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Adolescent Literacy in the Common Core Classroom

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Introduction

Growing up, music was, quite simply, an integral part of my life - as permanent as my closest family. I was enrolled in piano lessons at age 5 and went to them weekly until graduation. In 5th grade, I picked up a trumpet, learned the concert B flat scale in an hour, and then joined the school band. There was only one instrument that I could never quite figure out. I would stare at the five metal strings in frustration. I wanted to play guitar. No, I wanted to be *someone who played guitar*. I would watch people casually pluck the strings and softly strum my favorite songs and I would find my self wanting to be them. I was so frustrated - why couldn't I casually pull out my guitar and play my favorite songs? While I watched my friends often give impromptu concerts at bonfires and during free time at school, what I didn't see was where they began. I never saw them practice basic strumming patterns for hours or learn to play scales. I only saw the end result of frequent practice and learning. It was only in college, when I committed to consistent practice of the most basic skills before ever attempting a complex song, that I ever make any progress.

Now, imagine you're a high school student who has struggled with reading every year in school. Every day in English class you listen to your peers read fluently, without stuttering over words that you've heard before but don't recognize on the page. Maybe you've grown up with these classmates - some of whom have even been in the same class as you since kindergarten. How do you explain what you hear? Why is it that your friends read fine, but you're struggling? For most students, the difference between their reading ability and that of their peers is a source of frustration. Then, in addition to oral reading fluency, imagine that during class discussions you realize that you have no idea what you read anyway. Shakespeare is a foreign language. Jonathan Swift makes no sense. How do you explain why you're struggling to understand the content of class? Many students may settle on assumptions like "I'm just not good at reading" or

even "I'm too dumb for English class." In reality, students may be simply underprepared to read the content chosen for class. But these assumptions have already been formed, and they hinder students even further, as they become more reluctant to read aloud in class and may stop reading on their own all together.

The process of "learning to read" is an ongoing, fluid process that should grow and expand in depth and skill as students advance through school; in line with this thinking, learning to read is not, then, just a skill learned in elementary school. All students, regardless of grade or ability level, should continue to "learn to read" – whether with a quicker rate, better comprehension, or a more critical eye. In order to become a better reader, students must read texts that are slightly more difficult than their current reading level and must frequently practice the skills needed to read fluently with adequate comprehension. Teachers have an obligation to provide students with these opportunities within a environment where students feel safe in their learning journey. Furthermore, when teachers aren't transparent with students about each class member's reading level, where they need to be, and most importantly what they need to get there, students will quite possibly never realize their potential. Additionally, with the increased emphasis on reading ability in recent standards initiatives like Common Core, students need to have sufficient reading skills to engage with college and career level reading by the time they finish high school. As a result, reading fluency is, and should be, an important initiative in adolescent language arts classroom. I argue that by utilizing appropriately leveled texts intentionally in an adolescent classroom in a way that encourages student ownership of learning, teachers can ensure that all students have the tools and environment to grow as readers in order to successfully engage with college and career texts by graduation.

Reading Fluency and Adolescents

First of all, it is important for all educators to be aware of what reading fluency is, as

reading fluency is indeed relevant to the issues of both elementary and adolescent readers. Most educators consider reading fluency to be composed of two specific measurable skills; reading fluency is determined by the reader's accuracy in regards to word recognition (also known as automaticity) as well as their reading rate (Applegate, Applegate, & Modla, 2009). For elementary age students, these two components are especially significant, as they are efficient indicators of how well a child has grasped the basic skills necessary for a life of reading. Frequently, these teachers utilize reading fluency assessments to gauge whether students are reading at the ability appropriate to their age range. Students are monitored consistently to ensure their success. Yet, in my experience observing classrooms, most teachers in classrooms with older students do not use these instructional tools, but they arguably still should.

Somewhere between these elementary years and the end of high school, students are suffering. Middle school and high school students are overwhelmingly not reading at a level appropriate for their age range. According to the study by Renaissance Learning, the company that owns Accelerated Reader, called "What Student are Reading and Why it Matters," by the time students in the United States graduate college, they are reading on average at a fifth grade reading level (2015). While this statistic doesn't necessarily determine whether students are capable of reading well above a fifth grade level, it is clear that students are not frequently challenging themselves or being challenged with texts at the level appropriate to their age. It also seems fairly logical to assume that these students might not feel comfortable with texts of a higher reading level since it takes frequent practice with challenging material in order to become accustomed to it. Regardless, students are surely not engaging with that level of text frequently, which means they have little practice with those texts. Interestingly enough, this shift in rigor of student independent reading occurs around sixth grade, both in quality and quantity ("What Students are Reading," 2015). Even the number of words a student reads in school peaks in sixth

grade at about 460,000. Sixth grade also signifies another shift for language arts classes. By the time students graduate, they are reading 100,000 fewer words annually (2015). If reading fluency is an ongoing learning process, students cannot be expected to grow as much as is expected of them if they simply are not practicing with the appropriate leveled texts enough.

Interestingly, at the same time that there is a shift in student reading quality and quantity, there is also a shift in instruction in the language arts classroom. When considering Language Arts instruction for students as developing readers, there is obviously a shift in English Language Arts instruction between Elementary, Middle, and High School English classes. Arguably, this shift occurs in part because children must learn basic reading skills and practice them on a variety of texts before they can truly focus on complex content. In accordance with this line of thinking, there are a series of Common Core State Standards for Kindergarten through fifth grade that are not present in grades 6-12: Foundational Skills. The authors of the Common Core website explains these standards, saying, "These standards are directed toward fostering students' understanding and working knowledge of concepts of print, the alphabetic principle, and other basic conventions of the English writing system" (2010). This set of standards includes standards for both phonics and reading fluency. Specifically, students at every grade level should, "read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension"(2010). Yet, this overarching standard is relevant to students in every grade, not just students younger than middle school age.

