

**Teaching Topics of Interest: Narrowing the Gap  
in Reading Comprehension Performance**

ABSTRACT

This literature review examines research on how selecting topics of interest to male students can improve their reading comprehension. Twelve empirical studies ranging from the 1974 through 2005 are reviewed chronologically. Early research indicates a strong relationship between reading comprehension scores and the level of male interest in the subject being tested. However, more recent research suggests that a male student's interest in the reading topic does not necessarily predict his success on reading comprehension measures. Cognitive schemas, biology, and societal values each factor into the gap between males and females in reading comprehension. Reading comprehension can be improved by a variety of pedagogical approaches. Three qualitative studies are examined to create a composite of best practices in the classroom. Best approaches include creating a balanced diet of reading material for both female and male students, understanding boys as individuals, and employing strategies that increase students' sense of self-efficacy as readers. Limitations of all studies are discussed, and suggestions are made for future research.

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Literature Review

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## Introduction

The appreciable gap between male and female literacy scores has been the source of much attention throughout the past thirty years. Having sat in classrooms full of disinterested boys in a recent practicum, I wondered if the problem of poor reading comprehension in boys is widespread, and if so, will high interest texts increase their reading comprehension scores and narrow the gap between male and female readers? These questions are the foundation for a review of empirical and qualitative studies that address the issue of male and female reading comprehension scores (RCS).

The federally commissioned National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), otherwise known as the Nation's Report Card, has been watching the gender gap in reading comprehension for thirty years. Literacy tests rate reading comprehension on a score of 1-500. The NAEP's standard for reading comprehension is a modest 250/500 points. According to the 2000 National Center for Education Statistics, 87% of girls scored at least a 250, compared to 77% of boys. This gap widens to higher percentages when looking at scores above 250. Scores between boys and girls have not improved since 1971: the 10% spread has been consistent for 30 years (2001).

In American ELA classrooms, boys account for a high percentage of problem readers. Allen estimates that 90% of problem readers are male (1977), and gives possible explanations for this problem. He argues the low RCS are caused primarily by boys' low interest levels in the text selected, but goes on to say that the problem is more complex than simply text selection: it is a function of socio-cultural expectations associated with being male or female; the classroom environment which favors inactive, quiet responses; and the earlier maturation of girls.

Research conducted in the 1970's indicates that boys' reading comprehension scores can be increased by giving them texts of higher interest. These older studies answer my question: if boys are interested in texts, their RCS will improve. Later research, however,

points to multiple complex factors that influence how boys comprehend text. Boys' RCS are influenced by much more than text selection.

## **Method**

To determine whether higher interest texts increase boys' RCS, I searched for empirical research that examined this factor in isolation. To do so, I searched Google Scholar and the ERIC database to find studies from 1970 through 2007 that isolated this factor using search terms that included "reading comprehension," "gender gaps," "text selection," and "high interest text." Beginning in 1974, studies showed a positive correlation between text interest and male RCS. Later studies year timeline further research called this correlation into question. Beginning in 1996, research began to examine other factors associated with male RCS, including cognitive schemas, biology, and social issues.

This review encompasses eight primary empirical studies on text interest, specific text topics, and cognitive schemas. Three secondary sources are referenced to provide a background for biology and social issues, and two pedagogical sources are referenced to provide application for the classroom.

## **Organization of Paper:**

This paper will chronologically examine the last thirty years of research on boys and reading comprehension. Since text selection is a frequent topic of discussion in the MAT/Adolescence Education English program, I isolate early empirical studies on this factor and gradually progress to examine more complex and qualitative studies on cognitive, biological and social factors affecting male reading comprehension. Throughout each section, research on each factor is evaluated. Following discussion of research on the factors influencing male RCS, best practices implicated by their results will be discussed.

