted students and their relationship to school libraries. Only one of the ALA articles dealt directly with elementary students. Much of the information was outdated and written in reaction to the Russian launching of Sputnik.



Ladley, in her article defined the role of the school librarian as a person who offers reading guidance to the individual student, and who develops in students the art of reading.

Helen Limper, in her suggested list of books, mentioned six fiction books for gifted fifth and sixth graders. Criteria for selection of these books were not mentioned. Cushenbery stressed the importance of knowing the reading interest of gifted students, and went so far as to develop his own reading interest inventory. The study by Witty and Lehman was conducted three times over an eight year period using the same population of gifted students. This study was completed in 1934, and there is no way of knowing how relevant the findings are today.

## Chapter 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Selection of Subjects

Westridge Elementary School was chosen for this study because the students were from a homogeneous group, and from an economically advantaged area. Dr. Steve Holbrook, Director of the Division of Research for the Waterloo Public Schools, and Mr. Bruce Hopkins, Consultant for the Gifted from the Area Education Agency have previously identified the school as having a higher proportion of gifted students than other elementary schools in the city. The selection of gifted students at Westridge Elementary School was made on the basis of I.Q. scores as reported in the students' cumulative records. The entire population of gifted students in fourth, fifth and sixth grades was used in the study.

#### Data-Gathering Instrument

Academically gifted students of Westridge Elementary School grades four through six, were given a questionnaire on which the students could indicate the types of fiction in which they were interested. At the top of the questionnaire there was a personal data section

for the students to fill out. In this section, students were asked to supply their names, ages, sex and grade levels. Below the personal data section, the nine Arbuthnot fiction categories were typed in a vertical column. Categories were further clarified and defined according to Arbuthnot's explanations so students would be able to readily distinguish among the categories. Beside each category, the students were asked to check one of the following:

"Choose often"  
"Choose sometimes"  
"Choose seldom"

A copy of the data-gathering instrument is located at the end of this paper in the appendix.

#### Procedure for Gathering Data

In order to obtain permission to use Westridge Elementary School in Waterloo, Iowa, Dr. Steve Holbrook, Director of the Division of Research in Waterloo, along with Mr. Reece, Principal of Westridge, was contacted. Dr. Holbrook gave written consent to conduct the study, and Mr. Reece gave verbal consent. A cover letter introducing the purpose, hypothesis, and procedure for administering the questionnaire was sent to Mr. Kelly, fifth grade teacher, and Mr. Reece, principal.

A copy of the cover letter is located at the end of this paper in the appendix.

Cummulative records were searched by Mr. Kelly to locate all students with I.Q.'s of 130 or above. Then each academically gifted student was given a copy of the questionnaire by the fifth grade teacher, Mr. Kelly, and asked to mark their responses. After all sheets were in, the researcher tabulated the data, and analyzed the results.

## Chapter 4

### ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The data for this study was analyzed by the following combination of narration and tables. Breakdowns in the population were made according to age, grade level and sex. At Westridge Elementary School in Waterloo, Iowa there was a total of seven academically gifted students grades four through six who took part in the study. There was one fourth grader, two fifth graders, and four sixth graders. The ages of the students ranged from ten years, one month to twelve years, three months. There was an uneven distribution of sexes with five males out-numbering the two females who filled out the questionnaire. Table 1, Student Population, will further clarify the breakdowns of personal data.

Age	Grade	Sex
11 yr. 10 mo.	6	female
10 yr. 10 mo.	5	female
11 yr. 7 mo.	6	male
11 yr. 8 mo.	6	male
12 yr. 3 mo.	6	male
10 yr. 11 mo.	5	male
10 yr. 1 mo.	4	male

In order to analyze the preference for fiction categories that the children responded to, a systematic numerical procedure was used. First, the researcher used a blank questionnaire and tallied all responses to the fiction categories by the seven students on a composite sheet. Secondly, each tally was assigned a numerical value according to how positive the response was. For each response marked "choose often," three points were assigned. For each response marked "choose sometimes," two points were assigned. For each response marked "choose seldom," one point was assigned. To find the composite score for each fiction category, the number values for each response were added together.