Obviously, there must be a reason why these foundational standards only are included in the curriculum up to the sixth grade. When teaching "foundational skills" related to reading ends around sixth grade, content-driven instruction then takes its place, meaning that teachers shift their focus from primarily reading fluency skills to comprehension and analytic skills instead. Of course, this is not to say that elementary teachers do not choose texts that are exciting and

interesting to their students, or that middle and high school teachers do not consider that their students may not be able to read a difficult text. However, teachers of young children generally place a greater importance on the level of a text within their classroom while teachers of older children generally privilege a text's usefulness in analysis and discussion. For instance, a first grade teacher might choose a non-fiction book because she knows it is at the appropriate level for students and then create a lesson, while a ninth grade teacher might know she wants to teach a memoir and then structure the reading assignments afterward. To further emphasize this shift, consider a recent conversation that I had with a seventh grade teacher. She noted that "only when a student has a specific reading goal does he or she take reading fluency tests, and then only with our intervention specialists. Our classroom mostly focuses on comprehension of texts." This shift can be concerning: once teachers begin to assume that students "know how to read" and texts are chosen based on what the teacher wants to accomplish or discuss, it is possible that the class can become so focused on content that students struggle simply to complete the reading assigned to them. (This does not necessarily mean that all classes assign readings that students cannot complete, but it is possible if the teacher does not pay close attention to student reading ability.) As the gap between proficient readers and struggling readers widens, uninformed text selection further intensifies the deficiencies of certain students. According to Vygotsky's famous theory of the Zone of Proximal Development, students learn best and improve most when engaging with content at a level slightly above their current ability (1978). When teachers assign texts that are far beyond a student's ability and expect him or her to complete the reading independently, that text may be at a frustration level for the student, meaning that the student may quickly give up when attempting to read the passage. When a student is assigned a text at an appropriate challenge level, however, that same student is capable of completing the reading and consequently improving from the assignment. Instead of focusing on the content of texts

completely over the skill required to fully appreciate them, teachers of adolescent students have to find a solid balance – students have to be able to both analyze *and* understand the text they are reading.

Though the foundational reading standards only exist for grades K-5, I argue that a continued focus on reading fluency throughout grades 6-12 as a complement to literature instruction will ultimately help students achieve the other standards required of them with the goal of college and career readiness. After all, how can we expect students to "at the end of grade 12, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of grades 11-CCR text complexity band independently and proficiently" as the Common Core State Standards expect if we do not continue to guide them in the process all the way through graduation? (2010). Even more urgent is that the Common Core Standards expectation actually means that students are to be reading *above* a 12th grade reading level in order to be prepared for the demands of college and/or a career ("Lexile to Grade Correspondence, 2014). Thus, it seems only natural that teachers should be required to continue to teach students reading skills, in addition to the expected Language Arts curriculum of literature, writing, and speaking and listening. By designing curriculum that uses appropriate leveled content to teach key skills, teachers can address both content-related standards and fluency-related needs that continue to exist beyond the sixth grade.

Though making gains in reading levels may be difficult with the reduction in quantity of reading for students beyond sixth grade, student achievement can still be maximized if teachers ensure that the time reading assignments are utilized efficiently and are designed intentionally to help students grow as readers. Especially in rigorous high school courses that are focused on specific subjects, the texts used are increasingly complex in structure and have more "content-laden vocabulary" (Fair & Combs, 2011). This content-focused language may be new for

students both in meaning and in usage. Teachers can aid students in engaging with this content through instruction specifically designed to assist in student understanding of material, specifically when instruction helps scaffolds student learning. As Ginni Fair and Dorie Combs state in “Nudging Fledgling Teen Readers,” even high school students need to “learn to read” as well as “read to learn” (2011). Consequently, middle and high school teachers have an obligation to continue to guide students in this process of learning to read the complex material that students encounter.

Fluency Strategies in the Adolescent Classroom

In order to ensure student growth in reading fluency, the adolescent language arts curriculum must be structured to utilize a variety of researched-based strategies intended specifically to increase student reading fluency. Regardless of the amount of reading that students engage in outside of the classroom (required or independently), these strategies are an effective way to set students up for growth in reading ability. When these strategies are coupled with frequent assessment of reading fluency, they create an effective method of data-driven instruction that objectively improves student learning. For instance, according to the article “Decoding and Fluency,” “fortunately, when given systematic, intentional instruction, the skill of decoding multisyllabic words is attainable by most struggling secondary readers” (Archer & Vachon, 2003). These instructional strategies are particularly effective in assisting students who are struggling readers or who have a high-incidence learning disability. This success is essential: According to a study of 11th and 12th grade students by Kansas University, for at-risk students and students with reading disabilities, reading achievement seems to stagnate after seventh grade (Warner, Schumaker, Alley, & Deshler, 1980). Intervention strategies like vocabulary acquisition instruction can benefit many students, particularly those whose needs are not currently being met in the adolescent language arts classroom.

