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Behind The Bestsellers: Building The Formula For Success In Children's Literature

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BEHIND THE BESTSELLERS: BUILDING THE FORMULA FOR
SUCCESS IN CHILDREN’S LITERATURE

BY

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Prepared for
Monsignor Mahon

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Seton Hall University

May 2005
ABSTRACT

BY ZENIA R. QUARLES

The purpose of this study is to explore the determining factors underlying best-selling children's books in the United States from 1996 – 2002. This study analyzed 15 books listed by Publisher's Weekly as the bestseller children's books in the category of fiction.
This thesis is dedicated to the precious memory of the author's father, James Ray Cuarlos.

"Stay Gold"
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this time to thank those individuals who made it possible for me to complete this study.

To begin I would like to thank my mother, Sylvia, stepfather, Vivian, and stepmother, Janet for their everlasting encouragement, and support. To my friends, thanks for being my personal pep squad. A special thanks to my advisor Monsignor Mahon for his comedic relief when things didn’t always look promising.

To the children at Lindbergh Elementary School, Palisades Park, NJ, Clinton School, Plainfield, NJ; Matawan YMCA; and Madison Middle School, Pontiac, Michigan thank you for taking out the time to complete the survey. And to my special helpers who assisted in this process: Carol Riley, Roychelle Woodson, Stephanie Walden, and Gloria Hill - I couldn’t have done any of this without your help.

To my editor, Lori Keyes and my statistician Delores Dalrymple, your services were greatly appreciated.

To my archenemy Procrastination, it may have taken a year but I finally beat you.

Lastly, I would also like to recognize Casmus Miller for his patience, encouragement, understanding, and love over the past year.
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### CHAPTER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 INTRODUCTION</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Popularity of Potter</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subsidiary Questions</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectives</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>II REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is Children’s Literature? - A</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brief History</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparative Analysis of Traditional</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiction Genres</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Series Takeover of the Classics?</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The John Newbery Award</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best-Sellers List</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library Best-Sellers - Do they exist?</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Influence of Trends in Marketing</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&amp; Technology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of Children’s Book Publishing</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>III RESEARCH METHODOLOGY</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Process</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design &amp; Development of the Survey</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribution of the Questionnaire</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IV ANALYSIS OF THE SELECTIONS</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sales Trends</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparative Analysis of the Top 15</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best-Selling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiction Books for Young Adults Ages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter I

Introduction

The Popularity of Potter

The American Library Association ranks it as one of the most challenged series of books in the country. More parents have requested its removal from bookshelves than Huckleberry Finn and Catcher in the Rye. Some even believe that these books promote witchcraft and Satanism, yet it is the biggest sales story ever. The Harry Potter series has sold more than 190 million copies worldwide in the last eight years - not including the sales of its last installment in the series, The Order of the Phoenix. Amazon.com had processed more than a million pre-orders of this installment and Barnes & Noble expected to sell a million copies. Therefore, it was not difficult for the 8.5 million copies in print of Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix to surpass its forerunner Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire in selling out its first weekend, thereby making it the second fastest selling book in history. By November 2003, sales for the first five Harry Potter books topped 250 million worldwide.

In 1997, the first three Harry Potter volumes placed on the New York Times bestseller list to the dismay and disbelief of many. Yet, according to Yale Professor and literary critic Harold Bloom, "Harry Potter" - books are long on clichés, short on imaginative vision. They don't measure up to the classics of children's literature (2000). He has, in fact, argued that 36 million book buyers were wrong for not selecting a "superior" book such as Kenneth Grahame's The Wind in the Willows. Bloom faults the
book for not being well written and believes that the book will never become a classic. “The book is simply a reflection of our popular culture because the book is full of clichés. If people can’t find anything better than this to read, he suggests that they read the book quickly to get it finished” (Hawk, 2003, p.1). Bloom is not the only person who has attacked the *Harry Potter* series; Carol Ann Wilson, Director of the Westfield Public Library and one of the 15 members of the Newbery Medal Committee, does not rank the *Harry Potter* series as “distinguished” writing. Furthermore, Jack Brock, pastor of the Christ Community Church in Alamogordo, N.M., made headlines in December 2001 for his “holy bonfire”, in which *Harry Potter* books were burned. Brock states, “they [the books] are totally, completely, entirely about witchcraft…. anyone who thinks that’s healthy, I don’t understand. God says in Deuteronomy that witchcraft is an abomination” (Gibbs, 2003, p.66).

However, children all over the world share a different view of the *Harry Potter* books - they love them. Young readers not only find the books interesting, but the relationship between Harry and his friends is one that they identify with. The author, Joanne Kathleen Rowling, shows an uncanny understanding of how adolescents deal with one another in her portrayal of the friendship between Ron, Harry and Hermione.

“Young readers sense that J.K. Rowling knows their world and their taste. Harry being an orphan makes him more vulnerable and independent in ways most 13-years-olds are not; he had to invent himself. Not having a regular family, kids say, is something many of them can relate to” (Gibbs, 2003, p.64). With the prominence and even the vehemence
of the views presently held about children's books, it would make sense to determine the essential elements, which underlie popular, children's books.

In this study the author will review the history of children's literature, while examining the trends and characteristics of best-selling, fiction, children's literature from 1996 - 2002. In addition, the author will compare the best-selling books with the literary award winners to establish whether there is any value in being selected for a literary reward, and whether it makes a difference to the reader.

Research Question

What are the common characteristics underlying successful, best-selling, contemporary fiction children's books as represented by *Publisher's Weekly* best-selling book lists from 1996 - 2002?

Subsidiary Questions

This study will also devote time to answering the following questions:

1. What is the formula for best-selling children's literature?
2. Does multiculturalism, religion or gender of the reader matter when it comes to children's books and best-selling children's books?
3. What are the common characteristics between a best seller and an award-winning book?
4. What are the determining factors for children ages 9-12 when selecting a book?

5. Do parents force their literary views on their children with the books they purchase for them?

6. Do book sales figures provide an indication of popularity about the books?

7. What are the guidelines used for issuing a literary award?

8. What are the benefits of receiving a literary reward?

Purpose of the Study

According to Gibbs (2003), Rowling’s books are the most popular children’s series ever written (p.63). Through her books she has introduced children to the world of fantasy, magic, adventure, and camaraderie. In addition, Wilson “like other reading experts, does, however, credit the series…with jump-starting a whole new group of kids’ interest in literature. There are younger readers more interested in complex or longer books, and I see many more boys looking for books. They are no longer embarrassed to be readers” (O’Crowley, 2003). So why is it that J.K. Rowling has not received any awards from the United States? Why is it that America does not recognize J.K. Rowling as a real writer? Are England’s standards for receiving a literary award less demanding than American literary awards, or is it just the opposite? The following is a list of awards that were presented to J.K. Rowling from England:

- British Book Award, Children’s Book of the Year, and Rowntree Nestle Smarties Prize, both 1997, for Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone
(published in the United States as Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone)
• Children’s Book of the Year shortlist citation, and Rowntree Nestle Smarties Prize, both 1998, for *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*

• Whitbread Prize for Children’s Book of the Year, White Bread Breweries, 1999, for *Harry Potter Prisoner of Azkaban*

• W.H. Smith Children’s Book - Award, 2000, for *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*

• Rebecca Caudill Young Reader’s Book Award, 2001, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*

• Hugo Award for Best Novel, World Science Fiction Society, 2001, for *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*

• Prince of Asturias Concord Prize, 2003, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* was voted one of Britain’s 21 best-loved novels by the British public as part of the BBC’s “The Big Read” (http://gale.net.galegroup.com).

As of today, American authors only are eligible for the Newbery awards.

However, Wilson recognizes that had J. K. Rowling not been from England the Newbery Committee might have come under heavy scrutiny for not presenting her with an award.

There are no quick and easy answers to these questions since there are so many different kinds of children’s books that can be “outstanding” for different reasons.

However, through the review of the literature, primary research, survey studies and interviews, the author will examine the best-selling, children’s fiction from 1996 - 2002 for the purpose of finding common factors shared by the successful books during this time period.

5
Objectives

One of the author's objectives for this project is someday to use the research material to compose, market, and publish a successful children’s book that encompasses all of the components used in best-selling fiction children's books today.

Definition of Terms

1. Backlist - A list of books from a previous season that are kept in print.

2. Booklist - A professional library journal published by the American Library Association and consisting solely of reviews of new titles recommended for purchase (Horning, 1997).

3. Challenged - Defined as a formal, written complaint filed with a library or school about a book’s content or appropriateness. Most challenges are reported by public libraries, schools, and school libraries (Rogers, 2000).


5. Children - Children are defined as infants to and including age fourteen (American Library Association, 1978).
6. **Children's Literature** – Defined as literature that appeals to the interests, needs, and reading preferences of children. Providing appealing formats and motivating content to inspire children as they progress as emergent, novice, developing, and master readers (Hancock, 2000).

7. **Crossover** - Books produced for children but read by adults

8. **Fiction** – Stories about imaginary people and events.

9. **Frontlist** – A publisher's list of new or current titles (The American Heritage Dictionary, 2000).

10. **Genres** – A term used to designate the type of categories into which literary works are grouped, usually by style, form, or context (Mitchell, 2003).

11. **Mass-market books** – Unlike textbooks, these books are produced with the consumer market in mind and usually sold in supermarkets and bookstores.

12. **Plot** – The basis of all fiction is the plot (Horning, 1997). A series of events that tell a story.

13. **Point of View** – The way in which the story is told: in the first person, the third person, or from the narrator.

14. **Setting** – A specific location or the time in which a story occurs such as past, present, or future.

15. **Style** – The author’s method of writing.

16. **Textbooks** – Books that are produced and sold to institutional school markets such as entire school districts.
17. **Theme** – The author’s underlying meaning or significance of the story. Themes should be based on high moral and ethical principles but should not be too overpowering.

18. **Trade books** – Books that are created for both the consumer and institutional market. These books are sold directly to schools and librarians but also sold directly to the consumer through bookstores.

**Limitations**

A limitation of this study is that it focuses primarily on students located in New Jersey who attend public elementary and middle schools, not private schools. Another limitation to the study is that the sample group is limited to students in elementary and middle school in grades 4 to 7. In addition, the study does not take into account the socioeconomic status or IQ level of the participating students. Lastly, depending on the resources used to obtain the bestsellers list, each source might have its own criteria for selection. Such as, the amount of books sold might differ between the resource lists that were used.
Chapter II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

What is Children’s Literature?

Prior to the nineteenth century, children’s literature reflected the attitudes of a society in which only a few books were written for the enjoyment of children. “It might be said that a child’s book is a book a child is reading, and an adult book is a book occupying the attention of an adult” (Huck, 1976a). Mostly, children would read books written for adults, taking from them experiences that they could understand. It was not until 1710 when Joseph Downing published the first catalog, The Young Christians Library for children and young people (Huck & Young, 1961b). Until this time, children were seen as miniature adults.

Today, Hancock (2000) defines children’s literature as literature that appeals to the interests, needs, and reading preferences of children and captivates children as its major audience (p.5). For authors, it is the ability to write about experiences that children are exposed to daily. It is the ability to understand how children think and feel and being able to express these emotions. It is the familiarity of places, people, animals and characters that inspire children to develop and become master readers. “The content of children’s literature focuses primarily on the domain of childhood and early adolescence while including a wide variety of experiences that appeal to readers from elementary through middle school” (Hancock, 2000). Having found acceptance with teachers and
students as instructional resources and independent reading material, children’s literature has seen substantial growth over the years from the days of the Dick and Jane books.