## **Factors Influencing Male RCS**

### *Early Studies: The Correlation Between High Interest Text and Male R C S*

Landmark studies correlating high text interest with male RCS were done in the 1970's. Seminal research by Steven Asher and Richard Markell in 1974 was the first to empirically test this relationship. Eighty-seven fifth-grade students with differential scores between sexes (22.54 and 28.68 for boys and girls, respectively) were asked to look at and rate pictures on a scale of one to seven indicating their interest in the item pictured. Reading passages were associated with the pictures, and each student was given an individualized comprehension test on both his/her three highest and three lowest topics of interest. RCS was then assessed by asking students to fill in missing words in paragraphs relating to the topics of strong interest/disinterest. Boys' reading comprehension was significantly improved on topics high interest. Girls' reading comprehension was relatively unaffected by the interest level of the material. The data suggest that using high-interest reading materials improves boys' RCS.

After his initial research correlating interest with improved RCS in boys, Asher wanted to examine specific gender-constructed factors within topics of interest that may increase male interest in topics (1975). First, Asher wanted to see if traditionally masculine themes in literature correlated with a higher interest level among boys, and if feminine themes were responsible for higher interest level among girls. He found that masculine themes were correlated with interest level in boys, but these same themes did not generate increased interest levels in girls. Boys' RCS increased when they were tested on masculine themes, reinforcing the positive correlation between interest and boys' RCS. During his 1975 study, Asher also sought to correlate familiarity of vocabulary terms with text interest in males vs. females, determining that there is no correlation between vocabulary familiarity and interest in either boys or girls (1975). In a 1977 study, Asher confirmed that higher interest in text related to higher RCS in males, but not in females. In this study, Asher also examined another variable, the sex of the teacher. He found no significant relationship between the sex of the teacher and RCS in boys and in girls (1977).

Later studies examined the effect of sex-typed reading on male/female RCS, negating the relationship between RCS and text interest. In 1979 study, Klein's found that boys were more interested in stories about male and female characters whose occupation was stereotypically male. Girls, by contrast, had no preference for stories with sex-typed occupations. Boys' interest in stories containing male sex-typed occupations did not improve their RCS. Girls' RCS did improve on stories with stereotypically female sex-typed occupations, despite their lack of interest in these texts.

Gardiner designed a study similar to Klein's in 1983 determine if text interest and RCS correlated with gender-typed occupations (1983). Selecting four stories designed with male or female characters occupying gender-typed occupational roles, students indicated their interest in the stories on a six-point scale and subsequently took a reading comprehension test on each story. Both studies found that sex-typed roles increase boys' interest in reading, but this interest did not improve their RCS. Girls' interest in text was not influenced by sex-typed roles. Both Klein and Gardner both concluded that literature based on gender-typed occupations increases interest in boys; but just because sex-typing promotes interest, it does not improve RCS. These studies negate correlation between text interest with RCS.

Studies done on male RCS and text interest in standardized test text selection also fail to confirm a correlation between male students' interest in text and their RCS. Early studies implied that achievement tests are biased against boys since they do not provide texts that are of interest to boys, and thus do not allow boys to demonstrate their true capabilities (Asher, 1974). However, this conclusion was not tested empirically until the 2000's. Babbit Bray and Baron studied the correlation between text interest and RCS on standardized tests. They had students rate their interest on all texts selected for a standardized test, then take the test to determine if text interest is a factor of RCS between boys and girls (2004). High interest texts were correlated with higher RCS scores for both genders. However, interest was a stronger predictor of test performance for girls than it was for boys. Furthermore, both male and female students with the highest scores were the least interested in its subject matter. Both male and female students with greater breadth of vocabulary also had higher RCS, which contradicts earlier studies that found that vocabulary does not increase RCS. Male RCS do not improve with high interest texts; verbal ability and overall reading skill level increase RCS in both girls and boys.

- *Evaluation of Studies on the Correlation between Text Interest and RCS*

There are several limitations in the initial studies on male and female RCS. First, all studies were limited in that the subjects were white, suburban students of higher socio-economic status. Further studies isolating text interest and RCS could be done in schools with varied race and economic status. Second, the studies involve multiple cultures (Canadian and American) and multiple age groups (fifth grade and eleventh grade), making it difficult to draw concrete parallels between them. Third, studies are based solely upon texts that reflect objects and occupations culturally stereotyped as masculine or feminine. No gender-neutral topics were assessed for text interest and RCS. As later studies indicate, sex-typed content should be treated as a separate variable for its effect on reading comprehension scores. Societal expectations of boys and girls have changed from the 1970's to the present; it would be interesting review literature studying how social expectations have affected text interest between genders over time.

