

Adolescents and Their Fiction: A Content Analysis of the Most Circulated Fiction Titles in Grades Six through Eight in Eleven Selected Texas School Libraries, Grades 6-8

Titles analyzed in this study in the order of popularity by weighted score:

1. <i>Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix</i>	J.K Rowling
2. <i>Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire</i>	J.K. Rowling
3. <i>The Hostile Hospital</i>	Lemony Snicket (Daniel Handler)
4. <i>The Austere Academy</i>	Lemony Snicket (Daniel Handler)
5. <i>The Bad Beginning</i>	Lemony Snicket (Daniel Handler)
6. <i>Killing Mr. Griffin</i>	Lois Duncan
7. <i>Where the Red Fern Grows</i>	Wilson Rawls
8. <i>Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone</i>	J.K. Rowling
9. <i>The Wide Window</i>	Lemony Snicket (Daniel Handler)
10. <i>Old Yeller</i>	Fred Gibson
11. <i>The Reptile Room</i>	Lemony Snicket (Daniel Handler)
12. <i>The Slippery Slope</i>	Lemony Snicket (Daniel Handler)
13. <i>Welcome to Dead House</i>	R.L. Stine
14. <i>Night of the Living Dummy</i>	R.L. Stine
15. <i>The Incredible Journey</i>	Sheila Burnford
16. <i>The Miserable Mill</i>	Lemony Snicket (Daniel Handler)
17. <i>Holes</i>	Louis Sachar
18. <i>Secret, Silent Screams</i>	Joan Lowery Nixon
19. <i>The Flunking of Joshua T. Bates</i>	Susan Shreve
20. <i>Surviving the Applewhites</i>	Stephanie S. Tolan
21. <i>Loser</i>	Jerry Spinelli
22. <i>Alice the Brave</i>	Phyllis Reynolds Naylor
23. <i>One Day at Horrorland</i>	R.L. Stine
24. <i>The Last Dog on Earth</i>	Daniel Ehrenhaft
25. <i>Alice-in-Between</i>	Phyllis Reynolds Naylor

Problem:

Reading motivation is connected to academic success and reading fluency. There is a significant, positive relationship between reading motivation and reading amount as well as text comprehension and reading amount (Guthrie, Wigfield, and Cox, 1999). Guthrie et al (1999) argue motivation increases reading amount, which in turn increases text comprehension.

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of the study was to describe the intersection of adolescent task development and the characteristics of the most circulated twenty five fiction titles in eleven selected Texas middle school libraries in grades six through eight.

Research Questions:

- Which fiction titles circulated most often in these eleven selected Texas middle school libraries, grades six through eight?
- Which of Robert Havighurst's (1972) Developmental Tasks of Adolescents as supported by contextual evidence within the narrative structure were found most frequently in the fiction titles circulating most often in these selected Texas middle school libraries, grades six through eight?

- How did the protagonist's dialogue, action, internal thought, and reputation demonstrate Havighurst's Tasks of Adolescents within the narrative structure of the twenty five most circulated titles from these selected Texas middle schools?

Method:

- ▶ 7,496 pages of circulation reports from eleven selected Texas middle schools were analyzed, which revealed the list of top twenty five novels.
- ▶ The eleven campuses represented 6,318 students who closely resembled state ethnicity data for all Texas middle schools.
- ▶ The twenty five novels were divided into categories with similar traits: dog books, *Goosebumps* series books, *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, mysteries, Alice McKinley novels, Harry Potter novels, and problem novels, with a total of 7,778 pages.
- ▶ Bibliographic information from the Library of Congress was used to describe the twenty five novels.
- ▶ The actions, dialogue, reputation and thought for each protagonist were analyzed using Robert Havighurst Adolescent Tasks as analytical constructs.
- ▶ Each novel was read and coded or recoded at least three times (23,334 pages).
- ▶ First reading: for story familiarity
 - The purpose of the first reading was to read the story and keep and narrative summary.
- ▶ Second reading: adolescent Task analysis
 - During the second reading, the researcher recorded protagonist's action, dialogue, reputation, or thought data connected to the Adolescent Tasks.
- ▶ Third reading: Structural analysis
 - The third reading served to check the previous findings and situate the data within the narrative structure.
- ▶ As each group of novels was completed, the data were tabulated in graphs and charts.
- ▶ Novel analysis notes were kept as well as a summary of results.
- ▶ As each group of novels presented some unique characteristics, the researcher chose to check the consistency of scoring with stability reliability measures using Holsti's method.
- ▶ A second coder who had a background with children's literature was trained to establish inter-coder reliability scores also using Holsti's method.