Early Beginnings

The history of children’s literature “traces its beginnings to preliterate times, when ancient bards and storytellers passed tales and legends from generation to generation in the oral tradition in caves and clearings, castles and cottages, and wherever people gathered” (Savage, 2000). In Europe, during the medieval days, (from the fifth to the fifteenth century) storytellers would tell stories to all ages. The young and old alike would gather around to listen with no distinction being made between stories for children and stories for adults. “As a matter of fact, there were no “children’s stories”. Stories were told to all age levels and everyone would interpret a story and internalize its lesson according to their maturity. At every level, new shades of meaning unfolded” (Ruutvet, 1998).

By the 1400s the first printing press was invented and by 1477 the first story, A Book of Curteseye by William Caxton appeared in printed form. Stories were now accessible to more people. For the early colonists life was dark and drab, therefore the only thing that allowed relief was the presence of a book. Unfortunately, even the books that were to provide inspiration and entertainment were just as gloomy. According to Savage, books for young readers consisted mainly of religious instruction, rules of behavior, ethical messages, and moral platitudes...they were vessels for instilling precepts of good behavior, piety, respect for parents, and other worthy goals that did little for enjoyment on the part of young readers (2009, pg. 4-5).
It was not until the end of the 1600s when the idea of children having their own identities was recognized. In 1693, John Locke changed the way adults viewed children (Norton, 1995). Until this time many of the printed books were read by children but not specifically targeted for their interests. But, stories like Reynard the Fox and The Fables of AESop became very popular with both adults and children (Norton). It was in 1744 when John Newbery, who is considered the “Father of English Children’s Literature”, changed the face of children’s publishing by creating and designing books primarily for children. With attractive formats, quality illustrations, and sturdy binding in the following century children’s literature began to bloom.

By the 1900s children’s literature started reflecting the world around it. A growing nationalism - world events such as: The Industrial Revolution, The American Revolution, Transcendentalism, The Westward Movement, and the broadening of school curriculums - made it possible for children to choose to read about a wide variety of topics. According to Huck, Kiefer, Helper, and Hickman (2004) during the period immediately following the American Revolution, there was a rush to publish textbooks that reflected the changing social purposes and interests of the new nation. By 1919-1924, publishing houses such as Macmillan were setting up children’s divisions; The Horn Book magazine, a publication devoted solely to children’s literature, was founded; and the John Newbery Medal was the first award in the world to be given for “distinguished contribution to literature for children” (Huck et al., 2004).

From the 1920s-1960s, more books were being published that focused on realism in content and characterizations. According to Denman-West (1998), references and characterizations of children who are “different” - mentally, physically, ... began to
make significant impact on the content of children’s books. Divorce, death, single parents, violence, AIDS, and other similar controversial topics are no longer avoided. Until the 60’s, African Americans didn’t appear in children’s literature. If African Americans were mentioned they usually appeared in stereotypical roles.

It was not until the latter part of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth that literature written for and about children was considered a literary form of recognition. The emergence of writers such as Louisa May Alcott, Mark Twain, Beatrix Potter... gave rise to the Golden Age of Children’s Literature.... Authors like Dr. Seuss and Judy Blume came upon the scene, revolutionizing the traditional approach to writing for children (Denman-West, 1998).

Comparative Analysis of Traditional – Fiction Genres

As the Romantic Movement gradually replaced the Puritan Movement in Europe in the eighteenth century, traditional literature was accepted by all levels of society once more. The evidence of this change in attitude was the publication by Charles Perrault in 1697 in France of eight “courtly” tales under the title Tales of Mother Goose. Included in this collection were “Cinderella,” “The Sleeping Beauty,” “Little Red Riding Hood,” and “Puss in the Boots” (Tomlinson & Brown, 1996, p.105)

Traditional literature is the body of ancient stories and poems that grew out of the human quest to understand the natural and spiritual worlds and that was preserved through time by the oral tradition of storytelling before being eventually written down (Tomlinson & Brown, 1996). Through oral tradition four subgenres were formed: folk or fairy tales, fables, myths, and legends. The objective of this section is to provide a contextual outline in which to view the books that will be analyzed in this study.

Fairy tales

The terms folktale and fairytale are often used interchangeably. According to Virginia Hamilton (2003, p.21), fairy tales “are folktales, not necessarily about fairies.
They are unusual, the different, and the fantastical and they give accounts of magical and enchanting events.” Fairy tales are based on magic and enchantment; both genres originated through storytelling. Stories of magic and wonder, the supernatural of elves, fairies, witches, and wizards capture young readers’ attention through the imaginative and dreamlike qualities of fairy tales.

Fables

Fables are short stories with a distinct moral or lesson usually given towards the end of the story. The characters are usually animals that behave like humans. Written in a style that is crisp and straightforward, “everything in the fable exists to make an abstract point, to make a lesson clear – as clear as the moral in the story”... “Don’t count your chickens before they hatch” (Lakens, 1999, p.25).

Myths

Myths are stories that interpret the origins of the world and its natural phenomena. Myths are ancient stories which often explain how things came to be long ago (Mitchell, 2003). They are the creation of stories from around the world, stories of religious beliefs and rituals that focus on gods and goddesses from ancient Greece. As Campbell (1988) explains myths “are symbolic stories which support social order and teach people how to live.”

Legends

Legends combine historical truth with the supernatural. Mixing realism and fantasy, myths tell stories based on either real or supposedly real individuals and their extraordinary deeds. Legends usually consist of a mentor who directs or guides the hero or heroine through unexpected challenges.
Other Genres

Through the years, fantasy has also played a vital role in children’s literature but it wasn’t until recently that the fantasy genre gained popularity through the introduction of J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* in the United States. Fantasy is characterized by the element of impossibility. Fantasy is also the genre that comes under the highest amount of controversy stretching back to Frank Baum’s (1900) *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and currently with the *Harry Potter* sequels. Yet fantasy ultimately grants children the freedom to exercise their imaginations and to rekindle and experience the joy of visual response during reading (Hancock, 2000, p.93).

Today, a contemporary genre based in realism (Ruutem, 1998) is also referred to as realistic fiction. Realistic fiction deals with real-life situations that children encounter. Peer pressure, divorce, friendship, growing pains, and death are all themes that are encompassed in stories within this genre. Diane Mitchell (2003) explains that the focus on one’s life experiences makes this genre very appealing to children, who are eager to learn more about people and how they handle life’s situations.

Series Takeover of the Classics?

The classics are books that have been around for generations – standing the test of time. Alice Jordan explains that (1974) “until a book has weathered at least one generation and is accepted in the next, it can hardly be given the rank of a classic”. Therefore a true classic is defined as a book that interests two or three generations. Most classic books have achieved their status through adults remembering what they read as children. They tend to think that what they read was best and ignore the possibility that any better books might be produced (Huck, 2004). In fact, many classics were not
children's books at all, but were written for adults (Huck, 2004). Some critics believe that what keeps classics in circulation are their significant themes, credible characters, real conflicts, and engaging style. Yet Charlotte Huck (2004) argues that many books and poems have achieved an honored position in children's literature through a combination of adult adoration, parent perpetuation, and teacher's assignments. A true classic should appeal to both children and adults. No teacher or parent should have to persuade a child into reading them since the appeal of a classic is based upon the type of story they represent. But because the reading interests of children have changed over the years, many teachers, librarians and parents are concerned that some of today's new books will be the classics of tomorrow.

Series

Although no one claims that these books are literature, their success in the market cannot be ignored (Ellerman, 1987). Series books appeal to children from the upper elementary grades through high school. Due to their predictable plots and familiar storylines, they are quick to read, there is always another book in the same genre available, and the simplicity of the vocabulary makes the book easy to read without assistance. They outsell regular single author works in bookstores by as much as four to one, and they consistently rank at or near the top of sales figures for young adult fiction (Savage, 2000).

Ironically, the first series books were launched back in the twentieth century with The Hardy Boys, and The Nancy Drew series, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, Little Woman, Tom Swift, The Motor Girls, The Bobbsey Twins and Hans Brinker, and The Silver Skates. For generations, these series books remained among the most popular
books of choice of young readers (Savage, 2000). If series books have been around for generations then why aren't they considered classics based on the previously discussed definition? Furthermore, why haven't any of these books won or been nominated for the John Newbery medal? Studies indicate that after World War I, within a five-year period (1919-1924) a series of events took place that took the history of children's literature by surprise. Besides the establishment of specialized departments for children in libraries, publishing houses formed children's divisions; The Horn Book magazine was founded (a magazine devoted to articles and reviews of children's books); Children's book week was established; and most importantly, the John Newbery Medal was established. With all the radical changes occurring "proponents and producers of formula series books launched a verbal attack on children's librarians, claiming that since they were mere women (spinster at that), they had no right to judge what was fit for red-blooded American boys" (Horning, 1997). The Librarians countered by initiating an alliance with the Boy Scouts of America and supporting 'good books for boys' in their early recommendations, thus advancing the notion of gender-specific reading tastes (Horning, 1997). Case in point: the first several winners of the Newbery medal. As a result, children's librarians quickly established themselves as a major influence in setting the literary standards for children's fiction. Therefore, formula series fiction faded into the background, and although it has never completely died out it has been greatly marginalized (Horning, 1997). That is until now, with the recent releases of Goosebumps, Left Behind, Captain Underpants, and the Princess Diaries, which have re-popularized the sales of series books.
The John Newbery Award

Guides for book selection are needed to find the best among the multitude of books. Teachers and librarians will find it helpful to be familiar with books which have won awards. These awards have been established for various purposes and provide criteria for what experts consider to be the best in children's literature. Such awards have helped to counteract the judgment of the marketplace by focusing attention upon beautiful and worthwhile books. (Huck & Young, 1961b, p.24)

Established in 1922, the Newbery Medal was named after John Newbery, a British publisher and bookseller during the eighteenth century who was the first to conceive the idea of publishing books solely for children and is subsequently known as the "father of children's literature". The Newbery medal is awarded annually to the author for the most distinguished American children's book published during the previous year. The book selection is administered by the Association for Library Service to Children, a division of ALA that is comprised of 15 children's librarians from both school and public libraries. Held in the highest esteem, the initial purpose of the Newbery medal, according to the Association for Library Service to Children, (n.d.) "was to encourage original creative work in the field of books for children. To emphasize to the public that contributions to the literature for children deserve similar recognition to poetry, plays, or novels. To give those librarians, who make their life work to serve children's reading interests, an opportunity to encourage good writing in this field".

For an author to be selected for the Newbery medal they must meet the following terms and criteria that was established by the Association of Library Service for Children. (1978):
1. The Medal shall be awarded annually to the author of the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children, published in English in the United States during the preceding year. There are no limitations as to the character of the book considered except that it be original work. Honor Books may be named. These shall be books that are also truly distinguished.

2. The Award is restricted to authors who are citizens or residents of the United States.

3. The committee in its deliberations is to consider only the books eligible for the award, as specified in the terms.

DEFINITIONS

1. "Contribution to American literature" indicates the text of a book. It also implies that the committee shall consider all forms of writing - fiction, non-fiction, and poetry. Reprints and compilations are not eligible.