### *Specific Topics of Interest and Male RCS*

Several studies have sought to identify which specific topics are associated with higher interest in male students. Surveying 157 middle school students in a Southeastern state, Higginbotham hypothesized that there would be significant differences between categorical interests by gender (1999). She created a fictional list of non-existent titles, defining their category and asked students to rate their interest in the titles based on a scale of one to four, one being definitely not read to four, definitely read. As expected, boys' and girls' reading interests were highly associated with societal stereotypes. Boys preferred topics on sports and science, while girls preferred romance, friendship, animal stories, adventure and historical fiction. Males also had a stronger preference for non-fiction, utilitarian texts than females, who were interested in narrative text. This study did not seek to correlate reading interest with RCS, but it is interesting to understand what types of literature motivate male and female students to read.

In interviews with thirty Canadian, middle-school male students, Freedman examined the relationship of male RCS to reading enjoyment (2003). Questions were designed to measure male attitudes toward reading in relationship to test scores in six schools, three of which had low male RCS, and three of which had higher male RCS. Of the males who had high scores on mandatory reading comprehension tests, 70% of the boys stated that they enjoyed reading, compared to only 30% in the schools where boys underperformed. Students who performed well on tests consider themselves readers who enjoy reading on their own time. From this

study, we can infer that teachers need to foster positive attitudes toward reading in order to increase boys' RCS by including non-fiction text in their classroom - material that serves a purpose or gives information as found in magazines, newspapers, instructional manuals, and the internet. Comic books, graphic novels, and adventure/fantasy books should also be part of the ELA curriculum. Text interest is correlated with reading enjoyment, which in turn leads to higher RCS.

Other researchers such as Pomplun have chosen specific topics of interest to boys and examined them in depth (2001). Pomplun's research responds to the allegation that war-related text in reading comprehension tests is biased against females who approach the subject of war in ways that are vastly different from males. He suggests that the origins of these differences may start at an early age and are dictated by societal expectations. Young girls tell stories concerned with stable and harmonious social relationships, whereas boys of the same age tell stories of active violence, conflict, and destruction. Into adulthood, personal journals by women focus on people-oriented themes, and journals by men focus on action and conflict. As a result, women may be less interested and not develop as much prior knowledge about the military and wars as men (Pomplun, 2001). Pomplun found that despite their different level of interest and perspectives of war, females and males do not show differential scores on RCS based on war-related text questions. This provides further evidence that text interest does not necessarily increase RCS.

- *Evaluation of studies on topics of interest to males and females*

Higgenbotham and Freedman's studies were limited in that all of their studies were male, and did not address social factors that may be influencing interest. Higgenbotham and Freedman also failed to discuss the relationship of text interest to RCS. Studies investigating the relationship between female interests and reading enjoyment could serve to help teachers better understand how to balance text selection between male and female interests. Further studies could also be conducted to determine if prior knowledge of a text type exists between males and females, and if this prior knowledge influences RCS.

The studies I have discussed up to this point simplify the issue of male RCS, focusing narrowly on the correlation between text interest/enjoyment and RCS. Results from these studies imply that the issue of male RCS is much more complex; many factors aside from text selection influence male RCS. The review now turns to research examining cognitive factors, biological considerations, and societal dynamics.

## *Cognitive Styles across Gender*

In recent years, researchers have begun to investigate additional factors that influence male and female RCS. Empirical studies seek to understand whether RCS are related more to gender interests or to cognitive learning styles.