Validity

- ▶ Credibility (Guba and Lincoln, 1981): a measure of internal validity which required that the researcher identify the important concepts to be analyzed and how the data reflected these concepts.
- ▶ Transferability (Guba and Lincoln, 1981): A form of external validity that requires the researcher to make a judgment about how the findings apply to other contexts.

Reliability

- ▶ Dependability (Guba and Lincoln, 1981): as the inductive inquiry process moves forward, the researcher must use logic and reason when making changes to the process because of replicability.
- ▶ Confirmability (Guba and Lincoln, 1981): Inter-rater reliability (two or more coders). Stability reliability (Krippendorff, 2004) is the measure of the consistency of the researcher's coding (one person coding).

Results

Series Books

▶ *Adolescent Task Analysis*

Series	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task 4	Task 5	Task 6	Task 7	Task 8
Goose-bumps	29	0	2	206	150	6	33	0
Snicket's	88	0	0	791	323	114	145	31

- Task 4 was the most important Task, and Task 5 was second in importance.
- Series books did not have data for all eight Adolescent Tasks.
- *Goosebumps* books lacked Task 2 and Task 8.
- *Snicket's* lacked Task 2 and Task 3.

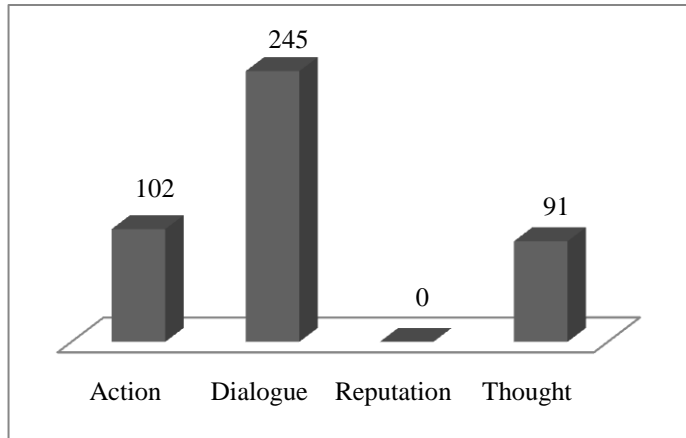
▶ *Narrative Task Structure*

Series Books	Setting	Conflict	Rising Action	Climax	Denouement	Resolution
Task 1	0	0	28	8	6	0
Task 2	0	0	1	0	0	0
Task 3	0	0	1	0	0	0
Task 4	0	13	914	28	39	7
Task 5	0	7	440	7	12	7
Task 6	0	0	118	1	1	0
Task 7	0	3	180	3	2	0
Task 8	0	0	9	0	0	0

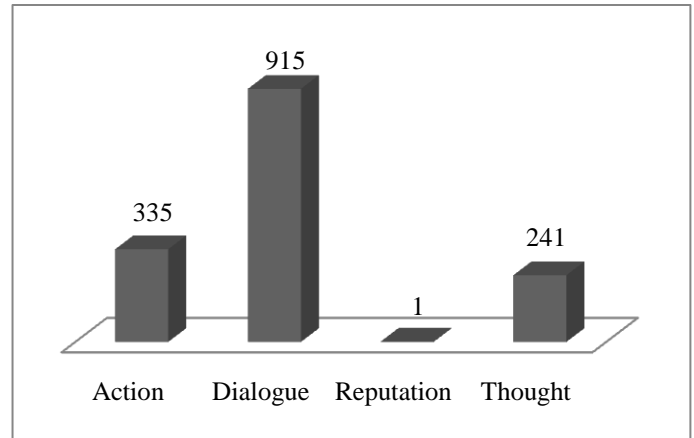
- Consistent, linear development of character focused on Tasks 4 and 5 in the compiled results and these Tasks contain the majority number of data. Was this a consistent finding for each series?