2. A "contribution to American literature for children" shall be a book for which children are a potential audience. The book displays respect for children's understandings, abilities, and appreciations. Children are defined as persons of ages up to, and including, fourteen, and books for this entire age range are to be considered.

3. "Distinguished" is defined as:
   marked by eminence and distinction; noted for significant achievement
   marked by excellence in quality
   marked by conspicuous excellence or eminence
   individually distinct

4. "Author" may include co-authors. The author(s) may be awarded the medal posthumously.

5. In defining the term, "original work," the committee will consider books that are traditional in origin, if the book is the result of original research and the retelling and interpretation are the writer's own.

6. "American literature published in the United States" means that books originally published in other countries are not eligible.

7. "Published . . . in the preceding year" means that the book has a publication date in that year, was available for purchase in that year, and has a copyright date no later than that year. A book might have a copyright date prior to the year under consideration but, for various reasons, was not published until the year under consideration. If a book is published prior to its year of copyright as stated in the book, it shall be considered in its year of copyright as stated in the
book. The intent of the definition is that every book be eligible for consideration, but that no book be considered in more than one year.

8. "Resident" specifies that author has established and maintained residence in the United States as distinct from being a casual or occasional visitor.

9. The term, "only the books eligible for the Award," specifies that the committee is not to consider the entire body of the work by an author or whether the author has previously won the award. The committee's decision is to be made following deliberation about books of the specified calendar year.

10. The term, "in English" means that the committee considers only books published in English. This requirement DOES NOT limit the use of words or phrases in another language where appropriate in context.

CRITERIA

1. In identifying "Distinguished Writing" in a book for children,
   a. Committee members need to consider the following:
      Interpretation of the theme or concept
      Presentation of information including accuracy, clarity, and organization
      Development of a plot
      Delineation of characters
      Delineation of setting
      Appropriateness of style
      Note: Because the literary qualities to be considered will vary depending on content, the committee need not expect to find excellence in each of the named elements. The book should, however, have distinguished qualities in all of the elements pertinent to it.

   b. Committee members must consider excellence of presentation for a child audience.

2. Each book is to be considered as a contribution to literature. The committee is to make its decision primarily on the text. Other aspects of a book are to be considered only if they distract from the text. Such other aspects might include illustrations, overall design of the book, etc.

3. The book must be a self-contained entity, not dependent on other media (i.e., sound or film equipment) for its enjoyment.
   Note: The committee should keep in mind that the award is for literary quality and quality presentation for children. The award is not for didactic intent or for popularity.

Over the years, the Newbery medal committee has come under heavy scrutiny over their medal winners. Savage (2000) explains, even the Newbery ... award
committees allow for some subjective interpretation. Opinions differ. Even when objective criteria are applied, judging the quality of a children's book can be a subjective enterprise. Why is this a problem? Teachers face a complicated task when choosing which books to recommend or assign and therefore find it helpful to use national recommended booklists that contain award winners and other notable books. Besides, booklists Newbery winners are automatically guaranteed a prime spot on the following year's summer reading lists. In addition, the Newbery award is the only literary award that actually has an impact on sales nationwide ... it also seems to have an impact on what sorts of books get published' (Horning, 1997).

But what if all the selections on these respective lists didn't meet a level of expectation in areas such as gender, character roles and race relations? Many classics and popular stories where girls are portrayed usually reflect stereotypes of masculine and feminine roles. Such gender stereotypes are prevalent not only in mainstream children's books but also in Newbery and Caldecott medal winners (Singh, 1998). In addition, there is over representation of whites, males, and adults as compared to census statistics (Ishimoto, 1996). Agée (1993) studied Newbery award winners from 1936 to 1981 and found deeply embedded assumptions about gender roles and relationships. Traditional roles for women (and daughters) within the family and in society at large were often the norm in nearly fifty years of Newbery books. During the author's analysis of selections it will be interesting to see if Newbery winners have become increasingly balanced and whether the equality between male and female main characters has improved throughout the years.
Best-Seller List

According to industry standards, a non-fiction book is considered a best-seller when it reaches 5000 copies sold. Best-seller lists tell us not which books sell the most, in absolute terms, but which fiction, nonfiction, or advice books sell the fastest at the bookstores (Truitt, 1998). Besides measuring the volume of books sold, best-selling book lists are important because they allow the author more publicity. According to Truitt (1998), if a book is a best-seller, bookstore clerks will be more likely to put it in the front of the store and readers will be more likely to buy it. Publishers will also be eager to publish more books like it, since best-seller lists also stand in for industry-wide sales data. For the purpose of this study the author selected best-selling fiction children's books supplied by Publisher's Weekly year in reviews best-seller list.

Publisher's Weekly has nine lists that are designed for people in the book industry: booksellers, libraries, literary agents, and domestic and international publishing houses. Thus PW's lists are divided into subcategories relevant only to people in the publishing world. Fiction and nonfiction are kept separate for hardcover books but mixed for trade paperback and mass market. Also listed separately are children's, religious, computer, and audio books. These lists are compiled at 3,000 chains and independents and are enhanced by statistical sampling. Nor Rawlinson, editor in chief of Publisher's Weekly, sees the proliferation of lists as a way to give publishers information on the different types of books they specialize in. But she also admits the plethora of lists gives more books "best-seller opportunities" (Truitt, 1998).

Library Best-Sellers - Do they exist?

In today's society there is a list for everything. There are lists that inform the consumers of what others are buying, there are lists that inform teachers and parents of what is considered to be distinguished children's literature, and there are even on-line purchasing lists, but what about a list of what libraries purchase, or a list of what patrons are reading? V. Hawkins from the American Library Association (ALA) (email

21
communication, March 3, 2004) had this to say when questioned about libraries' ability to compile national library best-sellers lists. A "national library best seller list" does not exist. To further clarify: if you are searching for a list of the books that have been purchased most often by libraries, and are in their collections, you will not find it. Such figures, a specific tracking of library acquisitions, are not collected this way. The Book Industry Study Group provides a number of the books purchased by libraries, along with a dollar amount, in their annual "Book Industry Trends" report. But the titles of the books purchased are not listed and compiled.

Or if you are looking for a list of the books most often checked out by patrons from libraries, such figures, library circulation numbers, are also not collected in this way. Similar to acquisitions, library circulation statistics are collected solely at the dry numerical level. These numbers are not labeled by title or even the type of book. These figures appear in national library statistic reports.

If your ultimate goal is to track popularity of a product, this is probably best answered by sales, as opposed to any library circulation statistics. The only reliable statistic for books, as far as gauging popularity, is to track by the number of copies sold.

The Influence of Trends in Marketing & Technology

But what if students could be unfettered from message-heavy classroom reading lists? What if they could escape the educational literary agendas and the nostalgic promotion of classics by parents who control the family book-buying budget (Breona, 2004)? What do children buy when given the freedom to shop independently? At a book fair in Virginia sponsored by Scholastic, some students never got past the piles of
television and movie spin-off books that Scholastic sells. One student, age 6, bought a book about the basketball player Yao Ming because he saw this player in a television commercial. Other students were drawn to the holographic covers, and books that were packaged with silvery lockets and charms. Moriah, a fourth grader, was looking for Molly Moon's Incredible Book of Hypnotism, a hardcover she heard about from friends. What sold Moriah, aside from the holographic cover, was the author's name: Georgia Byng was hypnotized while writing this book (Brenna, 2004, pg.19). Is this the latest trend publishers rely on to sell children's books? As it turns out, this is just history repeating itself. In 1744, John Newbery published A Little Pretty Pocketbook, which was sold with a ball (for boys) and a pin cushion (for girls).

**History of Children's Book Publishing**

During the 1920s, many publishing houses and departments established children's book divisions that accounted for a high percentage of the total number of children's 'textbooks' sold to the institutional market of schools and libraries. In the 1970s and 1980s when the school and library budgets started shrinking, book publishers turned their focus to consumer sales by producing 'trade books'. According to Calmer's Research, in 1980 combined hardcover and paperback sales for children's books amounted to slightly over $210 million; in 1985 sales were more than $336 million; in 1990, according to preliminary figures issued by the Industry Statistics Report of the Association of American Publishers, sales were well over $1 billion (Donovan, 1991). With the assistance of mass marketing of books in locations such as supermarkets, mall bookstores, and drugstores, it is no wonder how the spurt in children's book sales came to be.
However, in a 1997 article, Taxel explains that in recent years contemporary children’s book publishing in the United States is undergoing the same process of integration, consolidation, and downsizing evident in other sectors of the economy. Publishing companies that once were independently owned enterprises have been purchased by large multinational corporations. ... The increasing importance of the “bottom line” in these conglomerates undermines the publishers’ willingness to publish new, novel, or experimental books, and books having a limited market. Therefore, instead of releasing work by unknown authors publishing houses are re-releasing previously published titles in paperback form, revising classics with illustrations, and producing movie-related books.

Other factors are also affecting the business of producing and selling books for young people. Changes in tax laws, for example, now make it unprofitable for publishers to “warehouse” books …. Titles that have been in print for decades are no longer available. Once again, the bottom line is that only titles that sell widely remain in print (Nodelman, 1996, p.25). For that reason Huck (2001) explains that the result of this market-oriented approach to publishing is the packaging of cheaply produced books with other items such as plush toys, t-shirts, or greeting cards. Quality writing is seldom part of such a package. More and more often, however, even well written books seem to have toys or games packaged with them (p.103).
Chapter III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In a 1989 article, Sauer explains that lately there has been much emphasis on children's books. Awards are being made on the basis of a book's popularity with children. Obviously, it would be absurd to say that any children's book is a good children's book if no child reads it. But it is equally absurd to say that the best children's books are necessarily those which are most popular with the children. A child's enthusiasm for a particular title does not give it literary distinction. If that were true we might as well make our awards to the comics and call it a day.

In general, the purpose of the research design for this study is to assess a selection of bestseller children's books and critique them based on the award criteria used by the John Newbery Award Committee Manual [see Appendix A]. This is done by comparing each book through the elements of what constitutes a good book: 'literary quality; originality of text and illustration; clarity of style and language; excellence of illustration; excellence of design and format; the interest and value of the subject matter to children; and the likelihood of acceptance by child readers' (Kruse, 1982). It is the author's goal to understand why certain literary works, are more successful than others. To become more analytical about literary works the author will evaluate each of the selected books against the elements of fiction: characterization, plot, point of view, setting, style and theme to determine the qualitative factors that are shared amongst each of the books.

Research Process

Source of Book List

25
A primary source for the books included in this study was Publisher's Weekly, a well-recognized trade journal of the book industry that is known for interviews with authors, publishing industry news, bestseller lists, and reviews of adult and children's books. Every year, Publisher's Weekly, releases a list that indicates the top selling books for that respective year. After evaluating the bestseller lists from 1996 through 2002, the author selected two or three books from each year that fit the criteria. Specifically, fifteen bestsellers were analyzed. All the books selected were fiction and geared for children between the ages of nine through twelve.

Note: Other sources used to collect book data were computerized databases within Amazon.com and The Children's Literature Web Guide, and the magazine Emergency Librarian.

Procedures

1. Book selection: identify books that fit the criteria of the study.

2. Read each book for the purpose of identifying the elements of fiction: characterization, plot, point of view, setting, style and theme. Namely, the main character (protagonist), secondary characters, gender, ethnicity, and setting.