There are a variety of strategies that teachers can incorporate into their classroom that help students actively practice reading. These strategies fall into two major categories: teacher-led reading activities and student-led reading activities. First of all, teachers can directly influence student reading during teacher-led reading instruction. One method of doing so is through teacher read alouds. According to the article "Nudging Fledging Readers," "Reading aloud *is* an important step in the developmental process toward independent reading" (2011). However, it is also important to note that "Round Robin" activities are not especially effective. When students read a section of a text one after another, the negative consequences outweigh the benefits. Students who struggle to read slowly and with many errors can be humiliated when it is their turn to read aloud. Students who are good readers cannot follow along at the pace of slower readers and end up distracted. Ultimately, during Round Robin reading activities, no one is truly reading to comprehend the text (Fair & Combs, 2011). Instead, teacher read alouds are still a viable alternative – the teacher can model effective reading processes like pausing to clarify, looking up vocabulary, and re-reading confusing portions. Additionally, the teacher can ask guiding questions to the class so students can deepen their understanding of the text, an especially beneficial side effect for advanced classes with difficult content. Furthermore, choral reading, where all students read at once, is also a safe way to practice reading, as struggling students retain anonymity during the reading. An added benefit to this strategy is that it guarantees that every student is engaged because they are required to participate in the reading. However, these strategies are not a complete solution, as teachers must differentiate instruction and therefore cannot directly instruct students at all times, and also because students need practice reading independently.

In addition to teacher-led reading instruction, another way to promote student-reading growth in language arts classes is the use of student-led fluency building instruction. One way to

engage students in reading in this manner is to assign partner-reading activities. Students still get practice in reading aloud, but are not pressured to read in front of the entire classroom. Using this reading strategy as an intervention for struggling readers has been shown to work for a variety of readers, such as students with learning disabilities and adolescent students (Bryant, et al, 2000). Partner readings can be an alternative to students reading a text silently in class; they both guarantee that students are focused on the assignment and that students are actively participating in the reading. Another way to engage students in reading practice is to use repeated readings, which means having students read the same text multiple times to improve speed. This activity can help students to improve rate, accuracy, and comprehension, all of which are tied to successful reading fluency (Chard, et al, 2002). Thus, utilizing elements of drama can help students, especially older students, practice reading with purpose. Teachers can incorporate elements of reader's theater, or have students rehearse scenes, poems, or monologues for performance in class. This style of instruction avoids the pressure of having students engage in a cold-reading of a text (Fair & Combs, 2011). Plus, many students enjoy the ability being able to perform a text instead of just reading it.

A third strategy, which can be both teacher-led or student-led depending on the structure of a classroom, is utilizing vocabulary acquisition activities, especially those that focus on learning high-frequency words that students are sure to encounter in their complex texts. In my research, many middle and high school teachers do not even attempt to teach vocabulary specifically. However, it would be beneficial for these teachers to make time to teach vocabulary, specifically high-frequency vocabulary. Teachers should choose words that appear across content areas, as the most frequently used words are most important to student learning. These words will help students not only in English class, but also in their other content areas. It is not necessary for teachers to inundate their students with a large number of vocabulary words.

In "The Words Students Need," Joshua Lawrence, Clare White, and Catherine Snow recommend that teachers select five to seven words to focus on each week, and that teachers should plan for multiple exposures to these words in meaningful contexts, such as student writing prompts and other assignments (2010). Additionally, according to this same article, engaging in this style of vocabulary instruction is proven to boost middle school students' reading comprehension.

The Case for Data-Driven Reading Fluency Instruction

When these aforementioned strategies are coupled with frequent assessment of reading fluency, they create an effective method of data-driven instruction that is proven to improve student learning in regards to reading skill. However, reading fluency assessments have to be purposeful and teachers need to be transparent in regards the purpose of these assessments, especially with older students. Not only do students need to know why they are being assessed in their reading, but they also need to know whether they are behind in their reading ability, what their reading fluency goal is, and what they need to do to reach that goal. This level of communication with students is not difficult; it just takes thoughtful contemplation about teaching and frequent communication with students. When students are given the tools to succeed from someone who cares about their success, they are much more likely to accept the challenge.

First of all, students need to know what is expected of them as readers. Teachers of adolescent students simply do not have much time with their students to focus on reading; therefore, teachers must have clear and rigorous expectations. Laura Archer notes this fact in her article "Lexile Reading Growth as a Function of Starting Level in At-Risk Middle School Students," saying that adolescent students would be capable readers if "given plenty of time and support," but the age of these students means that urgency in reading intervention is essential (2010, p. 283). Teachers have an obligation to share with students the nature of this reading

problem if they (both students and teachers) hope to accomplish what is necessary for students to become excellent readers. Furthermore, teachers also must work with their students to set achievable but rigorous goals for their reading. Again, according to the article "Lexile Reading Growth," "the absence of clear growth expectations for profoundly delayed readers undermines their potential for significant reading improvement" (Archer, 2010, p. 283). In order to ensure that students are growing efficiently and with purpose, teachers must be transparent with what is expected of students and more importantly of what they can achieve.