The category of humor was most preferred, and the categories of folktales and poetry were least preferred. In Table 2, the fiction categories are listed in rank order of preference along with the total number of points each category received from the composite scores. In Chart 1, the fiction categories are listed in rank order of preference along with total number of points, and have been revealed graphically.

In order to test the hypothesis that there would be no variation among the types of fiction categories that academically gifted students grades four through six choose to read, the researcher had to compute the percentage of difference between the most preferred

and the least preferred category. If the hypothesis were to be accepted, there could not be more than a twenty percent difference between the most preferred category and the least preferred category. Any wider gap than the allowed twenty percent margin would signify definite preferences for some types of fiction categories over others.

Table 2

## Fiction Choices in Order of Preference

Fiction category	Total points
Humor.....	20
Adventure stories.....	19
Animal stories.....	16
Fantasy.....	16
Realistic stories.....	15
Fables, myths and legends.....	14
Historical fiction.....	13
Folktales.....	8
Poetry.....	8

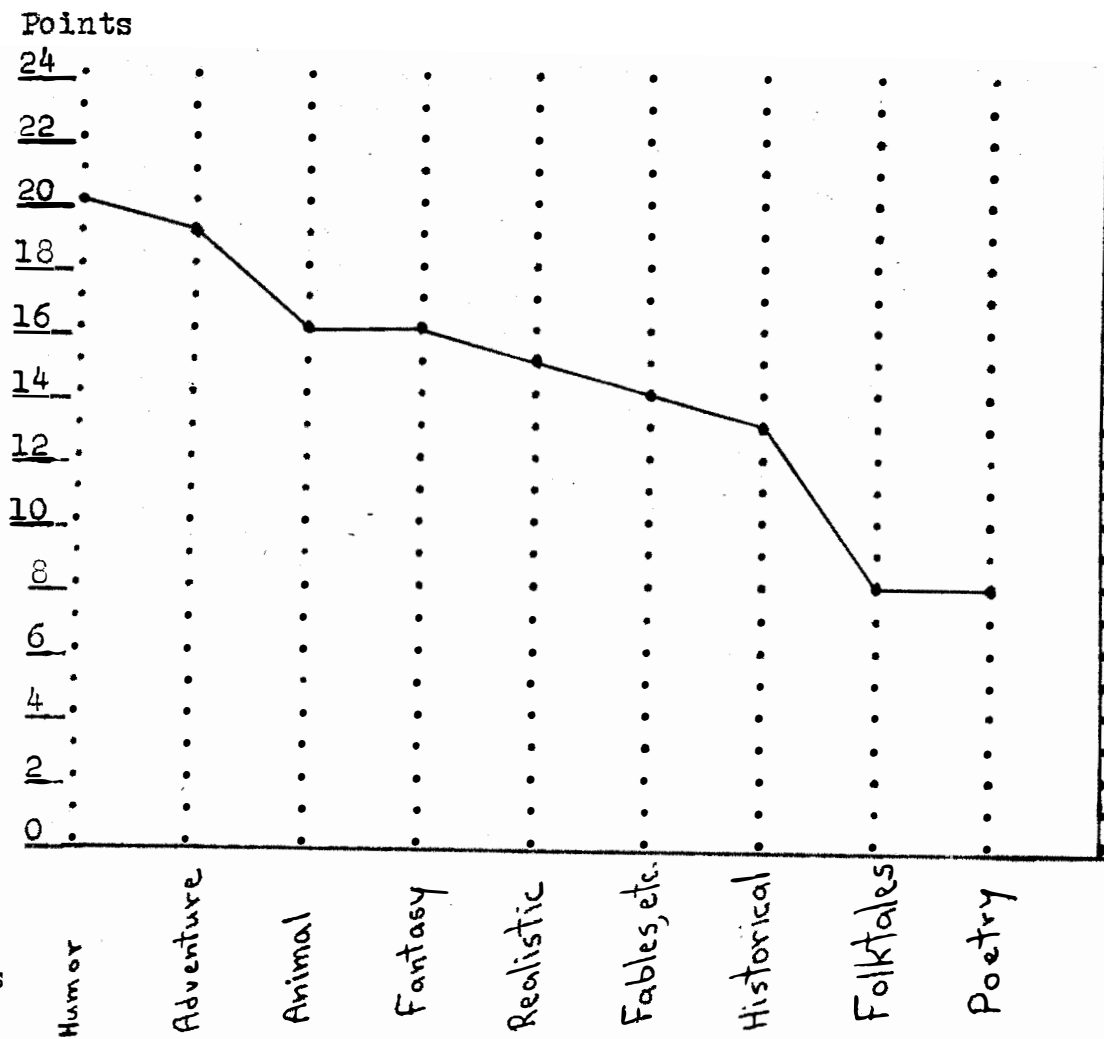


Chart 1

Fiction Choices in Order of Preference



The most popular category, humor, had a total of twenty points. The categories of folktales and poetry tied for the least popular categories scoring eight points each. The researcher then used the formula of dividing the most preferred category (mpc) by the least preferred category (lpc) to find the percentage of difference(%). Using the formula, the researcher then computed the following:

$$(lpc) \div (mpc) = \underline{\quad} \%$$

$$8 \div 20 = .40 \text{ or } 40\%$$

The percentage of the least popular category of fiction was 40 percent of the most popular category of fiction. The variation between the most popular and the least popular categories was 60 percent. Not only did the variation exceed the twenty percent limit, but did so by a variation of three times that amount.

The hypothesis that there will be no variation among the categories of fiction that academically gifted students grades four through six choose to read was rejected. The total possible points for each category in the study was 21. The lowest possible points for each category was seven. The students in this study came very close to both extremes in indicating their fiction choices. The seven students revealed some very evident preferences.