RCS may be a factor of both gender interest and learning styles. To determine which of these factors has greater bearing on RCS, Hite (2004) examines both factors. Prior research indicated that boys have lower interest in texts with social content than in texts with informational content. If interest correlates positively with RCS, male students should show lower RCS on text with social content. Hite designed an empirical test to determine if lower interest social content texts lead to lower RCS in males or if cognitive schemas are a greater factor (2004). The results surprisingly indicate that males' RCS on text with social content was equal to RCS of females. However, on texts with non-social content (i.e., informational content), girls performed lower than boys. Hite postulates that RCS on non-social text items are influenced by learning schemas as opposed to interest. Field Independence (FI) schemas (those which involve looking objectively at a problem without connecting it to external influences or previous experience) are needed to comprehend non-social text. Since boys are socially encouraged to think for themselves without taking into account the opinions of others, they naturally access FI schemas required to interpret texts with non-social content. By contrast, girls are socialized to interpret information based on people and situations outside of themselves; Field Dependence (FD) schemas use external, social factors to interpret text, and are more naturally suited to the socialization pattern of girls. Thus, girls are less cognitively able than boys to informational text because of societal factors that impact their learning style. The implications of this study indicate that by balancing text selection to include non-narrative text, teachers could help girls develop FI cognitive abilities, improving their RCS on these texts. Balancing texts between narrative and non-narrative benefits both boys and girls.

Other researchers have grouped readers by characteristic ways of thinking. Graduate students in Manzo's study were asked to classify themselves as one of four distinct subtypes (2000). Among Manzo's subjects, few perceived themselves as developmentally mature readers who comprehend male or female orientated texts with the same proficiency. Most of Manzo's participants classified themselves into one of two reader subtypes that seemed to have a strong correlation with gender. Males indicated a preference for and

proficiency with informational text; females indicated a preference for and proficiency with narrative text. Manzo also found that male subjects indicated a higher level of self-doubt regarding their reading ability. Even at higher levels of education, there appears to be a socially dictated difference in how males and females perceive themselves as readers.

- *Evaluation of research on cognitive styles*

Both Hite and Manzo link text interest to cognitive subtypes. Differential RCS scores between males and females are highly correlated with readers perceived or real learning styles. The two studies are highly empirical and acknowledge the complexity of RCS. However, these studies are limited in that they focus on suburban, Caucasian, higher socio-economical populations. Hite's participants were Juniors and Seniors in college, and Manzo's participants were graduate students. Further research could be conducted to determine if there is a difference between graduate students and persons of the same age who have not pursued a college education.

### ***Biological Determinism vs. Social Constructivism***

Contemporary research on the gap between boys and girls in reading comprehension exists on a continuum between biological determinism to social constructivism. Biological determinism believes that boys are "hard-wired for certain behaviors" (Gurian, 1996). This theory postulates that biologically, boys are more aggressive, more active, and less empathetic than girls. Boys have three times more reading difficulties than girls because they do not draw heavily on both sides of the brain at once to interpret text. Biological determinism seems to imply that certain reading abilities are driven by physiology and are relatively unchangeable. According to this theory, classrooms should give boys ample freedom to express their maleness with activities that are physical and competitive. In doing so, teachers help them learn to use both sides of their brain.

Empirical studies in cognitive theory argue that reading interests and comprehension are not driven by biology, but instead are determined by societal tendencies. Hite contends that gender tendencies in Field Orientation are not genetic, but driven by cultural expectations and norms (2004). Males are encouraged from a young age to look objectively at problems, while girls are expected to look at the people around them to gain an understanding of problems. As Day observes, people tend to use their life experiences to interpret texts, and both sexes bring into reading their own history and identification with gender-based stereotypes (1994). Girls respond to narratives by entering into them, relating the experiences of characters to their own lives. Boys tend to watch the narrative at a distance without identifying with the characters or situations in the texts. Cognitive theorists conclude that by using a variety of texts, teachers acknowledge socially dictated gender-roles, and can assist both boys and girls to develop new thinking strategies that will benefit both of the sexes. By separating texts into male/female interests, we may be discouraging boys from reading traditional literature that is often social in nature. Conversely, we may be discouraging girls to read more utilitarian texts that could enrich their FI thinking strategies.