Though teachers should have high expectations for all students, it is not feasible for all students to be reading above or even at their grade level. What does "reading at grade level" even mean, anyway? Reading at grade level usually refers to the score a student receives on a reading fluency rate assessment and comprehension quiz. These assessments, when teachers use them to screen students and monitor progress, are reliable and valid indicators of student reading ability (Fuchs et al., 2001; Good, Simmons, & Kame'enui, 2001). According to these assessments, in order to be reading at grade level, a student must read a passage at an appropriate rate and accuracy and be able to comprehend the reading. (See methodology section for detailed explanation of what these measurements are.) The number of words per minute is then compared to the norm for a student's grade. Since both the act of reading and students themselves are very complex, most educators agree that the interquartile range of a reading level, or somewhere between the what 25% and 75% of students can read, is a reasonable gauge for student ability in reading (Archer, 2010, p. 283; Hasbrouch & Tindal, 2006, p. 642). Since students enter into a new grade with great variation in reading ability, student-reading goals should be catered to each specific student according to his or her starting reading level. This baseline score is recorded at the start of school, and the student's reading goal is then decided upon based on this information (Archer, 2010, p. 289). The further behind a student is in his or her reading, the more rigorous

his or her goal should be. For example, a student reading five grade levels below his or her grade should be expected to grow twice as much as a student only two years behind (Archer, 2010, p. 287). Structuring goals in this way ensures that all students have a goal to work towards that is appropriate and achievable.

Furthermore, in addition to the use of these scores by students to monitor their own progress toward a chosen goal, fluency assessment scores can help teachers as well. With this data in mind, teachers can make key decisions about how to best meet the needs of their students. (Hasbrouch & Tindal, 2006, p. 642). For example, if certain students are struggling to read aloud but are proficient silent readers, a teacher can scaffold instruction accordingly. Student reading fluency data can also be used to differentiate lessons. Teachers can make sure that struggling readers are paired with their more proficient peers in an attempt to utilize peer modeling of effective reading practices. Teachers can also differentiate content as well. Student reading assignments can be based on their reading level. Sites like *newsela.com* even produce several versions of the same article. Students could all read about the same subject but the teacher can still make sure that every student is reading at the appropriate challenge level to foster improvement in reading. Student assignments can also vary based on their reading fluency information: students can be assigned to read the same text, but some groups can be assigned to do so in pairs, and others to read individually. There are a myriad of instructional options for a teacher to choose from, but the data is key. Only when a teacher objectively knows student proficiency in reading can he or she meet their needs appropriately.

Example Classroom

As a preliminary test of this pedagogical theory, I assisted a veteran teacher in the implementation of these strategies (reading fluency assessments coupled with specific activities to reinforce positive reading skills) into the curriculum of a high school in Northwest Ohio. The

school where these strategies were utilized is a small, rural high school school with a population of roughly 350 students. These strategies were implemented in all of the 11th and 12th grade classes, all taught by the same teacher. The classes at this school are mixed ability, and include every 11th and 12th grade student enrolled in English at the high school. There are a few students who are exempted from these two courses because they opted to take post-secondary courses at the local community college. As a result, there are not as many advanced students in the class, although some of the students who take college courses decided to still take English at the high school because they enjoy the high school's English teacher. The English teacher at this school recognizes that the school's upperclassmen come to her class every year with several gaps in their academic skill-set, and the initial reading assessment proved this hypothesis. At the beginning of the academic year, every single student enrolled in either level of English was reading below grade level. As such, it can be said that the students in this school, as a whole, are behind in reading. Further reinforcing this assumption, the school was designated "continuous improvement" by the Ohio Department of Education, which means that there are significant changes that teachers need to be making to ensure student success. In other words, this rating also confirms that students are behind where they should be academically.

Methodology

In this classroom, the teacher assessed students' reading fluency at the beginning of the academic year, using a reading rate test and comprehension quiz. Students administered these tests to each other so that time in class could be used as efficiently as possible. For the assessment, students had to read for one minute while someone followed along and marked any words missed as well as how far in the assessment the student read in the one-minute time period. Then, students completed a comprehension quiz that consisted of ten questions. To be reading "at grade level," 11th grade students had to read 240 words per minute, while 12th grade

students had to read 256 words. Students also had to answer 80% of the comprehension questions correctly. These two measurements assessed both of the key aspects of reading fluency: the rate test assessed students' ability to read at an appropriate rate, and the quiz ensured that students were reading with adequate comprehension. In addition to the initial reading assessment (which provided baseline data for student reading proficiency), students subsequently took two more reading fluency assessments (rate and comprehension assessments) spaced about nine weeks apart. In addition to these assessments, at the beginning of the year, the students learned explicitly about reading fluency and effective acquisition strategies. Students identified their current reading fluency level and marked it on a large graph in the front of the classroom. And again on a graph that that students saved in their binders. This activity ensured that students were aware of the purpose of these assessments and their own personal reading fluency goals. Then, when students took another fluency test, they also monitored their progress again in both locations. Students knew the score they "should" be reaching, and many students were even surprised to find that they were not reading at grade level at the beginning of the year.

In response to this gap, in between testing sessions, the teacher implemented many of the aforementioned research-based reading fluency strategies. The teacher ensured that students were reading in a variety of ways, including group readings, read alouds, partner reads, choral reads, and individual reading time. Students also engaged in targeted vocabulary instruction every week, using high-frequency words found in the texts utilized in class. Because the school year began with students learning about reading fluency, students were keenly aware of the metacognitive decisions the teacher made. The teacher would consistently remind students explicitly of the reasons they were engaging in each of the specific reading activities. Students also knew their personal goals for reading rate and comprehension level. This metacognitive awareness was especially important for students to be able to take ownership in their learning

and find intrinsic motivation.