3. The following information from the book was catalogued: title, author, publisher, year published, genre, suggested age level, movie tie-ins, the year the book was placed on the bestsellers list, and whether the book received a Newbery award.
Design and Development of the Survey

The survey, a two-page document was designed with children in mind [see Appendix C]. Therefore, the author has tried to develop a simple way to obtain the desired information. Besides the closed-ended questions, the survey also contains a number of open-ended questions for the purpose of obtaining genuine, unprompted answers from the students. Page one of the survey contains the books obtained from Publisher's Weekly bestseller lists. The questions asked on that page are very specific close-ended questions that will help determine the popularity of the books, as well as reading habits, library circulation, and book buying trends. Page two consists primarily of open-ended questions with a few close-ended questions placed within. The author's objective for this page is to be able to answer the subsidiary questions listed in chapter one. Questions 1-5 are personal questions that supply the author with student demographic information. Questions 6-11 are questions specifically designed to learn whether the reader likes "series" books since, as previously mentioned in Chapter II, series books such as Harry Potter are considered to be lacking literary merits by many literary critics. The author thought it would be interesting to evaluate whether those sentiments come into play when children select their books. Questions 12-13 reflect the reader's interest in multi-cultural and gender-based literature. Question 14 helps define
whether the parents' views are reflected in students' selection of literature; as does the question, "how did you get this book?" located on the front of the survey.

**Distribution of the Questionnaire**

The questionnaire was distributed to children between the ages of nine and twelve in grades fourth through seventh. There were four hundred and ten respondents to the survey from two elementary schools located in New Jersey, one YMCA after-school program also located in New Jersey, and one middle school in Michigan.
Chapter IV

Analysis of the Selections

Sales Trends:

This section will provide a brief overview of the sales trends for the years 1996 through 2002, which are covered in this study.

1996

In 1996, readers were introduced to a fresh approach to standard topics, such as through books on American history and questions that were raised about. Mathematics concepts in Jon Scieszka's *Math Curse*. However, Disney continued to see the success in print that it had seen back in 1992 with the releases of old and new books being adapted into movies such as *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and *James and the Giant Peach*.

1997

With 515.8 million units purchased during 1997, book-purchasing habits show that readers were drawn to mystery books such as *Goosebumps* by R.L. Stine and *I Know What You Did Last Summer* by Lois Duncan. Also, note that *I Know What You Did Last Summer* was also released in the movies this year. In addition, two award-winning books made the list; 1994 Newbery award winner, *The Giver* by Lois Lowry, and 1995 Newbery award winner, *Walk Two Moons* by Sharon Creech.
1998

"Pottermania" hits. Besides the introduction of Harry Potter, movie-ties were also high on the popular list particularly for picture books. However, media tie-ins continue to experience popularity, such as with the book *Junior Novelization* by Ellen Weiss. At the same time the book was published the film industry released an adaptation of the book. *The Giver* returns for a second year and this time is joined by 1998 Newbery Honor (runner-up), *Ella Enchanted* by Gail Carson Levine and 1998 Newbery winner, *The Wringer* by Jerry Spinelli.

1999

In 1999, two *Harry Potter* frontlist titles sold a total of seven million copies; while the new *Harry Potter* title, *Goblet of Fire*, sold 7.9 million copies. Needless to say, *Harry Potter* is a runaway success with three paperback series listed on the bestsellers list. Aside from Harry, there's the commercial success of *Pokemon* and the comic book style series *Captain Underpants* by Dav Pilkey, and the chapter-book series *The Magic Treehouse* by Mary Pope Osborne.

2000

Series books take-over the bestsellers list in 2000. *Left Behind* by Jerry B. Jenkins and Tim LaHaye books racked up totals of just over 3.6 million copies, both frontlist and backlist, and more than 2.5 million Magic Tree House books were sold. The first three *Captain Underpants* titles sold more than 700,000 copies combined, for a total of 1.2 million for the series so far (*Publisher's Weekly*, 2001). In addition, last year's
Newbery Award winner, *Bud, Not Buddy*, sold more than a quarter of a million copies (Publisher's Weekly, 2001). Another Newbery winner appearing for a second year on the best-sellers list was *Holes* by Louis Sachar.

2001

In 2001, with the release of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, movie sales of the previous *Harry Potter* titles increased. Sales also skyrocketed for newcomer Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events* by Daniel Handler with three titles selling more than a half of million copies combined. Published in 2000, *Princess Diaries* by Meg Cabot sold half a million copies with the release of the movie. And Newbery winner, *A Year Down Yonder* by Richard Peck, manages to squeeze in amongst the various Disney book adaptations for the movie *Monsters Inc*.

2002

This year there is not much ado about the Newbery winner, *A Single Shard* by Linda Sue Park, which could be attributed to the fact that everything on the bestseller list during 2002 is considered a series. With the increase in the number of series titles, such as two new *Harry Potter* activity books - *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* and *Quidditch Through the Ages* both by J.K. Rowling, *The Princess Diaries* by Meg Cabot, *Captain Underpants* and the *Wrest of the Wicked Wedgie Woman* by Dav Pilkey, and *Magic Tree House #23* by Mary Pope Osborne, critics might have a hard time supporting their claims that series-oriented books lack literary substance.
Summary

In summary, for the past several years the book industry seems to indicate that the only way to have your book published is if it's a series or if it has the appeal of a movie adaptation. Movie tie-ins have shown to be a proven winner. After reviewing the buying trend since 1996, undoubtedly there is no wonder why Newbery supports certain literature. If they didn't, today's children would miss out on a substantial amount of various types of literature. According to Barbara Ellenman (1998), for the most part, these MBAs and corporate moguls are not interested in whether Lois Lowry or Karen Cushman has penned an exciting, thought-provoking book that will open new worlds to children... they want books that will bring in money. Fortunately, for Lowry and Cushman, who are both Newbery award winners, "when a book is honored with the Newbery or Caldecott Medal, its sales are substantial and it will probably remain well in print indefinitely, and that the Honor books for both of those awards programs also sell extraordinarily well" (Donovan, 1991).

Clearly, there is a gap between the kinds of books critics celebrate and the books that sell (Taxel, 1997).
Comparative Analysis of the top 15 Best-Selling Fiction Books for Young Adults ages 9-12

The purpose of this study was to assess a selection of bestseller children's books and critique them based on the award criteria used by the John Newbery Award Committee. The study identified 15 books to be analyzed and examined with a critical view toward identifying the common elements of fiction: characterization, plot, point of view, setting, style and theme shared between bestsellers.
Summary/Plot: Set in twelfth-century Korea, it's the story of orphaned Tree-ear who lives under a bridge with his guardian (an older crippled man called Crane-man), and who dreams of becoming a Master Potter. After trespassing in the yard of Master Potter Min, the maker of the finest celadon ware in the Ch'ul'po village, he accidentally breaks pieces of his pottery set. Therefore Tree-ear must work off his debt to Min, and in the process he learns how to make pottery.

Characters: 10-year-old orphaned Tree-ear (named for a mushroom that grows without the benefit of parent seed). The wise guardian Crane-man (so called because of his crippled leg). Min, a grumpy perfectionist and his soft-hearted, submissive wife Ajima.

Pros: The story is written in such a manner that the reader identifies with the characters when the book mentions how Tree-ear and Crane-man must ration their food to keep from starving or how they move from under the bridge in the winter to a pit for warmth. And then there's the perseverance and courage of Tree-ear when traveling to the royal court in Songjo to show Min's work. He is robbed and all the pottery is shattered but he faithfully continues his journey even though he only has a single shard to show. The author does a great job of communicating the theme of the story without it becoming overbearing. Determination, hard work, courage, and perseverance pay off with Tree-ear being adopted by Min and Ajima and having his name changed.

Cons/Concerns: The story makes mention of Min losing his son, but the death of Tree-ear's friend and caretaker Crane-man was devastating. Even worse, Tree-ear was not in the village when the only person he has ever known dies.

Other Comments: An original setting highlighting the history of Celadon and the life and art in ancient Korea.
Summary/PLOT: It's 1937, during the Depression era. Mary Alice's father has lost his job. Since her parents are only able to afford a small room in Chicago, 15-year-old Mary Alice is sent to stay with Grandma Dowdel in rural Illinois for a year, maybe longer. Resistant at first, it took no time before Mary Alice is an accomplice in Grandma's outrageous schemes to benefit friends and avenge enemies. By the end of the year, to Mary Alice's astonishment it would be the best year of her life.

CHARACTERS: A 15-year-old Mary Alice, her rough and eccentric Grandma Dowdel, and a community full of memorable characters.

PROS: A heartwarming story that tells of a growing bond between the relationship of a granddaughter and grandmother. Written in first-person narrative the reader gets to hear everything straight from the mouth of Mary Alice. The hardships of enrolling in a new school, her first crush on a classmate, and the discovery of kindness and growth. A story about an older woman, Grandma Dowdel being a skillful and resourceful heroine, who is highly feared throughout the county because she is knowledgeable, is a rare attribute in books.

CONS/CONCERNS: Not Applicable

OTHER COMMENTS: The heart of the book is Grandma – huge and overbearing, totally outside polite society (Rochman, n.d.).
Summary/Plot: Narrated by sixth-grader Beth Bradley, the reader is taken on an adventure following the varied misadventures of the six cigar-smoking Herdman kids. Known throughout town as troublemakers the Herdmans are behind every minor catastrophe that occurs in town. This year, Beth has been assigned a yearlong project "Compliments for Classmate" where she has to write down compliments for everyone in her class including the leader of the Herdman clan, Imogene. In the end, Beth applies the word "resourceful" when defining Imogene.

Characters: The narrator Beth Bradley. Imogene Herdman and her siblings, other students in the sixth grade class. And there is the mention of teachers, principals, and other adults but their roles are limited.

Pros: The theme might be a bit too obvious but it is something that anyone can apply to their own lives, and that is, there's good in everyone and if you take the time you will find it, just as Beth found it in Imogene.

Cons/Concerns: The depiction of the Herdman kids was stereotypical. The Herdman household is described as six children with little to no parental supervision. It is a single parent household where the mother has to work to jobs to support the family. And the Department of Welfare makes routine visits.

Other Comments: None
Author: Christopher Paul Curtis  
Title: *Bud, Not Buddy*  
Publisher: Dell Yearling Books  
Genre: Realistic Fiction  
Age Level: 9-12

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<tr>
<th>Reviews</th>
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Summary/Plot: After being placed in an abusive foster home, Bud takes off to find the person he believes is his father. Having lost his mother at age 6, Bud (now 10) embarks on a journey to find Herman E. Calloway, a standup bass player for the "Dusky Devastators" of the Depression. Guided by only a flyer for one of Calloway's shows and the memory of how upset the poster made his mother when she looked at it — Bud sets off to track down a man he's never laid eyes on. Narrated by Bud, the story takes place during the 1936 Depression in Flint, Michigan.

Characters: Bud is a charming and sincere ten-year-old. Herman E. Calloway, the man Bud believes is his father, is an old cantankerous man who is set in his ways. He doesn't let down his guard for one minute to believe that Bud is his son.

Pros: Bud is a survivor. With everything that he has endured nothing can crush his spirit. Even after Herman Calloway denied being his father it didn't stop Bud from believing. He wasn't afraid of anything and didn't back down from the cold, hard stares he received from Herman Calloway.

Concerns: The cruelty and abuse that Bud endures at the foster home of the Amoses'. Then there is also the mention of the Ku Klux Klan.