Narrative Style Graph for Each Series:

Goosebumps series



A Series of Unfortunate Events



- Yes! Dialogue data remained most important for both series; action and thought were second and third, respectively. Again, the results for narrative style were similar for both series.

Summary

- ▶ The majority of the data for both sets of series novels revealed that Tasks 4 and 5 were the most important Adolescent Tasks.
- ▶ Characters were developed with a focus on Tasks 4 and 5 from the conflict to the resolution.
- ▶ Dialogue data were the majority with action and thought as second and third for both series.
- ▶ Compiled data for both the Narrative Task Structure and Narrative Style corresponded with the separate analysis for each series, which indicated the similarities of both series in terms of narrative structure and style.
- ▶ Series books are for readers who like (or need) predictability and linear character development. These protagonists focus on two Adolescent Tasks that are antagonistic.

Sequels

Adolescent Task Analysis

Sequels	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task 4	Task 5	Task 6	Task 7	Task 8
Alice McKinley	33	42	16	32	38	4	47	11
Harry Potter	357	24	21	363	234	142	399	76

- Task 7 was the most important Adolescent Task for both sets of sequels.
- The remaining Tasks diversified according to the specific personality of the protagonist:
 - For Alice, developing a feminine gender role was also important, but for Harry, achieving personal independence was second.

Narrative Structure Analysis

Sequels	Setting	Conflict	Rising Action	Climax	Denouement	Resolution
1	0	1	373	0	15	0
2	0	1	54	1	10	0
3	0	0	63	0	3	0
4	1	1	336	22	32	2
5	0	5	231	3	22	4
6	0	0	138	3	3	0
7	0	1	304	2	54	9
8	0	1	74	1	9	0

- The results of the compilation of data revealed Tasks 4, 5, and 7 contained data from the conflict through the resolution, but the compilation differed from the group findings. Not all of the majority data was within these fully developed Tasks.

Narrative Structure Analysis for each set of Sequels

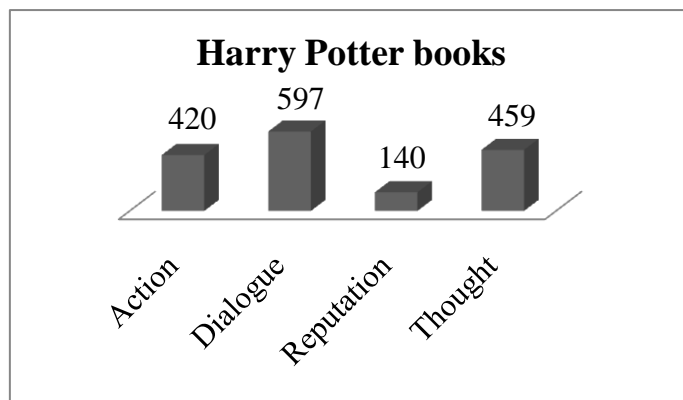
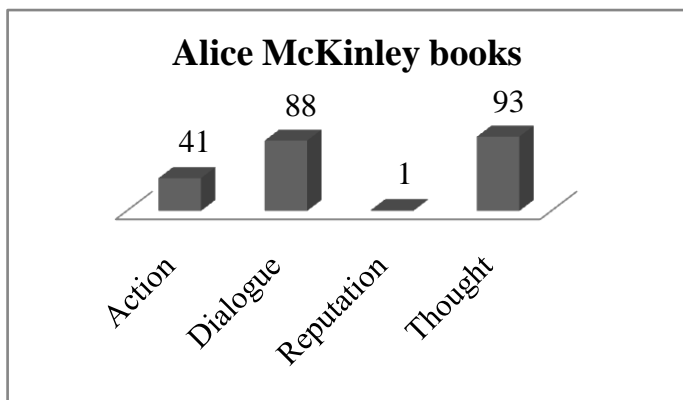
Alice McKinley	Setting	Conflict	Rising Action	Climax	Denouement	Resolution
1	0	0	31	0	0	0
2	0	1	30	1	10	0
3	0	1	45	0	0	0
4	0	0	28	1	1	1
5	0	1	30	1	1	1
6	0	0	2	0	0	0
7	0	0	36	1	9	1
8	0	0	9	1	0	0