Results

For the students' reading fluency assessment growth, we analyzed each student's baseline score and the student was assigned a growth target accordingly. Growth targets for 11th and 12th grade students ranged from an increase of 10 words per minute (wpm) to 50 words per minute, depending on how far behind the students was. The farther behind a student was, the higher the goal. These goals were relatively rigorous, especially for struggling students, as these students were expected to improve their WPM score by at least 50 words. At the end of the year, 69% of 11th students reached their growth target and 71% of 12h grade students reached their growth target.

For analytical purposes, the following visual representations of the data collected only include the 11th grade student scores. Since both grades had a similar number of students reach their growth target, the goal of this exclusion of student scores is to attempt to eliminate one more variable. **Figure 1** shows the lower and upper extremes, interquartile ranges, and median score for students on each test. This graft tells us that students improved the most between the first and second assessment. The difference in scores between the second and third tests was smaller, and the lower and upper extremes stayed relatively the same, although the median and lower quartile increased in the third test.

Additionally, the bar graph (**Figure 2**) illustrates the mean test score for students on each test. This figure confirms that the classroom indeed had growth overall in the assessment scores. The mean test score increased significantly with each test; however, as with **Figure 1**, greater growth occurred between test one and test two.

Furthermore, the scatter plot (**Figure 3)** shows the relationship between initial test scores and final test scores. There is a clear positive correlation between the two, which is to say that

students who score highly on the first are likely to score highly on the third. This tells us that the tests are consistent in terms of difficulty, which makes them useful for assessing growth. In other words, the tests used are proven to be reliable and valid. On this graph, the pink dots represent students who met their growth target and blue dots represent students who did not. We can see that the blue dots are clustered near the origin, so it appears that students who do not meet their target tend to be students who do poorly on the initial exam.

Finally, **Figure 4** is a kernel density plot that shows the distribution of growth for the class. The height of the kernal density plot tells the proportion of students that achieved a certain level of growth from their initial to final test. The distribution is fairly normal, although there is a fat right tail, which indicates more high growth learners than might be expected. We can see that the vast majority of the distribution is past the zero mark on the x-axis, so the vast majority of students experienced growth, and very few experienced significant losses. The peak represent the mode of the data set, so it appears that the most common result was a student gaining about 40 points from the first to the final test. Overall this graph shows robust growth across almost the entire classroom.