Other Comments: None
**Summary/Plot:** The re-invention of the classic Cinderella story, Ella, at birth, is inadvertently cursed by a foolish fairy, which bestows on her the gift of obedience. Ella is bound by obedience, compelled to follow every order, no matter how casually given. By the time she is fifteen, with the help from her mother and trusted fairy godmother, she has mastered turning the commands around to work in her favor. However, after Ella’s mother passes away and her greedy and self-centered father remarries a woman who dislikes Ella and uses the spell on Ella against her — Ella leaves home to find Lucinda, (the foolish fairy) so that she can have the spell removed.

**Characters:** There’s Ella, her deceased mother and absent father, Ella’s wicked stepmother and two heinous stepsisters, her fairy godmother, a prince, pumpkin coach, glass slippers, three cotillions and a happily ever after ending.

**Pros:** The concept of hero has changed forever. As every reader of mythic tales knows, writers in recent years have developed several convincing, capable, and strong heroes — who happen to be female. ... And all of us regardless of gender, age, or background, can benefit from such thoughtful portrayals of girls and women who break through the barriers that hold them back — whether those barriers exist primarily within themselves or without. ... And for Ella, the most serious barriers she must confront are the fears and doubts deep inside herself, which she faces with spirit, intelligence, and humor (Barron, 2001).

**Cons/Concerns:** The relationship between Ella and her father is a bit concerning since he tried to sell her to an older suitor but also the treatment from her stepfamily could lead the reader to believe that all stepfamilies are prone to act in such a spiteful manner.

**Other Comments:** Ella narrates the story.
Summary/PLOT: Set in a society where everything is perfect. There is no poverty, no crime, no sickness, no emotions, no war, no violence - it's a place where the Leaders of the Community Committee control everything. Celebrating his 12th birthday Jonas is given the job of Receiver of Memories as his life assignment. The Receiver is the only person who knows about the past and therefore, the only one who knows about violence, emotions such as pain, hate, love, sadness and death. The current Receiver, now old, will become the Giver, passing all his memories onto Jonas.

CHARACTERS: Jonas, the new Receiver, The Giver who will pass all his memories onto Jonas. Jonas's father, a Nurturer, who is responsible for all the children born including newborn baby Gabriel, who. Jonas must save from being released.

Pros: As is mandated through this perfect society, both parents are present and are active participants in their children's lives. The family has dinner together in addition, to engaging in in-depth family discussions. Furthermore, in The Giver, the traditional roles of the parents are reversed; the mother is a judge and the father is the nurturer or nursery worker.

Cons/Concerns: Ann Trudsdale suggests that this world denies a spiritual dimension to life and that men and women's roles are gender neutral, except for women who are used as breeding stock. And the only female chosen as a Giver is an aberration (Lehr, 20%). Another issue that this author has with this book is that when a person is not willing to comply with the rules in this perfect world they are "released," meaning killed by lethal injection. At one point, newborn baby Gabriel, who is unable to sleep soundly, is scheduled for "release." Furthermore, in this perfect society everything is the same, which means that there is no difference in the ethnicity of the people. Is this very something that should be conveyed? A society with only one race is perfect?
### Summary/PLOT
A natural born wizard, Harry, who is approaching his 11th birthday, is about to learn that he is a wizard, that his deceased parents were both wizards and that he has been accepted to the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft & Wizardry. Since his parents’ death Harry has been living with the Dursley’s, his unappreciative and abusive aunt and uncle, and their son, Dudley. At Hogwarts, Harry - whose looks favor that of a nerd - excels at the sport Quidditch, but is a mediocre student. In the midst of making friends and enemies, Harry will need to protect himself from the most dangerous enemy, Lord Voldemort, who is responsible for killing his parents.

### Characters
Harry finds another family in his professors and students Ron and Hermione. Hermione is a brilliant student, obedient to a fault, and not particularly athletic - the stereotypical “girl’s role” (Thompson, 2001). And Ron, a below average student that is teased because his family is poor and he wears hand me downs becomes Harry’s best friend.

### Pros/Cons
Kios like the characters she has created - Harry above all, not because he is fantastic but because he is familiar (Gibbs, 2003).

### Cons/Concerns
A small but growing group of critics has focused on one major flaw is the Harry Potter novels – the author’s traditional portrayal of males and females (Thompson, 2001).

### Other Comments
Narrated in the third person.
Summary/Plot: Unraveling a generation-old family curse through the usage of flashbacks, the reader is able to correlate the past with the present. Having a history of bad luck, it came as no surprise to Stanley Yelnats when he is wrongly accused and convicted for stealing a famous baseball player’s sneakers. Stanley is sent to Camp Green Lake, a juvenile detention home where he spends most of his days digging holes. With 20 friends in school because he is overweight, the boys in the camp 'make a bully back at Stanley’s school seem cute' (Chin, 2002). However, Hector Zeroni (Zero) befriends him, and together they lay Madame Zeroni’s curse on the Stanley’s family to rest.

Characters: Stanley has two loving parents: his determined father that aspires to become a successful inventor and his clueless mother. Hector Zeroni (Zero), Stanley’s only friend at the camp who was abandoned by his mother and never knew his father. Also, the staff and other detainees from Camp Green Lake.

Pros: There is an understanding of friendship, self-confidence, and perseverance. The reader learns about keeping promises and commitments.

Cons/Concerns: When the story flashbacks to the past, it tells the story of how Kissing Kate Barlow falls in love with an African American man and he is killed because of these indiscretions.

Other Comments: None
### Summary:
Orphaned at age three when a drunk driver killed his parents, Jeffrey Magee, now 12 years old, escapes an unhappy life with his quarreling aunt and uncle. While in search of a place Jeffrey can call home, he becomes a legend throughout town for the unthinkable feats he is able to accomplish. Unaware that the town is racially divided, Jeffrey reaches out to both sides and bridges a town’s racial gap.

### Characters:
Jeffrey, nicknamed Maniac Magee because of his super athleticism. The Beale family, who doesn't consider Jeffrey's race a factor when taking him into their home and treating him as if he was one of their own. Tough guy Mars Bar Thompson, who first resented Jeffrey because of his race but in the end Jeffrey is welcomed into his house to live as his brother.

### Pros:
Jeffrey confronts prejudice and racism without any thought. He doesn't recognize a difference between the races. Jeffrey just wants to belong; it doesn't matter if it's in a White or African American community. The same goes for Amanda Beale and her family. 'Both the Beale parents demonstrate a compassion for Maniac that crosses racial and economic boundaries' (Vardell, 200).

### Cons/Concerns:
The realism of the relationship of Aunt Dot and Uncle Dan might be too much for his age group. Aunt Dot and Uncle Dan hated each other, but because they were strict Catholics, they wouldn’t divorce. Around the time Jeffrey arrived, they stopped talking to each other. Pretty soon there were two of everything in the house. Two bathrooms, two TVs, two refrigerators, two toasters. If it were possible, they would have had two Jeffreys. As it was, they split him as best they could (5-6).

### Other Comments:
None
Summary/Plot: The story takes place in medieval England with a homeless, nameless young girl around the age of 12 or 13 but she doesn’t know herself. Taken in by a sharp-tempered midwife, and renamed Beetle, she starts to learn the trade of midwifery. Through obstacles and hardships, the young girl eventually gains confidence and finds a place for herself in this world.

Characters: First nameless, she is then given the name Beetle but after building up her self-esteem, she renames herself Alyce. Jane, the crotchety midwife.

Pros: Running from her failure after she is unable to deliver a baby, Alyce soon realizes that she controls her own fate and returns back to Jane to ask for her job back promising never to give up again.

Cons/Concerns: Alyce considers Jane as a role model but Jane is not supportive. She belittles Alyce and has little thought for the girl beyond the work she can contribute. While Jane helped Alyce to grow, how can someone look up to another individual that is using her?

Other Comments: Considered a straightforward narrative since throughout the novel the author makes frequent references to the seasonal passage of time, not only to make the progression of time clear to young readers but also to symbolize Beetle’s growth (Horning, 1997).
**Author:** Lois Lowry  
**Title:** *Number the Stars*  
**Genre:** Realistic/Historical Fiction  
**Publisher:** Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group  
**Reviews:** BCCB Booklist Horn Book PW SLJ Other:  
**Age level:** 10-14

### Summary/Plot
The year is 1943 and as the Germans have just invaded Denmark, Annemarie and her family embark on a dangerous mission to save the lives of their friends while endangering their own. In an effort to smuggle a Jewish family over to Sweden, Annemarie learns the meaning of courage and bravery despite her fear.

### Characters
10-year-old Annemarie and her best friend, Ellen Rosen that she helps elude from the Germans. Inge Johansen, Annemarie’s mother who leads the Rosen’s to the boat in the middle of the night with a broken ankle.

### Pros
Annemarie and her mother, Inge are the heroines in this story. The portrayal of the women in this story shows them as being strong and courageous regardless of their fear. Even after the loss of Lisa, Annemarie’s older sister, the mother didn’t cower from helping the Resistance group – this is the same group her daughter worked with when she lost her life.

### Cons/Concerns
The mentioning of the Holocaust could be troubling for some kids in this age group.

### Other Comments
Narrated by Annemarie.
**Summary/Plot:** Set in Oklahoma during the Depression. (1934), Billie Jo and family are trying to survive years of living through dust storms and a drought. This book is the memoirs of the terrible experiences Billie Jo has had to endure and overcome in her life when trying to get Out of Dust only to find out that the dust is who she is. It is, what in fact, makes her.

**Characters:** 14-year-old Billie Jo who tries to escape the hardships of living in a Dust Bowl far away from home. Billie Jo’s mother, whom she shares a close bond with, and her father, whom she has lived with all her life but barely knows.

**Pros:** The women in the story are given strong roles.

**Cons/Concerns:** The story opens with an introduction to Billie Jo’s mother who is currently pregnant but has suffered numerous miscarriages. Her grandparents have died from cancer. The mother, the matriarch of the family, dies after the birth of her newborn from injuries she sustained in a horridous fire accident caused by Billie Jo and her father’s negligence. And shortly after the birth of her newborn brother, he passes away. The father, unable to handle the loss of his wife, starts drinking. Billie Joe’s hands are severely burnt in the fire – the author mentions how her flesh is hanging off the bones. And then there’s the chance that her father has the beginning stages of cancer. When is realism in children’s fiction too much?

**Other Comments:** Narrated by Billie Jo, the book is like her own personal journal where the story is written in free-verse poems.
Summary/PLOT: Four extraordinary sixth graders are selected to represent their school in an academic challenge. Some considered them the underdogs but not to Ms. Olinski, they are “The Souls”. Through their diverse backgrounds and experiences, each child is able to bring something different to the team, which helps them to sweep the championship while becoming the best of friends.

CHARACTERS: Many, but the main characters are Ms. Olinski the enthusiastic teacher, her four bright students on the academic spelling team: Nadia, Noah, Ethan, and Julian, and Julian’s father, who provides an unknown insight into the group known as “The Souls”.

PROS: The diversity of all the characters. The kindness that the children show to themselves and to others. Their maturity builds through a series of encounters, as they pressure each other to open up, take risks, and stand up for themselves and each other (Vardell, 2001, p.170)

CONS/CONCERNS: Ilene Cooper states, the book is weighted down by a Byzantine structure that houses too many characters and alternating narratives that will confuse readers (e.d.).

