The Newbery Award Books: Are They Being Read?

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A study conducted among Oklahoma schools investigated the frequency with which the Newbery Award books are being read by third and fifth grade students. It would seem reasonable that children would read such books with great regularity, since this award is given each year to an outstanding American author for his or her contribution to children's literature.

The subjects for the study consisted of 750 students, divided evenly between third and fifth grades, and drawn from schools to represent equal numbers of rural, urban, and metropolitan groups in Oklahoma. There was almost equal distribution of girls and boys. The students were given a list of books designed to assess the frequency extent to which they had read the Newbery Award Books. The list consisted of fifty children's books, of which ten were Newbery Award books. The participants were asked to indicate whether or not they had read the book. The Newbery Award Books were the winners from 1971 through 1980. Each response was individually tabulated and tested using a correlational analysis for reading frequency.

In correlating the individual responses of students reporting their reading of the Newbery Award Books, both third and fifth grades reflected a nonsignificant correlation between age, based on grade level, and the number of books read. In comparing the number of books read in the third grade to the responses of fifth grade students, a positive correlation, significant at the .05 level was reflected. Results of this correlational analysis indicated essentially no relationship between age and number of Newbery Award Books read within the grade level. The small, but significant correlation between grade level and number of Newbery books read was to be expected due to the additional years in school.

The third grade reported reading 448 Newbery Award Books, with a mean of 1.24. Also in the third grade, 54.29% of the students had never read any of the books investigated in this study. The fifth grade reported reading 590 Newbery Award Books, with a mean of 1.52. Of these students, 45.36% had never read any of the books investigated. One third grade student reported reading all ten books, and one student reported reading eight of the award winning selections. One fifth grade student reported reading all ten of the selections, and five fifth graders had read nine of the Newbery Award Books.

Generalizing from the findings of this study, the following conclusions can be made. Many third and fifth grade students in Oklahoma have not read many of the Newbery Award Books. It would seem worthwhile for teachers as well as librarians to promote an interest in these books among all students. The reading of Newbery Award Books as recreational reading would have multiple benefits, adding value to the curriculum, and adding quality to the lives of the readers.

Editor's note—

Without wishing to start a column of letters-to-the-editor, we would invite reactions from readers concerning the findings of this investigation. One's curiosity might be piqued to the point of asking, is this true of all grades, all states—can we generalize at all? Is there literature extant on this matter? We hope to hear from a few of our regular readers.