Figure 1

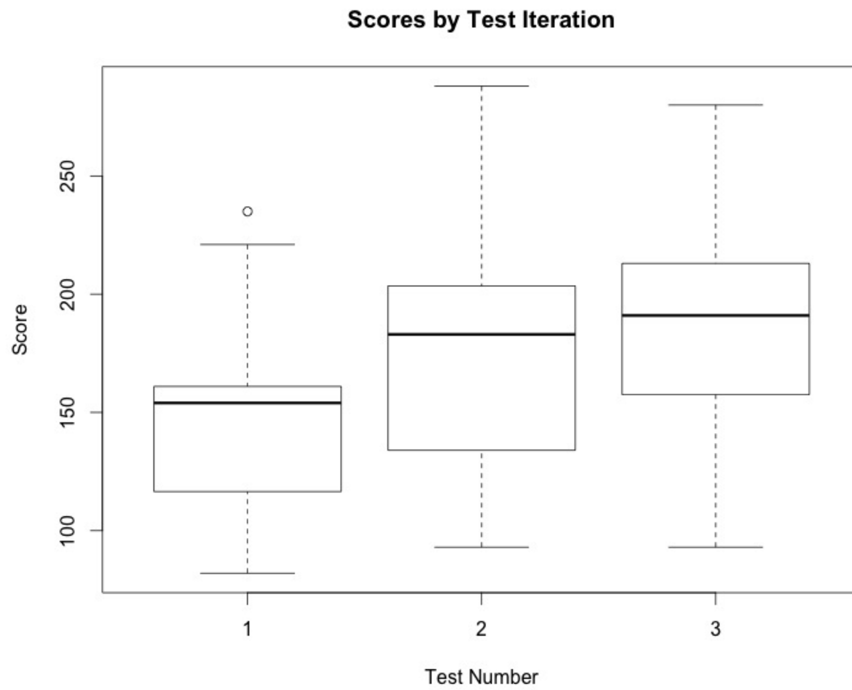


Figure 2

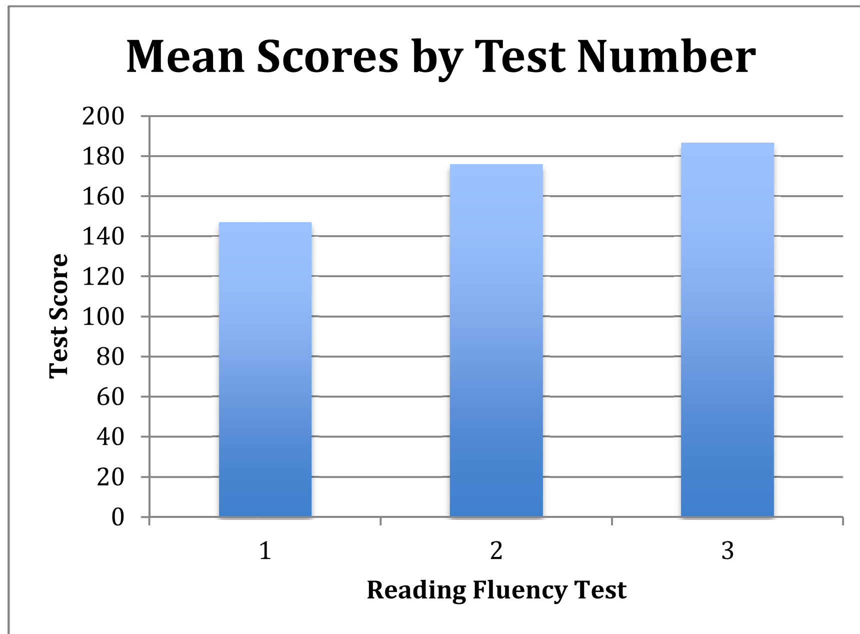


Figure 3

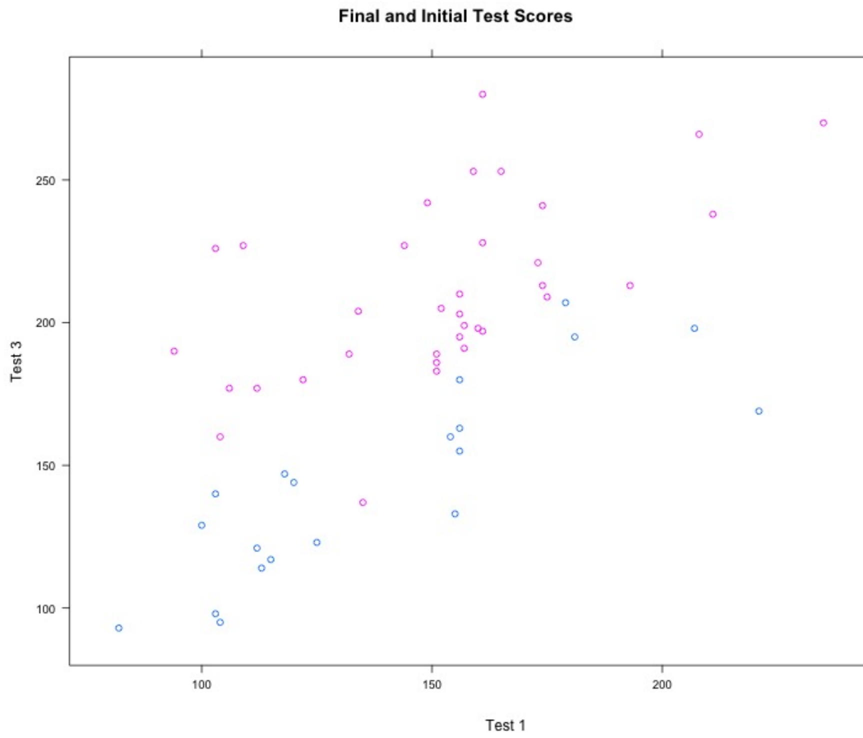
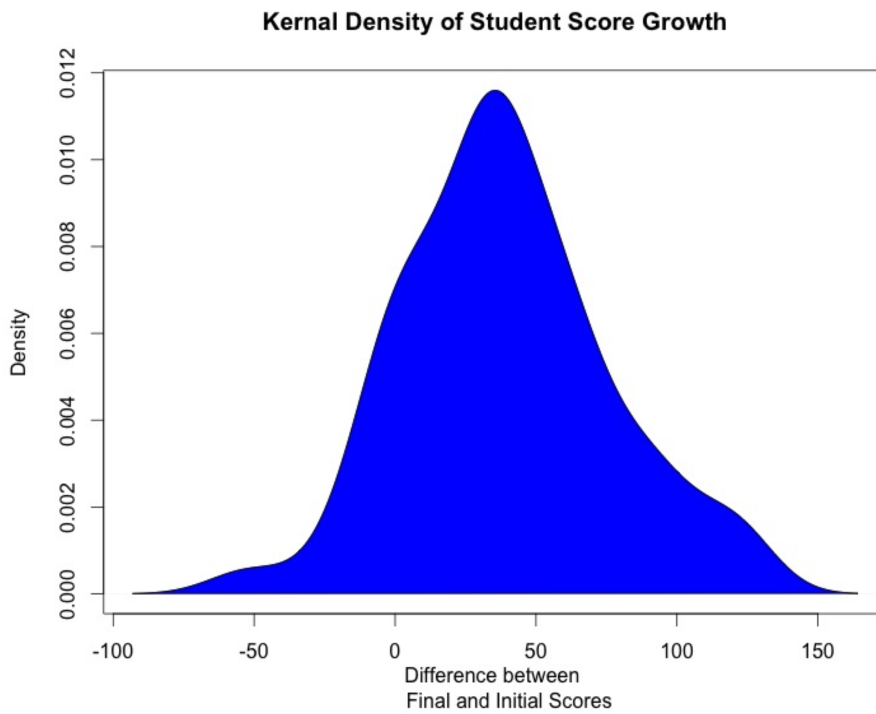


Figure 4



Discussion

Though not every student reached his or her growth target and a few students did not see any improvement at all, overall, there was a significant difference between test one and three. It is interesting that the difference in student scores between tests one and two is larger than the difference between test two and three as is shown in **Figures 1** and **2**. There are several possibilities as to why this difference exists even though the tests were evenly spaced out. The first explanation is that student scores on test two jumped because students were more familiar with the assessment process and adjusted their performance accordingly, causing the data to be skewed. The second explanation is that students fail to retain information over their summer break. Usually, this retention problem manifests itself in students' inability to recall information from previous courses, but it is possible that students also lose some of their reading fluency rate over the summer. Once students are back in class and frequently practicing their reading, their reading rate jumps a fair amount. The last explanation is that high school upperclassmen have a higher level of engagement and focus during the initial months of school and then their motivation wavers as the school year comes to a close. This issue of student focus, or "senioritis" as some call it, would explain why the growth between test two and three is much lower compared to test one and two.