OTHER COMMENTS: Although each story is seamlessly entwined, each child narrates their own experiences providing a different perspective.
Summary/Plot: The disappearance of Salamanka's mother sends her on a six-week road trip with her grandparents to Idaho. "One day I realized that our whole trip out to Lewiston had been a gift from Gram and Gramps to me. They were giving me a chance to walk in my mother's moccasins — to see what she had seen and feel what she might have felt on her last trip (276)."

Characters: Thirteen year old Salamanka, her friend Phoebe whose life seems to parallel her own. Salamanka's father who is too grief stricken to take the trip and Salamanka's grandparents.

Pros: The love that is shown between all the family members. The relationship between Salamanka and her grandparents is endearing. And when Gram dies, the reader senses that Gramps might not be able to go on without her because of the special relationship they shared. And while the relationship between Salamanka and her father is somewhat strained, the reader can sense that he has always loved Salamanka but is just unable to express it.

Cons/Concerns: Phoebe's mother has an illegitimate son that she gave up for adoption but the author places a spin on the story where the reader believes that Phoebe's mother left her family to have an affair with a younger man. Salamanka's mother never got over the loss of her stillborn baby or the fact that she could never bear any more children after her hysterectomy. Therefore, she leaves her family in search of self-understanding and dies in a bus accident. When Salamanka travels to go find her mother, her grandmother dies in the process.

Other Comments: Narrated by Salamanka to pass time on her road trip she tells a story about her friend Phoebe whose mother has also disappeared.
Author: Jerry Spinelli  
Title: Wringer  
Publisher: HarperCollins  
Reviews: BCCB, Booklist, Horn Book, PW, SLJ, Other:_  
Age level: 8-12

Summary/Plot: Dreading his 10th birthday, Palmer must decide whether he will succumb to the pressures of being a wringer or find the courage to oppose this so-called rite of passage. During the town’s annual Pigeon Day shoot, boys are trained to be wringers by wringing the necks of wounded pigeons. Unable to admit his own displeasure with the whole event, Palmer puts up cover until his pet pigeon gives him away.

Characters: Pigeon lover Palmer, and his new buddies: Beans, Mutto, and Heavy. Palmer’s mother who cares for the pigeon without Palmer’s knowledge and his father who once won a medal at Pigeon Day must now come to grips with his son’s new pet.

Pro: At the end, Palmer stands up for himself and his pigeon. He no longer fails victim to peer and community pressure.

Cons/Concerns: The barbaric sport of killing pigeons by wringing their necks. Boys are denied another aspect of their development in most literature for children — namely, their feelings. Seldom do we have a story in which a male character exhibits tenderness or compassion. Or if they do, they must do it in secret as does Palmer … when he hides his feelings of his pet pigeon from his bully friends (Hack, 290).

Other Comments: The story is narrated in third person.
Findings

The purpose of this study was to critically analyze the best-selling fiction children's literature from 1996 - 2002 for the purpose of finding the common factors shared by all the successful books during this time period. The study identified 15 books to be analyzed. In Table 1.1, the author developed a chart to focus on the findings discovered in each book. In Table 1.2, we examine the years in which the books were published with the year that they received the Newbery Award and gauge both of those factors against the year the book reached best-selling status.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character, Race, &amp; Gender</th>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Family Orientation</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tree-ear Asian male</td>
<td>Korean village</td>
<td>Orphan</td>
<td>Realistic</td>
<td>True courage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Alice Caucasian female</td>
<td>Home &amp; school</td>
<td>Both parents alive but focus is on her relationship with her Grandmother.</td>
<td>Historical</td>
<td>The camaraderie between Mary Alice and her grandmother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth Caucasian female</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Both parents reflected in the story.</td>
<td>Fiction</td>
<td>The ability to find good in people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bud African American male</td>
<td>No school or home life reflected</td>
<td>Mother passed away leaving him an orphan, the reader never introduced to father.</td>
<td>Realistic</td>
<td>Never give up in what you believe. Having determination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ella Caucasian female</td>
<td>Obedience school &amp; home</td>
<td>Mother passes away &amp; father never around. However, the father remarries and leaves the evil stepmother to tend to Ella.</td>
<td>Fantasy</td>
<td>A quest for freedom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob Caucasian male</td>
<td>A school where children are promoted not to another grade but to another stage of life</td>
<td>Both parents are present but non-affectionate as if they are robots.</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>The power to chose your own destiny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harry Caucasian male</td>
<td>Hogwarts School of Witchcraft &amp; Wizardry</td>
<td>An evil wizard kills his parents so Harry is being raised by his cruel Aunt &amp; Uncle.</td>
<td>Fantasy</td>
<td>Recognizing one’s personal power, self-discovery, self-acceptance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.1 ■ Common factors found when analyzing 15 Best-Selling Fiction Books for Young Adults ages 9-12
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character, Race, &amp; Gender</th>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Family Orientation</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stanley Yelnats, Caucasian male</td>
<td>Isolated and picked on in school &amp; Juvenile Detention Center</td>
<td>Both parents are reflected in the story but the mother is somewhat simple.</td>
<td>Fiction</td>
<td>Growing up and gaining self-confidence. Learning from mistakes. And always keeping commitments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeffrey Magee, Caucasian male</td>
<td>A homeless runaway</td>
<td>Parents die in a car accident and Jeffrey is living with his miserably married Aunt &amp; Uncle.</td>
<td>Realistic</td>
<td>Everyone is the same regardless of race.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alyce Beetle, Caucasian female</td>
<td>Homeless &amp; uneducated</td>
<td>No home, no parents, and no name.</td>
<td>Fiction</td>
<td>Gaining confidence and self-esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AnneMarie, Caucasian/Jewish female</td>
<td>No school setting</td>
<td>Both parents are present.</td>
<td>Realistic</td>
<td>Bravery &amp; courage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billie Jo, Caucasian female</td>
<td>School &amp; home</td>
<td>Both parents are presented until the mother is tragically killed. Strained relationship between father &amp; daughter.</td>
<td>Realistic</td>
<td>Self-realization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethan (Caucasian/Jewish male), Nadia (Caucasian/Jewish female), Noah (Caucasian male), and Julian (Indian male)</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Nadia’s parents are going through a divorce, Julian’s mother passed so his father is raising him, and Ethan and Noah both have parents present in the story.</td>
<td>Fiction</td>
<td>Finding kindness in others and learning to look for it within themselves. Lessons on maturing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character, Race, &amp; Gender</td>
<td>Setting</td>
<td>Family Orientation</td>
<td>Genre</td>
<td>Theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salwanica</td>
<td>Road Trip</td>
<td>Mother dies, leaving father as the primary caregiver.</td>
<td>Fiction</td>
<td>Self-understanding &amp; acceptance of death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American female</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palmer</td>
<td>School &amp; Home</td>
<td>Both parents are present.</td>
<td>Fiction</td>
<td>Dealing with the perils of peer &amp; community pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book</td>
<td>Year Published</td>
<td>Award &amp; Year Received</td>
<td>Best-Selling Year</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Linda Sue Park</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>A Year Down Yonder</em></td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Newbery 2001</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Richard Peck</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Antz Junior Novelization</em></td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>No Award Received</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Ellen Weiss</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Best School Year Ever</em></td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>No Award Received</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Barbara Robinson.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Bad Not Buddy</em></td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Newbery 2000</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Christopher Paul Curtis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Gill Caron Levine.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Lois Lowry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone</em></td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>No Award Received</td>
<td>1998 &amp; 1999</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By J.K. Rowling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Louis Sachar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I Know What You Did</em></td>
<td>1973</td>
<td>No Award Received</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Last Summer</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Lois Duncan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Jerry Spinelli</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Karen Cushman</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Number the Stars</em></td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Newbery 1990</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Lois Lowry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Karen Pease</td>
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<td><em>The View From Saturday</em></td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Newbery 1997</td>
<td>1997</td>
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<tr>
<td>By E.L. Konigsburg</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Walk Two Moons</em></td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Newbery 1995</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Sharon Creech</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Jerry Spinelli</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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</table>
Research Results

After collecting each of the completed surveys the author compiled the responses to the survey, which was distributed to children between the ages nine through twelve in grades fourth through seventh. Recipients included students at two elementary schools located in New Jersey, one YMCA After-school program also located in New Jersey, and one middle school in Michigan. The questions were designed to discover how children feel towards the certain best-selling, series, and Newbery award winner books. Four hundred and ten children completed the survey. The results shown below represent their answers.

Part 1: Survey Questions

Question 1: Have you read any of the books listed? The answers only reflect those children that stated yes they have read the books or supplied no answer.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book</th>
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<th>Female</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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<tr>
<td>A Single Shard</td>
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<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>A Year Down Yonder</td>
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<td>14</td>
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<td>By Richard Peck</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann Junior Novelization</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>By Ellen Weiss</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Best School Year Ever</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>By Barbara Robinson</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paul, Not Pudgy</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>60</td>
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<tr>
<td>By Christopher Paul Curtis</td>
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54
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Book</th>
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<td>By Gail Carson Levine</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Giver</td>
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<tr>
<td>Holes</td>
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<td>123</td>
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<td>By Louis Sachar</td>
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<td>I Know What You Did Last Summer</td>
<td>66</td>
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<td>Maniac Magee</td>
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<tr>
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<td>12</td>
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<td>Walk Two Moons</td>
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</table>

Question 2: Did you like the books that you have read? The answers only reflect those children that stated yes they liked the books or supplied no answer.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book Title</th>
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<th>No</th>
<th>Not Always Read</th>
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<td>Elza Enchanted</td>
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<tr>
<td>By Gail Carson Levine</td>
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<tr>
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<td>22</td>
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<td>By Lois Lowry</td>
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</tr>
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<tr>
<td>By Louis Sachar</td>
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<tr>
<td>I Know What You Did Lost</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>Summer</td>
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<tr>
<td>By Lois Duncan</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Montez Moyer</td>
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<tr>
<td>By Jerry Spinelli</td>
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<td>By Karen Cushman</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number the Stars</td>
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<tr>
<td>By Lois Lowery</td>
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<tr>
<td>Out of Dust</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Karen Hesse</td>
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<tr>
<td>The View from Saturday</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<tr>
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<td>18</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Sharon Creech</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wringer</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Jerry Spinelli</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Question 3:** When asked if the respondent read *A Single Shard*, the author then asked what was the reasoning behind selecting this book.
Question 3.1: When asked if the respondent read *A Year Down Yonder*, the author then asked what was the reasoning behind selecting this book.

Question 3.2: When asked if the respondent read *Antz Junior Novelization*, the author then asked what was the reasoning behind selecting this book.
Question 3.3: When asked if the respondent read *The Best School Year Ever*, the author then asked what was the reasoning behind selecting this book.

![Bar chart showing reasons for reading *The Best School Year Ever*.](image)

Question 3.4: When asked if the respondent read *Bud, Not Buddy*, the author then asked what was the reasoning behind selecting this book.

![Bar chart showing reasons for reading *Bud, Not Buddy*.](image)
Question 3.5: When asked if the respondent read *Ella Enchanted*, the author then asked what was the reasoning behind selecting this book.

![Graph showing reasons for reading *Ella Enchanted*]

Question 3.6: When asked if the respondent read *The Giver*, the author then asked what was the reasoning behind selecting this book.

![Graph showing reasons for reading *The Giver*]
Question 3.7: When asked if the respondent read *Holes*, the author then asked what was the reasoning behind selecting this book.