The category of humor received a near perfect score of twenty points, followed closely by the category of adventure with nineteen points. On the other end of the scale, students revealed some evident indications of categories they seldom choose to read. Both categories of folktales and poetry came very near to the lowest possible point total. Among Arbuthnot's nine categories of fiction, there was a wide spread of point totals. The greatest point span occurred between the category of historical fiction and the two lowest categories, folktales and poetry. A five point spread indicates that there is a considerable dislike or lack of interest in the categories of folktales and poetry. Seven of the nine categories received a total of thirteen points or above.

There was not enough <sup>were</sup> students in the study to make a comparison of choices of categories of fiction as pertaining to sex. There were only two females as opposed to five males who completed the questionnaire. There was little difference among fiction choices by sex. Both females indicated humor and adventure stories as categories they choose most often. The only distinguishable difference between the males and the females is that females indicated a strong

interest in animal stories while males indicated a moderate interest in the same. One could hypothesize that a high interest in animal stories may represent the popularity of horse books checked out by the females in the school. At this point it cannot be determined if this represents any differences between the sexes, or is merely coincidental, or if it represents a difference in interest. It would be an interesting hypothesis to pursue. Both males and females indicated little interest in folktales and poetry. In order to make comparisons of reading interests between the sexes, a larger population containing a more equal ratio of male to female should be studied.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

The hypothesis that there will be no variation among choices of fiction categories that academically gifted students grades four through six indicate they choose to read, was **rejected**. Even though the hypothesis was disproved, the study is useful to the school media specialist. The result of this study can be used by the media specialist at Westridge Elementary School as she assists each individual student in reading guidance. Once the reading interests of each student are revealed, the media specialist has a reference point to start from <sup>by</sup> in which she can enhance and develop the interests the student already has. Not only can the media specialist use as a reference point the types of fiction students reveal they choose to read most often, but ~~he~~ <sup>she</sup> ~~or she~~ may be able to develop greater interests in those categories of fiction that students reveal they seldom choose to read. Through reading guidance and selection of materials, the media specialist may help to diversify the interests of these particular students by **enhancing** ~~their~~ appreciation of poetry and folktales.