Social constructivism also argues that male RCS have less to do with biology and more to do with a socially constructed picture of gender and reading. Boys have come to rely on unbalanced models of masculinity, which abound in media, peer interactions, and popular culture. Sex role standards create gender imbalances and contribute to male students' lack of interest in reading and writing. Girls may score well on reading comprehension tests regardless of their interest in a topic because of a cultural perception that reading is appropriate for females, but boys may need the additional incentive of high interest material to overcome the fact that our society deems reading to be a feminine, not a masculine, activity (Asher, 1974). As Freedman found, boys believe strongly that males and females read different things, ascribing animals and teen idols as the top two topics of interest to girls and sports, science, and utilitarian texts to boys. Furthermore, Freedman notes that boys have fewer male role models in their households that demonstrate an interest in reading and are read to less than girls in during formative childhood years (2003).

Several researchers emphasize that the differences between boys and girls reading comprehensions are driven by societal expectations (Blackburn, 2005; Pirie 2002; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). This research, which relies on focus groups and interviews, demonstrates how the beliefs and behaviors of boys toward reading are defined not by innate tendencies implied by biological determinism, but by social expectations of gender appropriate reading material. Blackburn urges teachers to not succumb to this socially dictated dichotomy by teaching to boy and girl interests, but to counter these expectations by presenting diverse literature to all students (2005). She argues

that by segmenting boy and girl topics of interest, we encourage sexism in the ELA classroom - a continued sense of what is male and what is female reading material. Blackburn says that by looking at the continuum of socially defined masculine to feminine texts and discussing biases found in them, we encourage diversity, multiplicity, variability, and complexity in male and female students (2005). Students learn to be aware of how social expectations influence their perception of texts and learn to appreciate variety in literature.

Teachers and staff also need to be aware of their own ideas about gender and expectations of boys and girls. According to Allen, boys are not, universally speaking, poorer readers than girls. (1977). Teacher expectations are often self-fulfilling prophecies (Rosenthal, 1974), and if teachers accept the fact that boys are less capable readers, they will generally be less capable readers. In *Teenage Boys and High School English*, Pirie (2002) cautions teachers not to treat all boys as a homogenous group that requires on sex-specific strategy to help improve RCS. He adds, “We must be prepared for the likelihood that strategies intended to help boys will also benefit many girls.” (p. 19)

- *Evaluation of Biological Determinism and Social Constructivism Research*

Gurian, Pirie, Allen, and Blackburn lack empirical data to support their claims, with most of their observations based on small sample sizes of homogenous populations. Blackburn. It seems difficult to gather data on the subject of gender and reading as it relates to cultural stereotypes. Research in social constructivism fails to concretely link low male RCS to gender-role assignments; this is an area for future research.

One of the most extensive studies on boys and reading was done by Smith and Wilhelm in their classic pedagogical work, *Reading Don't Fix no Chevys* (2002). In this qualitative study, Smith and Wilhelm interviewed 48 boys to determine what factors influence their ability to interact with and interpret texts. Of all of the social constructivist research reviewed, this was the most extensive, analyzing discussions with participants who were racially and socio-economically diverse, in both urban and rural environments. This text discusses specific social factors that influence literacy in boys, and offers practical advice for teachers who want to build male students' skills as readers. Their advice lays the foundation for a discussion on teacher practice.

## **Classroom Solutions: How to Engage Boys as Readers**

Smith and Wilhelm arrived at a number of conclusions that are worth noting in this review. Based on their interviews and classroom interactions, they make the following key observations:

- Boys take longer to learn to read than girls do.
- Boys read less than girls read.
- Boys generally provide lower estimations of their reading abilities than girls do.
- Boys value reading as an activity less than girls do.
- Boys have much less interest in leisure reading and are far more likely to read for utilitarian purposes than girls are.
- Significantly more boys than girls declare themselves “nonreaders.”
- Boys spend less time reading and express less enthusiasm for reading than girls do.
- Boys increasingly consider themselves to be “nonreaders” as they get older; very few designate themselves as such early in their schooling, but nearly 50 percent make that designation by high school.
- Boys and girls express interest in reading different things, and they do read different things.
- Boys are less likely to talk about or overtly respond to their reading than girls are.
- Boys prefer active responses to reading in which they physically act out responses, do or make something. (Smith, 2002)

Based on these observations, Smith and Wilhelm offer suggestions for teachers to enhance the reading lives of boys.