![Graph showing reasons for reading *Holes*](image)

Question 3.8: When asked if the respondent read *I Know What You Did Last Summer*, the author then asked what was the reasoning behind selecting this book.

![Graph showing reasons for reading *I Know What You Did Last Summer*](image)
Question 3.9: When asked if the respondent read *M adjacent Mage*, the author then asked what was the reasoning behind selecting this book.

![Bar chart for reading *M adjacent Mage*]

Question 3.10: When asked if the respondent read *The Midwife’s Apprentice*, the author then asked what was the reasoning behind selecting this book.

![Bar chart for reading *The Midwife’s Apprentice*]
Question 3.11: When asked if the respondent read *Number the Stars*, the author then asked what was the reasoning behind selecting this book.

![Graph showing reasons for reading *Number the Stars*]

Question 3.12: When asked if the respondent read *Out of Dust*, the author then asked what was the reasoning behind selecting this book.

![Graph showing reasons for reading *Out of Dust*]
Question 3.13: When asked if the respondents read *The View From Saturday*, the author then asked what was the reasoning behind selecting this book.

![Diagram for reading *The View From Saturday*]

Question 3.14: When asked if the respondents read *Walk Two Moons*, the author then asked what was the reasoning behind selecting this book.

![Diagram for reading *Walk Two Moons*]

63
Question 3.15: When asked if the respondent read *Wring*er, the author then asked what was the reasoning behind selecting this book.

![Chart showing reasons for reading Wringer]

Question 4: When asked if the respondent read *A Single Shard*, the author then asked how they received the book.

![Chart showing sources of A Single Shard]

64
Question 4.1: When asked if the respondent read *A Year Down Yonder*, the author then asked how they received the book.

Question 4.2: When asked if the respondent read *Ants: Junior Novelization*, the author then asked how they received the book.
Question 4.3: When asked if the respondent read *The Best School Year Ever*, the author then asked how they received the book.

![Pie chart showing the distribution of how respondents received *The Best School Year Ever*]

Question 4.4: When asked if the respondent read *Bud, Not Buddy*, the author then asked how they received the book.

![Pie chart showing the distribution of how respondents received *Bud, Not Buddy*]
Question 4.5: When asked if the respondent read *Elly Enchanted*, the author then asked how they received the book.

Question 4.6: When asked if the respondent read *The Giver*, the author then asked how they received the book.
Question 4.7: When asked if the respondent read *Holes*, the author then asked how they received the book.

Question 4.8: When asked if the respondent read *I Know What You Did Last Summer*, the author then asked how they received the book.
Question 4.9: When asked if the respondent read *Maniac Magee*, the author then asked how they received the book.

[Diagram showing the percentage of respondents who received the book from various sources: bought it (17%), library (8%), parents (24%), other (15.5%), own (6.8%), and no answer (1.2%).]

Question 4.10: When asked if the respondent read *The Midwife’s Apprentice*, the author then asked how they received the book.

[Diagram showing the percentage of respondents who received the book from various sources: bought it (79%), library (17%), parents (2.4%), other (7.3%), own (1%), and no answer (0.9%).]
**Question 4.11:** When asked if the respondent read *Number the Stars*, the author then asked how they received the book.

![Pie chart showing book acquisition methods for *Number the Stars*.](chart1.png)

**Question 4.12:** When asked if the respondent read *Out of Dust*, the author then asked how they received the book.

![Pie chart showing book acquisition methods for *Out of Dust*.](chart2.png)
Question 4.13: When asked if the respondent read *The View from Saturday*, the author then asked how they received the book.

[Diagram showing the percentage of responses for how the book was received.]

Question 4.14: When asked if the respondent read *Walk Two Moons*, the author then asked how they received the book.

[Diagram showing the percentage of responses for how the book was received.]
Question 4.15: When asked if the respondent read *Pringer*, the author then asked how they received the book.

![Pie chart showing responses to how the book was received.]

**Gender**
- Male – 199 respondents = 48.5%
- Female – 208 respondents = 50.7%
- No Answer – 3 respondents = 0.7%

**Grade Level**
- 4th Grade – 61 respondents = 14.9%
- 5th Grade – 7 respondents = 1.7%
- 6th Grade – 206 respondents = 50.2%
- 7th Grade – 126 respondents = 30.7%
- Other – 5 respondents = 1.2%
- No Answer – 5 respondents = 1.2%
Age
- 9 years old – 17 respondents – 4.1%
- 10 years old – 38 respondents – 0.3%
- 11 years old – 90 respondents – 22%
- 12 years old – 167 respondents – 40.7%
- Other – 90 respondents – 22%
- No answer – 8 respondents – 2%

Race
- African American – 138 respondents – 33.7%
- Asian – 67 respondents – 16.3%
- Caucasian – 37 respondents – 9.0%
- Hispanic – 96 respondents – 23.4%
- Indian – 2 respondents – .5%
- Middle Eastern – 3 respondents – .7%
- Native American – 4 respondents – 1.0%
- West Indian/Caribbean – 3 respondents – .7%
- Other – 41 respondents – 10.0%
- No answer – 19 respondents – 4.6%

Religion
- Catholic – 147 respondents – 35.9%
- Jewish – 6 respondents – 1.5%
- Christian – 19 respondents – 4.6%
- Other – 37 respondents – 3.7%
Part III: Respondents responses to series books

Question 5: Respondents were asked the number books they read in the *Harry Potter* series and what they liked about the books.

![Graph showing how many respondents read certain books in the *Harry Potter* series and what they liked about them.]

Question 6: Respondents were asked the number of books they read in the *Left Behind* series and what they liked about the books.

![Graph showing how many respondents read certain books in the *Left Behind* series and what they liked about them.]

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No answer – 201 respondents – 49.0%
Question 7: Respondents were asked the number of books they read in the *Captain Underpants* series and what they liked about the books.

![Bar chart showing the number of books read by respondents in the *Captain Underpants* series and what they liked about them.]

Question 8: Respondents were asked the number of books they read in the *American Girls* series and what they liked about the books.

![Bar chart showing the number of books read by respondents in the *American Girls* series and what they liked about them.]

75
Question 9: Respondents were asked the number of books they read in the *Princess Diaries* series and what they liked about the books.

![Graph showing preferences for *Princess Diaries* series books.]

Question 10: Respondents were asked the number of books they read in the *Goosebumps* series and what they liked about the books.

![Graph showing preferences for *Goosebumps* series books.]

76
Part IV: Gender and race in relation to book selection

Question 11: Respondents were asked if they preferred books in which the main character was the same gender as them.

![Gender Preference Graph]

Question 12: Respondents were asked if they preferred reading books in which the main character was the same race. The protagonist in *A Single Shard* is an Asian male.

![Race Preference Graph]
Question 12.1: Respondents were asked if they preferred reading books in which the main character was the same race. The protagonist in *A Year Down Yonder* is a Caucasian female.

![Graph showing preference for books with same race main character.]

**Question 12.2:** Respondents were asked if they preferred reading books in which the main character was the same race. The protagonist in *The Best School Year Ever* is a Caucasian female.

![Graph showing preference for books with same race main character.]

78
Question 12.3: Respondents were asked if they preferred reading books in which the main character was the same race. The protagonist in Bud, Not Buddy is an African American Male.

Question 12.4: Respondents were asked if they preferred reading books in which the main character was the same race. The protagonist in Ella Enchanted is a Caucasian female.
Question 12.5: Respondents were asked if they preferred reading books in which the main character was the same race. The protagonist in *The Giver* is a Caucasian male.

![Graph](image1)

Question 12.6: Respondents were asked if they preferred reading books in which the main character was the same race. The protagonist in *The Holes* is a Caucasian male.

![Graph](image2)
Question 12.7: Respondents were asked if they preferred reading books in which the main character was the same race. The protagonists in *I Know What You Did Last Summer* are two Caucasians males and two Caucasian females.

Question 12.8: Respondents were asked if they preferred reading books in which the main character was the same race. The protagonist in *Maniac Magee* is a Caucasian male.
Question 12.9: Respondents were asked if they preferred reading books in which the main character was the same race. The protagonist in *The Midwife’s Apprentice* is a Caucasian female.

![Bar chart](chart1.png)

**Race**

*Read Midwife’s Apprentice:*
- Yes
- No
- No answer

**Race**

Question 12.10: Respondents were asked if they preferred reading books in which the main character was the same race. The protagonist in *Number the Stars* is a Caucasian/Jewish female.

![Bar chart](chart2.png)

**Race**

*Read Number the Stars:*
- Yes
- No
- No answer

82
Question 12.11: Respondents were asked if they preferred reading books in which the main character was the same race. The protagonist in *Out of Dust* is a Caucasian female.

![Graph showing race preferences for *Out of Dust*](image)

Question 12.12: Respondents were asked if they preferred reading books in which the main character was the same race. The protagonists in *The View from Saturday* are two Caucasian males, one Caucasian female, and one Indian male.

![Graph showing race preferences for *The View from Saturday*](image)
Question 12.13: Respondents were asked if they preferred reading books in which the main character was the same race. The protagonist in *Walk Two Moons* is a Native American female.

Question 12.14: Respondents were asked if they preferred reading books in which the main character was the same race. The protagonist in *Wringer* is a Caucasian male.
Question 12.15: Respondents were asked if they preferred reading books in which the main character was the same race. The protagonist in the *Harry Potter* series is a Caucasian male.

![Chart showing race distribution for Harry Potter readership.](chart1.png)

Question 12.16: Respondents were asked if they preferred reading books in which the main character was the same race. The protagonist in the *Left Behind* series is a Caucasian male.

![Chart showing race distribution for Left Behind readership.](chart2.png)
Question 12.17: Respondents were asked if they preferred reading books in which the main character was the same race. The protagonist in the Captain Underpants series is a Caucasian male.

![Chart showing reading habits by race for Captain Underpants series](image1)

Question 12.18: Respondents were asked if they preferred reading books in which the main character was the same race. The protagonist in the American Girls series is a Caucasian female.

![Chart showing reading habits by race for American Girls series](image2)
Question 12.19: Respondents were asked if they preferred reading books in which the main character was the same race. The protagonist in the *Princess Diaries* series is a Caucasian female.

Question 12.20: Respondents were asked if they preferred reading books in which the main character was the same race. The protagonist in the *Goosebumps* series is a Caucasian male.
Question 13: Respondents were asked what is their favorite book and why is it their favorite book of all-time.

Summary

In today’s society, best-selling children’s literature is that which celebrates realism. Ever since the 1920s – 1960s, children have enjoyed realistic content and characterization in children’s books. That same desire for realism in children’s literature still exists today. Children enjoy reading about experiences that they are exposed to daily. They like to see how someone else handles a problem that they themselves might be coping with. Most of all, they realize that they are not the only ones dealing with a certain issue. While Harry Potter is a mystical book about fantasy there are experiences within the story that children can identify with and apply to their own lives. According to Giorgis and Johnson (99/00), there is both comfort and acknowledgement when readers discover books that remind them of familiar places, people, and things, and of situations they have experienced in their own lives. Such books do not need to replicate an experience or mirror specific people for readers to make connections. A book elicits
natural personal responses when story content feels familiar or when an experience or character is so well described that a reader thinks "this reminds me of...".