- Alice's narrative Task structure revealed that just Task 5 was developed from conflict to resolution, but Task 2 contained data from the conflict through the denouement. Tasks 4 and 7 also contained data from the rising action through the resolution.

Harry Potter	Setting	Conflict	Rising Action	Climax	Denouement	Resolution
1	0	0	342	0	15	0
2	0	0	24	0	0	0
3	0	0	18	0	3	0
4	1	0	308	21	31	1
5	0	4	201	2	21	3
6	0	0	136	3	3	0
7	0	1	268	1	45	8
8	0	1	65	0	9	0

- In the Harry Potter novels, Tasks 5, 7, and 8 contained data from conflict to resolution, and Task 4 was developed from rising action through the resolution.

Narrative Style Graphs



More differences

- For Alice, thought and dialogue were close as first and second most data.
- For Harry, dialogue had the most data, but thought and action were also a close second and third. Data in the Harry Potter books engaged dialogue, thought, and action.

Summary

- ▶ Within a set of sequels, there were predictable settings, characters, and style.
- ▶ The development of the protagonists for the two sets of sequels had linear development for different Tasks.
- ▶ In the Alice McKinley novels, Task 2, developing a feminine gender role, was an important Task developed from the conflict through the denouement, which indicated this series would appeal to a specific audience.
- ▶ Harry Potter's character development focused on Tasks 4, 5, 7 and 8, four non-gender specific Tasks.

- ▶ These two sets of sequels also differed in narrative style in that the Alice books focused on thought and dialogue; whereas, while Harry’s dialogue data were the majority, thought and action were a close second and third, respectively.
- ▶ Sequels focus on fully developing a character who interacts with different Adolescent Tasks over time. These books are for readers who still like (or need) some predictability but who have grown tired of the repetitive series books

Stand Alone Novels (not within any set of series, sequels, or prequels)

Adolescent Task Analysis

Stand Alone Books	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task 4	Task 5	Task 6	Task 7	Task 8
Dog Books	32	61	16	165	236	52	141	43
Mysteries	162	33	10	242	66	20	259	114
Problem Novels	157	16	24	174	121	87	161	71

- The Adolescent Task Analysis for the stand alone novels showed that each group (i.e. dog books) contained protagonists who were developed with a focus on their own unique Adolescent Tasks.

Narrative Structure Analysis (compiled for each group)

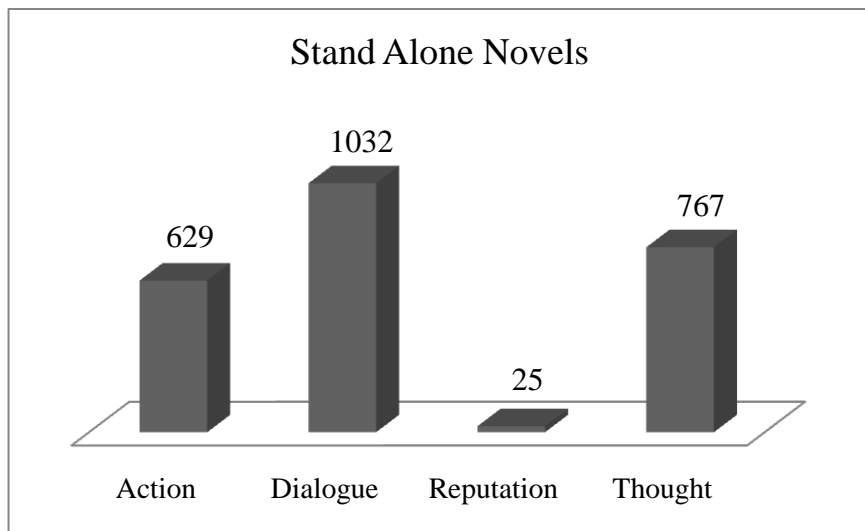
Dog Books	setting	conflict	rising action	climax	denouement	resolution
Task 1	0	1	15	0	5	1
Task 2	0	3	55	0	3	0
Task 3	0	0	16	0	0	0
Task 4	0	8	141	1	15	0
Task 5	1	2	208	7	16	1
Task 6	0	0	52	0	0	0
Task 7	0	3	128	2	3	8
Task 8	0	0	30	1	1	0

