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## An Attitude Survey of Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading

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# An Attitude Survey of Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading

Honey Halpern

## **Abstract**

Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading, more usually referred to as U.S.S.R., was introduced by Lyman J. Hunt of the University of Vermont in the early sixties. Since that time reports indicate that many elementary and secondary schools in the United States and Canada have installed USSR into their timetables (Jones,1978; Mork,1972; Petre, 1971). There is an abundance of literature describing in general terms this program of silent reading of a self selected book (Allington,1975; Carner,1969; Ganz & Theofield, 1974; McCracken,1971; Noland,1976; Oliver,1970). More recently authors have suggested detailed methods of organizing a classroom in order to maintain a USSR program (Gambreil,1978; McCracken & McCracken,1978). The focus of these recent articles is on the specifics of application rather than on the generalities of organization. In addition, some empirical research has been carried out on the effects of this kind of program (Evans and Towner,1975; Harvey, 1974; Mikulecky and Wolf,1977; Oliver,1976). There appears to be little doubt that both researchers and classroom teachers have more than just a passing interest in USSR.

# AN ATTITUDE SURVEY OF UNINTERRUPTED SUSTAINED SILENT READING

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Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading, more usually referred to as U.S.S.R., was introduced by Lyman J. Hunt of the University of Vermont in the early sixties. Since that time reports indicate that many elementary and secondary schools in the United States and Canada have installed USSR into their timetables (Jones,1978; Mork,1972; Petre, 1971). There is an abundance of literature describing in general terms this program of silent reading of a self-selected book (Allington,1975; Carner,1969; Ganz & Theofield,1974; McCracken,1971; Noland,1976; Oliver,1970). More recently authors have suggested detailed methods of organizing a classroom in order to maintain a USSR program (Gambrell,1978; McCracken & McCracken,1978). The focus of these recent articles is on the specifics of application rather than on the generalities of organization. In addition, some empirical research has been carried out on the effects of this kind of program (Evans and Towner,1975; Harvey, 1974; Mikulecky and Wolf,1977; Oliver,1976). There appears to be little doubt that both researchers and classroom teachers have more than just a passing interest in USSR.

## Why an Attitude Survey?

The USSR Attitude Survey presented here evolved from active participation in a USSR program, discussion with teachers and students who have had experience with the program and extensive reading on the topic. Almost everyone who has participated in USSR has been pleased with the program. Increased interest in reading, increased awareness of a variety of books, increased feelings of community within a classroom, and increased awareness of the reading program have all been reported.

Most people who use this reading method in their classrooms have their own way of organizing the actual practice. It is these variations that need to be investigated in order to find the actual or potential weaknesses of the program. For example, in one classroom a teacher may use this quiet time to mark workbooks, to conduct interviews, or to leave the room in order to run off a

stencil, make a phone call, or to simply take a 15 minute break. In this instance the teacher is not acting as a model. A teacher moving about could be a cause of interference with the reading program. Teacher modelling is very important to the success of USSR (McCracken and McCracken, 1978).

Another variation besides the absence of teacher modelling could be in book selection. Provisions are not always made for the students who forget their books and these absent-minded people are expected to sit quietly while the others read. Or students that were able to find one interesting book at the start of the program are unable to find a second or third good book after the first one is completed. The importance of providing interesting reading material must be taken very seriously. Many students need a lot of assistance in finding good books. Periodic library visits or even a classroom collection of assorted titles can help introduce students to literary selections.

Another problem often contributing to difficulty in the program is classroom and hall disruptions. Using the Attitude Survey the teacher can identify these problems early and make the necessary adjustments. For example, it may be necessary to cut short the USSR program for a couple of days in order to make the class aware that the teacher is firm about providing an uninterrupted quiet atmosphere.

Sometimes, because of student restlessness or misbehavior, teachers have unfortunately chosen to discontinue their USSR programs. One of the purposes of this attitude survey is to provide these teachers with information on student feelings, which can then be used to remedy weaknesses and promote the continuation of USSR.

In some school districts the decision to adopt a program of USSR depends on analysis of test results. In such circumstances, however, is allowance being made for the possibility that the program is interpreted differently in individual classrooms? Because of the high degree of variation from classroom to classroom with regard to such factors as the availability of books, the quietness of the environment and the role of the teacher, it is suggested that the results of statistical testing are of limited value. Thus, another purpose of the Attitude Survey is to allow each teacher to evaluate the program's worth for her own group of students. If more evaluative information is required, statistical measures can be taken after the program has been refined and improved on the basis of the information gleaned from the Survey. Hence it would be appropriate to give this Survey in order to iron out the kinks in the program before embarking on extensive empirical data taking.

What It Is and How To Use It

The USSR Attitude Survey is very simple to administer and score. There are eleven statements that students are to respond to by circling their preference on a seven-point scale. The choices on the scale range from "disagree very strongly" to "agree very strongly." Two examples are provided before the attitude statements are presented. The second section requires yes-no answers to statement groups on the practice of the program. Here, too, examples are provided to help the student understand the directions.

Each statement is to be judged on its own. There is no need to total the group scores on the overall Survey. In the first section the scores for each statement should be added together and averaged. In the second section it is suggested that the total number of yes and no answers be calculated for each item. This straightforward analysis is all that is necessary for an item-by-item summary of students' attitudes.