*1. Get to know your students.* Understanding boys and their interests should influence text selection and curriculum development. By asking students to complete questionnaires at the beginning of the year such as the one found in Appendix A, teachers can get to know who they are as individuals.

*2. Balance text selection* to encourage boys to develop new skills with narrative tasks, and to encourage girls to develop analysis associated with non-fiction texts.

3. *Teach students how to read the text before assigning it* to give them a sense of competence going into the reading. Males have a strong need to feel competent about what they read. This is referred to as frontloading and it allows students to see what they already understand about the text before they read it. Recommended frontloading strategies are shown in Appendix B.

4. *Give students tools to help them as they read.* By asking students to employ reading strategies as they experience texts, teachers can help boys relate to text experientially rather than to observe it from a distance. Teachers should ask students to fill out a reading worksheet as they read such as the one I have included in Appendix C.

5. *Help boys make connections with text through activities* such as drama, inquiry, and small group discussions. Offering specific discussion questions such as those listed in Appendix D can increase student awareness of gender-role assignment in literature. It allows boys to engage in discussions that relate reading material to their personal experience.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations for Further Study**

According to the majority of the studies in this review, teachers cannot improve RCS among male students simply by integrating texts of high interest to boys. The issue of male RCS is much more complex, involving cognitive, biological, and sociological factors.

Repeatedly in the literature, researchers note that reading comprehension is a larger issue for boys from lower socio-economic background, visible minorities, and boys who are learning disabled. Not all boys have low RCS; white, privileged boys tend to have high comprehension scores. As income and status rise, the gendered differences in reading comprehension are minimized. More studies should be done to determine which boys are having difficulty and what the likely sources of the trouble are (Freedman, 2003).

Research that works with lower income and minority populations may give a more accurate understanding of the gap in RCS between genders.

While nearly all studies allude to the fact that cultural definitions of gender dictate who boys are as readers, there are few empirical studies that examine teacher gender bias and its effect on reading comprehension in males. This is one crucial point that could be further studied. There are many commentaries and articles about this subject, but none of them actually test how teacher bias operates on the RCS gender gap.

Boys' literacy is strongly affected by societal expectations. As teachers, we need to bring these biases to light, presenting a balanced diet of both narrative and non-fiction texts. But we also need to know our students as individuals, whether they are male or female, and their interests should be acknowledged as we select texts to be studied. It's important to allow students' interests to have a voice in our selection of literature. In Appendix E, I have included a sample unit plan that can be used to engage students as readers in self-selected literature.

By understanding the needs of young men in our classroom, we can narrow the gap between sexes in RCS. The strategies that work best, however, benefit both males and females as they progress toward greater levels of literacy.

## Appendix A: Survey of Students' Interests

### Activity Ranking Sheet:

Please rank the following activities in the order that you like them. Put a 1 next to the activity you like most, moving down to a 14 for the activity you like the least.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Listening to music
- \_\_\_\_\_ Hanging out with friends
- \_\_\_\_\_ Playing sports
- \_\_\_\_\_ Playing video games
- \_\_\_\_\_ Doing something mechanical, like fixing an engine
- \_\_\_\_\_ Drawing, painting, or cartooning

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Reading a good book

\_\_\_\_\_

Watching a favorite sports team on TV or at the stadium

\_\_\_\_\_

Surfing the net

\_\_\_\_\_

Learning something new about a topic that interests me

\_\_\_\_\_

Working on a hobby (Please specify your hobby \_\_\_\_\_)

\_\_\_\_\_

Going to school

\_\_\_\_\_

Watching television or going to the movies

\_\_\_\_\_

Other:

\_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix B: Frontloading Strategies

Introduce the text utilizing discussion or a brief writing assignment to discover what students know about the topic or theme. This allows us to focus the lesson to the students' needs. It's a time saver since we are teaching what we KNOW the students need.