Though the data shows that there is less growth in the latter half of the year, it is important to note that these strategies seemed to be particularly effective in guarding against *early* "senioritis" during the year – students always knew why they were reading in class, and consequently seemed to stay much more engaged that is usual for upperclassmen.. Students knew that for every assignment, there was a distinct purpose, and that purpose was ensuring that all students were adequately prepared for life beyond school. While students may have slacked in

their effort toward the end of the year, the initial growth between test one and two show that students were actively engaged in the class.

Another interesting observation about this curriculum is that these strategies interfered little with the overall progression of the course. Each reading fluency test took an estimated 20 minutes (split into two days) to administer and graph, and occurred three times throughout the year. The acquisition strategies were implemented within the existing curriculum through key lesson planning decision on the part of the teacher, and as such took little additional time. The biggest time requirement was the vocabulary practice, which took an estimated 15-30 minutes every week, plus another 20 minutes every two weeks for students to be assessed. Although this instruction took the most time, it also seemed to be incredibly useful. Students began to take joy in using the words learned in class and even incorporated them into their outside conversations. Considering the time required, these teaching strategies initially seemed to be worthwhile.

Implications and Areas for Further Research

Although the culmination of many research-based strategies would logically suggest the effectiveness of a data-driven reading curriculum for middle and high school students, it is clear that more research needs to be done before the data included from the example classroom can show the effectiveness of these strategies. One implication of this research is the limitations of the data used. The data above originates from a singular teacher in one specific type of high school. Further research needs to be done with a larger sample set in a wider variety of classroom settings in order to be positive of the effectiveness of these strategies and assessments. Most importantly, the data collected and analyzed here was not compared to a control group, as every student in 11th and 12th grade student who takes English at the school is in one of the classes taught by this teacher. However, based on the preliminary results of this specific classroom, it

seems likely that this type of instruction and assessment pattern would not adversely affect the students in the classroom, and could very well help many of the class's struggling readers. AT the same time, this research also shows that the students who struggle most are still not growing as much as they need to in order to become proficient readers by graduation. As teachers, we still need to find other ways to work hard to meet the needs of these students. One successful class like the one researched above is not enough. It is possible that utilizing these strategies across upper level grades may help these students make slow but consistent progress. More research needs to be done to confirm this hypothesis, but it my be a viable solution.

A Note on Text Complexity

Though utilizing reading fluency assessments gives teachers of adolescent students a general idea of the reading level of a class, it is not enough just to assess students; teachers also have to use this data to guide instruction. Reading level should be taken into consideration when selecting a text for a class lesson *as well as* when deciding how students will engage with a text or when designing lessons that teach a certain reading-based skill. In the article "Growing your Garden of Complex Texts," authors Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey advocate that teachers should analyze every text that they might teach in a course before deciding which texts to teach. They also note that, "matching the task with the text is an important consideration of text complexity" (2013). Generally, the more student led work that will be done with a text, the lower level a text should be. Conversely, if the teacher is going to scaffold the work being done with a text, the more challenging a text can be. For example, if a teacher plans on guiding students through analyzing a text, the text can be more challenging. If the teacher expects students to jigsaw a text and participate in literature circles, then the text should be less challenging. Furthermore, the level of practice students have done on a skill also matters. For example, if students have never created a one-sentence theme for a text before, it would be smart to have

them work with fairly simple texts first – that way, the students' comprehension of the text does not impede their ability to master the skill. Then, when students are more confident with the skill, they can apply it to a more complex, challenging text.

Though research shows that text complexity should vary based on task and student proficiency, for the most part, required reading in grades 7-12 has undergone little change over the years. While teachers may incorporate one or two current or recent best sellers (such as *Life of Pi* or *Kite Runner*) the reading curriculum in language arts courses generally stick to texts that are recognized as works of literary merit, or "the classics" (such as works by Shakespeare, Hemingway, and the Brontë sisters.) With this in mind, and taking into consideration the suggestion made by the authors of the article "Grow Your Garden of Complex Texts," I have carefully selected books that are currently read or would be approved to be read in the classroom and have leveled each text. A portion the books included in the following data for grade level equivalents have been chosen from the list of "BBC's 100 Books To Read Before You Die" as it can be assumed that if these books are frequently read, they are also probably read in some schools. The vast majority of the books mentioned on this list fit the aforementioned qualifications to be included in a high school curriculum and thus are relevant to the purpose of this data. Additionally, I have selected books from the list entitled "Suggested Reading for High School," which is published by Pearson Prentice Hall on their website.

In addition to the books from the BBC list, the other selection of books are from the list of "Top 25 books read overall, grades 1-12" according to the company Accelerated Reader (specifically the books that appear most frequently on the 7th grade through 12th grade portion of that list). This reading data set is the largest available on student reading in k-12. Accelerated Reader claims that these lists come from "book reading records for more than 9.8 million students in grades 1-12 who read more than 300 million books during the 2013-2014 school

year." The records also include schools from all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia" ("What Students are Reading", 2015). While Accelerated Reader may be slightly biased as a company that provides a reading program for students, the fact remains that this data gives a good general overview of what students are reading. Accelerated Reader is used in schools for both classroom assigned books as well as independently chosen student reading. As such, the data in this report reflects both of these types of reading. For example, both Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet (a commonly read play) and the currently popular "Divergent" series appear on this list. Thus, fluency grade level data for these books is useful, as these texts are widely read.