Problem Novels	setting	conflict	rising action	climax	denouement	Resolution
Task 1	0	2	149	2	3	1
Task 2	0	0	15	1	0	0
Task 3	0	0	22	0	1	0
Task 4	0	2	162	5	4	1
Task 5	0	0	116	4	4	2
Task 6	0	5	70	3	4	1
Task 7	0	0	158	2	0	1
Task 8	0	12	65	0	0	1

Mysteries	setting	conflict	rising action	climax	denouement	resolution
Task 1	0	0	160	1	0	1
Task 2	0	0	33	0	0	0
Task 3	0	0	10	0	0	0
Task 4	0	4	222	12	3	1
Task 5	0	0	60	0	5	1
Task 6	0	2	16	0	2	1
Task 7	0	3	235	8	1	1
Task 8	0	1	106	5	1	1

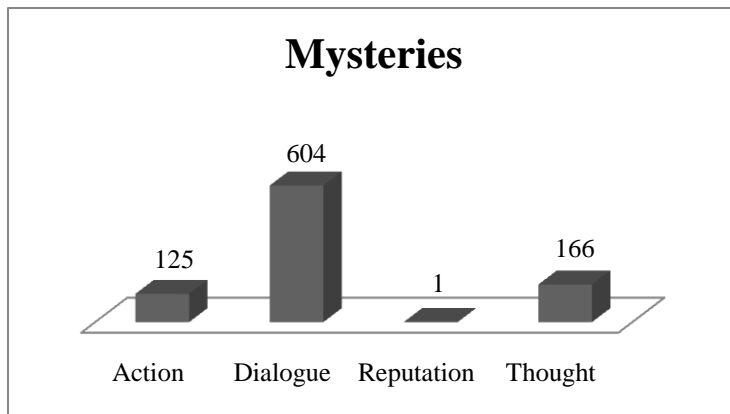
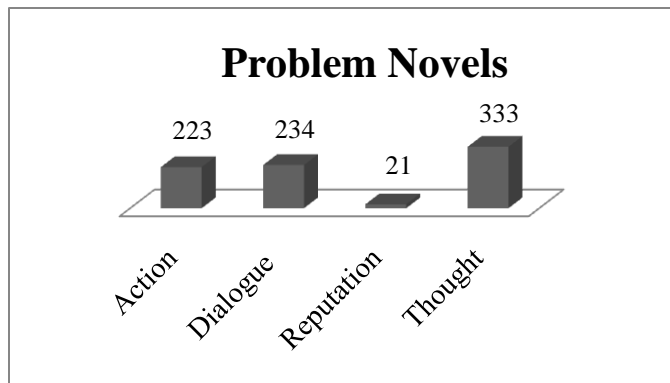
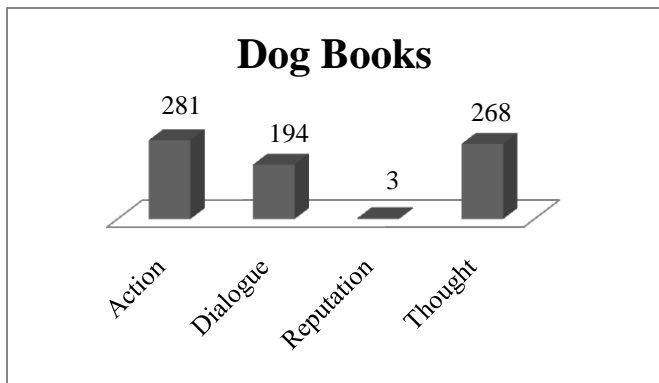
- Each group of stand-alone group had its own character development focus. Majority data were not always within the well developed Tasks, and there was more Tasks represented in the climax, denouement, and resolution than in series and sequel books. Character development became more complex in that it involved more Tasks throughout the narrative structure

Narrative Style Graph (compiled)



- The compiled data for stand-alone novels did not resemble the dog books or the problem novels. The compiled data showed that the majority of the data were dialogue while thought and action ranked second and third.