When To Use It

It would be appropriate to administer this Survey after USSR has been in operation for at least six weeks since any difficulties that may arise in connection with the implementation of the program will have appeared. The information derived from the Survey will help teachers and administrators redirect the program in appropriate ways.

This Attitude Survey is not being suggested as a total evaluation scheme for a class or school. It is best used by classroom teachers to investigate actual or potential strengths and weaknesses. A more complete method of evaluation would include some or all of the following: interviewing teachers and students, administering a Reading Attitude Survey, observing the program in practice, making sure that students keep records of their reading, and obtaining feedback from librarians and parents.

The principle idea of this Attitude Survey is to give insight into students' reactions to their USSR program. To date it has been used successfully by teachers of high school and junior high classes, as well as intermediate levels. Teachers have been enthusiastic about the information it provided. Teachers in Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver reported that this Attitude Survey gave feedback that helped their organization of the USSR program.

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STUDENT ATTITUDE SURVEY ON  
UNINTERRUPTED SUSTAINED SILENT READING

This attitude survey is an attempt to determine students' feelings toward USSR. This will help your teachers decide if the USSR program should be changed and improved on in any way. On this first page you will be asked to answer a few general questions. On the other pages you will be asked to respond to statements of opinion on the different parts of the USSR program. Read the instructions carefully before responding to the statements.

General Questions

1. What grade are you in? \_\_\_\_\_
2. When did you start USSR in class?  
year \_\_\_\_\_ month \_\_\_\_\_
3. How many days a week do you do USSR?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. How long is each USSR session? \_\_\_\_\_
5. How much time do you spend each day after school reading things other than school-books?  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Are you male? \_\_\_\_\_  
female? \_\_\_\_\_

ATTITUDE SURVEY ON USSR  
DIRECTIONS

You are being asked to respond to a number of statements. Seven choices are given for each statement. The choices range from disagree very strongly to agree very strongly. The seven choices are:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
d i s a g r e e				a g r e e		
very	slightly		I	slightly		very
strongly			don't			strongly
			care			

Following each statement you will see a line of numbers. These seven numbers correspond to the above numbered line. Please circle the number that best describes your feelings about each of the statements. Remember that you may choose any one of the seven numbers.

Two examples are provided.

If there are any difficulties in answering this survey,  
please ask your teacher for help.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
strongly disagree	very disagree	slightly disagree	I don't care	slightly agree	strongly agree	very strongly agree

#### EXAMPLES

Every student should  
be given free milk  
at lunch time.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Christmas holidays  
should be longer.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

#### ATTITUDE SURVEY ON USSR

1) I think that our teacher  
should give us marks for  
reading during USSR.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

2) I think that students  
who disturb others during  
USSR ought to be punished  
by the teacher.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3) I feel it is difficult to  
find interesting books to  
read during USSR.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4) I would like to have a  
stack of comics and/or  
magazines in the classroom  
that could be used during  
USSR.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

5) I find myself reading  
books after school that I  
started during USSR.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

6) I used to read after  
school even before we  
started USSR.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

7) When our class does USSR,  
noise from other students in  
our class stops me from  
reading.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7



8) I find that when we are doing USSR, noise from outside the classroom stops me from reading. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

9) I would read my own books after school even if we didn't have USSR during schooltime. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

10) I feel that USSR is a good time to try different kinds of books to see if I like them and want to finish them. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

10a) I think USSR is a worthwhile activity and I am pleased that our class does it. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

DIRECTIONS: Please circle either yes or no to the following statements. An example is provided. If there are any difficulties in answering this section of the survey, please ask your teacher for help.

EXAMPLE: My after-school activities are:

baby-sitting	yes	no
TV watching	yes	no
school sports	yes	no
music lessons	yes	no
homework	yes	no
kite flying	yes	no

ATTITUDE SURVEY ON USSR

11) I think that we ought to do USSR at the time of day we now have it yes no  
 at a different time yes no  
 at different times during the day yes no

12) Having a book ready for USSR  
 is always a problem yes no  
 is sometimes a problem yes no  
 is not a problem yes no

- 13) I get my books for USSR from
- |                     |     |    |
|---------------------|-----|----|
| a friend            | yes | no |
| the school library  | yes | no |
| teacher recommends  | yes | no |
| home                | yes | no |
| classroom library   | yes | no |
| bookstore           | yes | no |
| other places/people | yes | no |
- if yes, list \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

(Answer either number 14 or number 15)

- 14) If your parents know that you do USSR, are they:

pleased that you do USSR	yes	no
of the opinion that USSR is a waste of school time	yes	no
trying to have your family do USSR together	yes	no
interested in finding out more about USSR	yes	no

- 15) If your parents don't know that you do USSR, should

they be told what USSR is	yes	no
they be told that you do USSR	yes	no

- 16) During USSR I would prefer that my teacher

read a book	yes	no
spend the time making sure that everyone in class reads	yes	no
leave the room	yes	no

- 17) During USSR does your teacher

stop USSR at first interruption	yes	no
mark papers, talk to others	yes	no
see that students read	yes	no
read a book	yes	no

- 18) I think that the amount of time that our class spends  
on USSR each day is:

too long	yes	no
too short	yes	no
just right	yes	no
a waste of school time	yes	no