- Show a video clip of a related topic.
- For non-fiction reading, prepare an anticipation guide.
- Listen to a song on a related topic.
- With older students, read aloud from a children's book.
- Make a connection to a previous reading or personal experience.
- Discuss a "hypothetical" situation asking students to consider what they might do in a similar situation.
- Use photographs or artwork to introduce story themes
- Read a poem with similar ideas and discuss it.

Strategy: **Previewing: Taking a Close Look at the Assignment.**

Give students the chance to discover for themselves what an assigned text might be about.

- Encourage them to examine the cover of a book and discuss the artwork.

- Read critical comments from the back of the book.
- Discuss the book title exploring why the author may have selected it.
- Look for chapter titles, subtitles, and graphic aids.
- Examine the title and copyright pages.
- Note and discuss dedications and contemplate why the author might have made this decision.
- Make **predictions** about what our expectations for reading might be based on our preview.

-Taken from “Strategies for Teaching Reading,” Tennessee Department of Education Website is replete with ideas for teaching struggling readers. <http://www.state.tn.us/education/ci/cistandards2001/la/cilarstrateteachread.htm>

## Appendix C: Reading Strategies

### Reading/Thinking Strategies

What did you think about when you read the assigned text?

<b>Predict/Speculate</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I think that ... is going to ....</li><li>•</li></ul>	
<b>Observe</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I think that this would be like....</li><li>• This is like/different from...because ....</li><li>• I see that ... is ....</li></ul>	
<b>Guess</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I'm not sure, but I think that ... is ....</li></ul>	
<b>Wonder</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I wonder if ... is significant because....</li><li>• I wonder how people felt about ....</li></ul>	

<b>Argue</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I don't agree that ... because....</li></ul>	
<b>Philosophize</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I think that maybe ... might mean ....</li><li>• Things seem ... when ...</li></ul>	
<b>Re-evaluate</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ok, it did (did not) work out that way because....</li><li>• That's not what I thought would ....</li></ul>	

- Adapted from: <http://www.state.tn.us/education/ci/cistandards2001/la/cilarstratteachread.htm>

## Appendix D: Sample Questions for Group Discussion

### READING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Directions: With three or four classmates, discuss the following statements and questions. Take notes on the responses you hear and be prepared to share them with the class.

#### **Change is destructive.**

Do you agree with this statement? Explain.

Can you think of a time when a major change destroyed something important in your life? Explain.

Can you think of a time when a major change improved your life? Explain.

#### **Religion restricts behavior.**

Do you agree with this statement? Explain.

Can you think of a time when religion kept you from doing something you wanted to do? Explain.

Can you think of a time when religion made your life better? Explain.

#### **Social order demands conformity.**

Do you agree with this statement? Explain.

Have you ever felt the need to go along with what others are doing? Explain.

Have you ever rebelled or felt like rebelling against what others demand of you? Explain.

**Being a man is difficult.**

What is your definition of manliness? Explain.

What pressures do men feel more strongly than women? Why do they feel these pressures? How might they react to them?

**Fear is destructive.**

Do you agree with this statement? Explain.

Has fear ever kept you from doing something you wanted to do? Explain.

Have you ever overcome any fears in your life? What would have happened if you hadn't? Explain.

**It is a son/daughter's duty to carry on family traditions.**

Do you agree with this statement? Explain.

What traditions will you carry on from your family? Explain.

What family traditions will you leave behind? Explain.

Adapted from: <http://www.state.tn.us/education/ci/cistandards2001/la/cilarstratteachread.htm>

## Appendix E: Student Selected Text: A Unit in Young Adult Literature

### LITERATURE CIRCLES: READING BY CHOICE

Unit Description: Students choose young adult novels to augment novels deemed part of the "canon" of literature. Students will choose young adult novels to read, discuss these novels in small groups, share thoughts on the novels with their classmates, and create an advertising campaign designed to encourage their classmates to read more of the novels. In addition, as they read, they maintain reflection journals or respond on messageboards via the internet. All parts of the unit combine to give students a sense of independence and a renewed love for reading.