Narrative Style Graphs for each group of Stand Alone Novels



- These three groups of stand-alone novels revealed very different narrative styles that were unique to each group.

Summary

- ▶ Each group of stand-alone books focused on different Adolescent Tasks.
- ▶ While there was some linear character development, some Adolescent Tasks were not consistently developed but played an important part in protagonist development.
- ▶ Stand alone novels engage more Tasks from the conflict through the resolution than series or sequels.
- ▶ Each group of stand-alone books had a unique narrative style.
- ▶ Stand alone novels appeal to readers who no longer need predictable structure or character development.

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Developing Life-long Readers: Reading Appreciation Hierarchy

Series Books	Example	Appeals to...	Characteristics
<i>Simple Series</i>	<i>Goosebumps</i>	Less skilled readers Less mature readers English language learners Children with short attention spans	Action drives the story Very short chapters Very few <i>Goosebumps</i> have sequels, so each is its own story Predictable structure and writing style Limited number of characters Character development focuses on independence and family roles
<i>Complex Series</i>	<i>A Series of Unfortunate Events</i>	Better readers who are not yet ready to leave series books Readers who like word games and puzzles Readers who still need predictability	Dialogue drives the story Predictable structure and writing style One continuous story Novels progressively get longer Character development focuses on independence and family roles After the third book, the protagonists become slightly more complex
Sequels	Example	Appeals to...	Characteristics
<i>Specific Audience</i>	The Alice McKinley novels	Adolescent girls Realistic fiction readers Adolescent readers who are curious about growing up Adolescent readers in single parent families Readers who are becoming teens	dialogue and thought drive the story After the first book, the characters and setting remain familiar to the reader Author's writing style varies very little Protagonist's thoughts allow the reader intimate knowledge The conflict Task is developed in the rising action The protagonist matures from sequel to sequel Each novel focuses on different aspects of maturation Protagonist development focuses on gender roles, physical maturation, peers, and personal values
<i>Wide Audience</i>	Harry Potter novels	Boys and girls Fantasy readers Readers who like reading about heroes Readers who like stories about friendship and family	Dialogue, thought, and action are reasonably balanced After the first book, the characters and setting remain familiar Author's writing style varies very little The protagonist matures from sequel to sequel Maturation leads to better problem solving, decision making and adult acceptance Protagonist development focuses on independence, family, and developing personal values

Stand Alone Titles	Example	Appeals to...	Characteristics
<i>Dog Books</i>	<i>Where the Red Fern Grows</i>	Boys and girls Dog lovers; coming of age Readers who like to read about family Readers who have family problems Theme and conflict interest the reader	Strong protagonist (for this group, males) Action drives the story Each book is a new story with no predictability between titles Protagonist development focuses on independence, family, and personal values Protagonist matures and during the climax transitions from childhood to teen; Bildungsromans Death and/or loss
<i>Mysteries</i>	<i>Killing Mr. Griffin</i>	Boys and girls Readers who like suspense, mysteries Readers who like puzzles Theme and conflict attract the reader	Dialogue drives the story, but thought and action are also strong Missing information for reader or protagonist Each book is a new story but some author write stories with same characters Focuses on independence, family, personal values, and peers Character matures and undergoes a maturational transition; Bildungsromans Ethical/moral dilemmas
<i>Problem Novels</i>	<i>Holes</i>	Boys and girls Coming of age Readers who may have a similar problem Theme and conflict interest the reader	Story may be driven by dialogue, action, or thought Varies in length, so there should be one for every reading ability Each book is a new story Conflicts relate to common adolescent problems Focuses on independence, family, personal and social values