This questionnaire may be used in other schools by media specialists to determine the reading interests of

gifted students. Using the questionnaire for each student, the media specialist may be able to determine any trends or preferences among the gifted population within **his/her** school. The media specialist can also use this questionnaire to assist each student through reading guidance on a *individual* personalized basis. Not only could such a questionnaire be used to assess reading interests of gifted students, but could also be used with other students in the school to determine their preferences of fiction categories.

Even though the results of the study may be indicative of reading interests of academically gifted students at Westridge Elementary School in Waterloo, Iowa, they cannot and should not be generalized to be the reading interests of all academically gifted students grades four through six. Reading interests may vary with geographical location, ethnic background, and previous exposure of gifted students to categories of fiction. In order to make any **generalizations** the questionnaire should be given to a much larger and more heterogeneous population of students from different geographical locations in the country. Seven students filling out a questionnaire is not a large enough sample of students to reveal any trend. This study should not be considered

to be a representation of reading interests of all gifted students.

There was a strong dominance of sixth graders filling out the questionnaire, only two fifth graders, and one fourth grader. This population was too scanty and uneven to allow conclusions to be drawn about reading interests and grade level. Any conclusions pertaining to reading interest and the sexes cannot be made until there are more students of an equal ratio who fill out the questionnaire. Five males and two females are not a large enough sample to draw any conclusions.

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Name \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_

year months

Sex \_\_\_\_\_ male \_\_\_\_\_ female

Grade \_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Below are listed nine categories of fiction books along with a brief explanation of each category. Place an "x" in the column which indicates how often you choose that category of fiction. If you have any questions regarding this questionnaire, please ask your teacher for help.

Categories	Choose Often	Choose Sometimes	Choose Seldom
1. FOLKTALES- fairy tales and tall tales handed down through the ages			
2. FABLES, MYTHS, EPICS- fables- short stories with a moral myths- stories about supernatural beings to explain natural events epics- a long poem or literary work about heroic characters			
3. HUMOR- funny stories			
4. POETRY- verse			
5. ANIMAL STORIES- stories centered around animals as pets or in the wild			
6. REALISTIC STORIES- stories of family life that seem as if they could happen			
7. ADVENTURE TALES- stories with much action and suspense			
8. FANTASY- stories of make-believe or science fiction			
9. HISTORICAL FICTION- stories about the past based on fact			



## COVER LETTER

March 20, 1976

Mr. Reece, principal  
Mr. Kelly, teacher  
Westridge Elementary School  
3610 Ansborough  
Waterloo, Iowa

Dear Sirs:

At the University of Northern Iowa, I am currently working on my Master's Degree in Library Science. As part of graduation requirements, I am writing a departmental paper on reading interests of academically gifted students grades four through six.

The purpose of this study is to find out what categories of fiction books academically gifted students choose to read. The types of categories I am using as a reference point have been taken from May Hill Arbuthnot's Children and Books, 1972 edition.

According to James Gallagher, author of the book, Teaching the Gifted Child, interests of gifted children are many-sided and spontaneous. It is my hypothesis that reading interests of academically gifted students grades four through six are many-sided, and that students read all types of fiction on an equal basis.

Each student at Westridge Elementary with an I.Q. of 130 or above will be given a questionnaire to fill out in regards to their interests. Mr. Kelly, fifth grade teacher has consented to administer all questionnaires during reading class, and then give them back to me to analyze.

In order for the hypothesis to be accepted, there must not be more than a 20 percent variation between the most popular fiction category and the least popular fiction category. If there is a greater than 20 percent variation it will indicate definite preferences for some categories over others.

If you have any questions or comments about this study or procedure for gathering data, do not hesitate to contact me. Approval has already been given by Dr. Holbrook to proceed with this study. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Kathy Kelly  
213 Elmwood  
Waterloo, Iowa.