To begin the unit, select 7-10 novels that are readily available and appropriate to my students and my purpose. Introduce students to these novels in class and allow for time in the computer lab so that students can research the novels online. Direct students to several sites other than major search engines as they research. Examples: <http://www.virtualcircle.freehomepage.com/novels.html> <http://www.amazon.com> <http://www.guysread.com>

<http://www.teanreads.com>. After researching, students choose two novels of interest and give these to me on an index card.

To create small groups: Match up students and novels based on knowledge of the novels, the students, and how the students work together. Keep circles to a size of four students, to encourage discussion from each student. Sometimes more than one group is reading the same novel.

Give students a response journal with dates and suggested topics at the front. The dates delineate when response journals will be handed in, when presentations will be made throughout the unit, and when certain parts of the reading must be complete. Student novels can be divided into sections of roughly 10-20 pages a night depending on student reading levels. Students may choose topics to address throughout the reading. Sample topics:

- Who is your favorite character in the book? Describe and tell why this character is your favorite.
- How is this book different from other books you have read?

- Have you ever found yourself in a similar situation?
- Describe one character's problem or choice. What advice would you give this character?
- Pick an action of one of the characters. Why do you think the character is acting this way?
- Copy a provocative, interesting, or important passage and comment on why you picked it.
- Would you like to be friends with the main character? Why or why not?
- Consider the setting of the story. Would you like to live during this time or at this place? Why or why not?
- Do the story events or characters remind you of real events or people? How so?
- Add your own \_\_\_\_\_

Throughout the unit, the students respond reflectively through writing and discussion, and must present their ideas in different written and visual texts to their classmates. Because of these varied responses, students of various abilities and talents all have a place to be successful, and each is allowed the choice of what to read.

Activity Description	Approx. Time
Show students novels; put in chalk tray on board. Students research texts online; they write two choices on index card and defend why these should be assigned to them. After assigning groups, read through Response Journal assignments; calendar pages, discuss dates for reading assignments.	55 minutes
Class brainstorm to create a definition for "Classic Literature" to write on first page of Response Journal—students will later compare this to a definition of "Young Adult Literature" at the end of the unit.	10 mins
After each reading section is complete, students will choose one journal topic and respond in writing either online or in their response journals to later share with students in their reading groups. Depending on which topic students choose they will be addressing goals 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.	
After first reading assignment is complete, students choose one conversation to re-enact for classmates as a mini-drama, memorize it and act in front of	At least 45 min

class	
After second reading assignment is complete, students create setting maps, including cultural contexts, for major settings in novel and present to the class.	At least 45 min
After third reading assignment is complete, students identify a conflict and present this conflict to the class visually. (I will usually not allow them to do man vs. man, as it is very easy to dramatize!)	At least 45 min
After fourth reading assignment is complete, students create an editorial cartoon depicting a concept found in the novel.	At least 45 min
After fifth reading assignment is complete, compare the themes, characters, and/or style of this work to another text of students' choice. This can be an essay, a dialogue between characters, a letter, etc.	At least 45 min
Other activities I have used include the following: find a poem that speaks to one of your characters; write a letter to one of your characters; have one character write to another character; assign famous people to play the character roles in your novel; rewrite the opening scene in the form of a drama; rewrite the opening scene in the form of a poem; write a newspaper article condensing the events of one of your chapters; pick out scene with a definitive mood from the novel and recreate the mood in a breaking news story.	At least 45 min
Students evaluate advertising in the media by watching and taking notes on TV ads, bringing in magazine ads, discussing propaganda, and researching one complete advertising campaign.	1-2 days
Students create an advertising campaign to convince other students to read their novels. The campaign includes magazine, newspaper, radio, TV, ads that must be in publishable format. Students vote for the best advertising campaign through a student-created assessment, and then choose the next novel they will read based on the presentations.	4 days
Class brainstorm to create a definition for "Young Adult Literature" to write on first page of Response Journals under "Classic Literature" definition. Students compare two definitions to answer the question "What is literature?"	20 mins

Adapted from: <http://www.state.tn.us/education/ci/cistandards2001/la/cilarstratteachread.htm>