Besides the need for realism in children's literature, the study has identified three other emerging themes found throughout all the literature examined:

(1) Children like to feel in control of their lives; they relish the idea of being independent. A majority of the books examined depict parents who are dead or absent. Gone are the days when storybooks resembled the nuclear family and extended families. In today's literary society, more alternative families are being represented. Separation, single-parent family, and divorce are often the new backdrop in stories. Furthermore, "fathers seemed to have emerged as the important caregiver in a number of recent Newbery books, often against their wills or in spite of themselves. Gallo (1997) reported an increase in the incidence of single-parent families in children's novels of the 80's and early 90's" (Vardell, 2001).

(2) A majority of the stories in the books examined take place within a school setting. Because children spend at least six hours each weekday in school, they have intimate knowledge of the setting and the workings of school. They love to hear school stories, which tend to be humorous and show characters doing things they might like to do (Mitchell, 2003). Even though schools in the real world are notorious for being unpopular with children, most actually love school and for one main reason — being with other children. Books about schools have always been popular with kids (Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 2001, p.2).

(3) Being accepted by their peers is an issue that is commonly seen within stories based in a school environment, neighborhoods, clubhouses, and summer camps. Another focal point is the development of close friendships. Adolescents at this age are confused about who they are as individuals. Meanwhile, in the midst of trying to mature into positive, confident, self-assured
children, they rely heavily on the relationships they build with their peers. As stated by
(Tennison & Brown, 1990), developing close friendships is another focus of stories about peer
relationships. Friends may be of the same sex or the opposite sex, of the same age or a very
different age, or of the same culture or a different culture. A concern for friendship and how to be
a good friend to someone are shared traits of these stories (p.148).

Conclusions

To summarize, the common factors underlying best-selling children’s books are (1)
realism about the current problems in today’s society; (2) the presence of an alternative family;
(3) classroom setting; (4) development of peer groups and friendships. Having surveyed 410
respondents, the author has also identified that certain topics have just as wide of an appeal.
Child readers are also attracted to action, suspense, humor, and surprise. The majority of the
respondents read Captain Underpants because they enjoyed the humor. In Harry Potter, it was
the magical concept. As for Goosebumps, an overwhelming number of children stated they liked
the feeling of being scared.

Multiculturalism, gender, and religion are not factors when children make their book
selection. They are more interested in the cover and the free giveaways that may accompany the
book. However, even though the respondents stated that they enjoyed reading books about their
own gender or where the protagonist resembles them – the author did not see these results
reflected in the overall study.
After further examination, the author cannot conclude that book sales alone indicate the
popularity of a book. The majority of respondents in the study stated that the books they read
were provided through the library, with the exception of *Holes* and *I Know What You Did Last
Summer*, which held the highest numbers for books purchased. A reason for this, as reflected in a
recent study by *Publisher’s Weekly* magazine, is that tie-ins to popular movies or television shows
and series books, particularly those with supernatural or horror themes, were among the best-
selling children’s books (Huck, 2001, p.34). This also held true in the author’s study. The results
show that when the respondents were asked, “Why did you read this book?” the two most popular
answers for *I Know What You Did Last Summer* and *Holes* were because of the movie version.
The second most popular answer to that question was homework – children read the books
because they were assigned as homework.

And is there value in being selected for the Newbery award medal? While it doesn’t
matter to children - parents, teachers, authors, and librarians rely highly on the Newbery list. In
table 1.2, notice that any book that is not a series or movie adaptation is a Newbery winner. Also
notice that 12 out of the 15 books that received the Newbery medal went on to become a best-
selling book that same year and years to follow. A Newbery award is a great accomplishment if
an author can achieve it. However, after reviewing the Newbery awards list from prior years it is
also fair to say that the Newbery committee selects authors that have won in previous years. Lois
Lowry won in 1989 for *Number the Stars* and again in 1993 for *The Giver*; the same holds true
for Jerry Spinelli, who won in 1990 for *Maniac Magee* and then in 1997 for *Wringer*. With
favoritism being shown to seasoned artists and the lack of publishing houses picking up new
writers, this doesn’t leave much hope for an aspiring children’s writer.
It has been predicted that the years ahead will be challenging ones for children's book publishers and libraries facing funding cutbacks due to a weak economy. Only one thing is for certain—a new Harry Potter book is due out this summer and the kids can't wait. So while it won't be on any summer reading list with the latest Newbery winner, *Because of Winn Dixie* (a movie adaptation was released earlier this year), it is the most highly anticipated series book and soon to be bestseller.


Contemporary Authors Online (2003). Retrieved November 9, 2003 from online database Literature Resource Center database Gale on the World Wide Web:
http://www.galenet.com/secret/LitRC?vsn=3&GP=contains&locID=selenhallu
&srchp=ahrt&ca=1&c=1&stab=1&ast=3&tab=4&hstr=arp&al=1128762&n=1
&docNum=H:000130189&ST=J.K.+Rowling&bContents=2703#Writings.


http://web23.epnet.com


http://weblinks2.epnet.com


line database Academic Search Premier on the World Wide Web:
http://web22.epnet.com,
http://www.amazon.com
http://slate.msn.com/?id=3504
CHILDREN'S LITERATURE


### Note-taking
Sample Notes Form:

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<th>Field</th>
<th>Content</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publisher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Reviews</td>
<td>BBBB Booklist</td>
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<td>Horn Book</td>
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<td></td>
<td>FW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SLJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Summary:**
- **Characters:**
- **Pros:**
- **Cons/Concerns:**
- **Other Comments:**

### Criteria
- Interpretation of the theme or concept
- Presentation of information including accuracy, clarity, and organization
- Development of a plot
- Delineation of characters
- Delineation of setting
- Appropriateness of style

The committee should keep in mind that the award is for literary quality and quality presentation for children.
APPENDIX B: Letter to Parents
April 2014

Dear Parents:

I am writing to introduce myself and to ask for your assistance. I am a graduate student enrolled in the Master of Arts in Corporate and Public Communication program at Seton Hall University. As such, I am required to complete a thesis for graduation. My chosen thesis, entitled "Building the Formula for Success in Children’s Literature," is largely dependent on the reading preferences of children. Therefore, I am requesting your permission to have the students enrolled in grades fourth through seventh take part in a brief survey.

Each student will be asked to complete a questionnaire based on their opinion of some of today’s best-selling novels. In addition, students will be asked to provide demographic information including their gender, grade level, race, and age. The results will help to identify the factors that go into writing successful children’s literature. The survey should take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. Students’ names will not be used on the questionnaires and all responses will be kept anonymous.

Please return the completed forms to your classroom teacher no later than Friday, April 31, 2014.

In December, a copy of the thesis will be available online by visiting Seton Hall’s website at [http://library.shu.edu/thesis.htm](http://library.shu.edu/thesis.htm).

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Zenja Quarles
APPENDIX C: Questionnaire
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<th>Number</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Circle Yes or No</th>
<th>Did You Like the Book? Circle Yes or No</th>
<th>Why Did You Like/Not Like This Book?</th>
<th>How Do You Rate This Book? (Rate 1-5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A Single Shard by Louis Sachar</td>
<td>Yes of No</td>
<td>Yes of No</td>
<td>A - B - C - D - E - F - G</td>
<td>A - B - C - D</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>A Year Down Yonder by Ronald Peck</td>
<td>Yes of No</td>
<td>Yes of No</td>
<td>A - B - C - D - E - F - G</td>
<td>A - B - C - D</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Antz: Junior Novelization by Ellen Weiss</td>
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<td>Yes of No</td>
<td>A - B - C - D - E - F - G</td>
<td>A - B - C - D</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>The Bear School Year Ever by Barbara Robinson</td>
<td>Yes of No</td>
<td>Yes of No</td>
<td>A - B - C - D - E - F - G</td>
<td>A - B - C - D</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Bud, Not Buddy by Christopher Paul Curtis</td>
<td>Yes of No</td>
<td>Yes of No</td>
<td>A - B - C - D - E - F - G</td>
<td>A - B - C - D</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Elf Enchanted by Jeff Cohen Levine</td>
<td>Yes of No</td>
<td>Yes of No</td>
<td>A - B - C - D - E - F - G</td>
<td>A - B - C - D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Fantastical Repeats and Where to Find Them by J.K. Rowling</td>
<td>Yes of No</td>
<td>Yes of No</td>
<td>A - B - C - D - E - F - G</td>
<td>A - B - C - D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>The Giver by Lois Lowry</td>
<td>Yes of No</td>
<td>Yes of No</td>
<td>A - B - C - D - E - F - G</td>
<td>A - B - C - D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Holes by Louis Sachar</td>
<td>Yes of No</td>
<td>Yes of No</td>
<td>A - B - C - D - E - F - G</td>
<td>A - B - C - D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>I Know What You Did Last Summer by Lurl. Quentin</td>
<td>Yes of No</td>
<td>Yes of No</td>
<td>A - B - C - D - E - F - G</td>
<td>A - B - C - D</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Maniac Magee by Jerry Spinelli</td>
<td>Yes of No</td>
<td>Yes of No</td>
<td>A - B - C - D - E - F - G</td>
<td>A - B - C - D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Math Curse by Jon Scieszka</td>
<td>Yes of No</td>
<td>Yes of No</td>
<td>A - B - C - D - E - F - G</td>
<td>A - B - C - D</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>The Missing Vampires by Skip Cooper</td>
<td>Yes of No</td>
<td>Yes of No</td>
<td>A - B - C - D - E - F - G</td>
<td>A - B - C - D</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Number the Stars by Lurl. Lowry</td>
<td>Yes of No</td>
<td>Yes of No</td>
<td>A - B - C - D - E - F - G</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Out of Dust by Karen Hesse</td>
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<td>Yes of No</td>
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<td>A - B - C - D</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Quidditch Through the Ages by J.K. Rowling</td>
<td>Yes of No</td>
<td>Yes of No</td>
<td>A - B - C - D - E - F - G</td>
<td>A - B - C - D</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>The View from Saturday by E.L. Konigsburg</td>
<td>Yes of No</td>
<td>Yes of No</td>
<td>A - B - C - D - E - F - G</td>
<td>A - B - C - D</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Sticks Two Moons by Shannon Cratch</td>
<td>Yes of No</td>
<td>Yes of No</td>
<td>A - B - C - D - E - F - G</td>
<td>A - B - C - D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Whiffen by Jerry Spinelli</td>
<td>Yes of No</td>
<td>Yes of No</td>
<td>A - B - C - D - E - F - G</td>
<td>A - B - C - D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Circle your gender:  **Male**  Female  
2. Circle your grade level:  4th  5th  6th  7th  Other  
3. Circle your age:  9  10  11  12  Other  
Hispanic (Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Latin, Spanish, Mexican)  Indian  Middle Eastern  Native American  West Indian/Caribbean  Other  
5. What is your religion?  
6. How many Harry Potter books have you read? ___ What did you like about the Harry Potter series?  
7. How many Left Behind books have you read? ___ What did you like about the Left Behind series?  
8. How many Captain Underpants books have you read? ___ What did you like about the Captain Underpants series?  
9. How many American Girls books have you read? ___ What did you like about the American Girls series?  
10. How many Princess Diaries books have you read? ___ What did you like about the Princess Diaries series?  
11. How many Goosebumps books have you read? ___ What did you like about the Goosebumps series?  

**Please circle the best answer.**  
12. Do you read more books where the main character is the same gender as you?  **Yes** or **No**  
13. Do you read more where the main character is the same race as you?  **Yes** or **No**  
14. My all-time favorite book is  __________________________. Tell me what makes this your favorite book?