For each of these books, I have listed their Lexile score in the hopes of compiling a useful list of potential texts for adolescent Language Arts classrooms. Though reading level is just one facet of text complexity, these two lists offer a starting point for teachers who want to consider reading level as an important factor in text selection.

Conclusion

Just like the mastery of an instrument or success in a sport, learning to read takes time and learn. No matter where a student is in his or her educational learning, the benefits of teaching a student to read (even if they are also simultaneously "reading to learn") are numerous. Though the results in this paper are the reflection of a small experience with a singular educator, they point to the larger possibility of using reading fluency strategies and assessments as a means to an end. Students must be able to read complex texts by the time they graduate, and the new curriculum standards such as the Common Core State Standards place an added pressure on teachers to make sure that all students are ready for college and career. With these new pressures there must be new strategies as well. If teachers of adolescent students place a greater focus on the selection of texts, the teaching of reading skills, and the importance of students owning their learning, students can indeed be adequately prepared for life after high school.

Appendix I: Reading Fluency Text Data

Lexile to Grade Correspondence

(*from www.lexile.com*)

Grade	Reader Measures, Mid-Year 25th percentile to 75th percentile (IQR)
1	Up to 300L
2	140L to 500L
3	330L to 700L
4	445L to 810L
5	565L to 910L
6	665L to 1000L
7	735L to 1065L
8	805L to 1100L
9	855L to 1165L
10	905L to 1195L
11 and 12	940L to 1210L

BBC's "100 Books to Read Before You Die" & "Suggested Reading for High School"

Book	Author	Lexile Score
Things Fall Apart	Achebe, Chinua	890
How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents	Alvarez, Julia	950
Winesburg, Ohio	Anderson, Sherwood	1050
I know why the Caged Bird Sings	Angelou, Maya	1070
Pride and Prejudice	Jane Austen	1100
Growing Up	Baker, Russell	1090
In These Girls, Hope is a Muscle	Blais, Madeleine	1150
Jane Eyre	Bronte, Emily	890
O Pioneers!	Cather, Willa	930
Cervantes, Miguel de	Don Quixote	1410
The House on Mango Street	Sandra Cisneros	870
Lord Jim	Joseph Conrad	1120
Having our Say: The Delaney Sisters first 100 Years	Delaney, Sarah and Elizabeth	890
Great Expectations	Dickens, Charles	1150
David Copperfield	Dickens, Charles	1070
A Tale of Two Cities	Dickens, Charles	790
Sister Carrie	Dreiser, Theodore	620 (HL)
Crime and Punishment	Dostoyevsky, Fyodor	990
Rebecca	Du Maurier, Daphne	880
Invisable Man	Ellison, Ralph	1310
As I Lay Dying	Faulkner, William	870
The Sound and the Fury	Faulkner, William	870
The Great Gatsby	Fitzgerald, F. Scott	820
Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl	Anne Frank	1080
The Lord of the Flies	Golding, William	770
The Autobiography of a Face	Grealy, Lucy	200
Death Be Not Proud	Gunther, John	1060
Return of the Native	Hardy, Thomas	1040
The House of the Seven Gables	Hawthorne, Nathaniel	1320
The Scarlet Letter	Hawthorne, Nathaniel	940
Stranger in a Strange Land	Heinlein, Robert A.	940

A Farewell to Arms	Hemmingway, Earnest	730
For Whom The Bell Tolls	Hemmingway, Earnest	840
The Sun Also Rises	Hemmingway, Earnest	610
The Illiad	Homer	1290
The Odyssey	Homer	1290
Les Miserables	Hugo, Victor	1010
Their Eyes Were Watching God	Hurston, Zora Neale	1080
Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man	Joyce, James	1120
One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest	Kesey, Ken	1110
A Separate Peace	Knowles, John	1110
Charles Kuralt's America	Kuralt, Charles	870
To Kill a Mockingbird	Lee, Harper	870
The Sea Wolf	London, Jack	1020
The Natural	Malamud, Bernard	1060
Dragonsong	McCaffrey, Anne	960
Member of the Wedding	McCullers, Carson	900
Moby Dick	Mellville, Herman	1230
Death of a Salesman	Miller, Arthur	1320
The Crucible	Miller, Arthur	1320
Gone With the Wind	Mitchell, Margaret	1100
The Glory Field	Myers, Walter Dean	800
The Things They Carried	O'Brien, Tim	880
1984	Orwell, George	1090
Cry, the Beloved Country	Paton, Alan	860
Complete Tales and Poems	Poe, Edgar Allen	1300
My Name is Asher Lev	Potok, Chiam	640
The Chosen	Potok, Chiam	970
All Quiet on the Western Front	Remarque, Erich Maria	830
The Catcher in the Rye	Salinger, J.D.	790
Ivanhoe	Scott, Sir Walter	1410
Frankenstein	Shelley, Mary	
Moon Shot: The Inside Story of America's Race to the Moon	Shepherd, Alan and Deke Slayton	
On the Beach	Shute, Nevil	780
The Jungle	Sinclair, Upton	1170
The Grapes of Wrath	Steinbeck, John	680

The Pearl	Steinbeck, John	1010
The Red Pony	Steinbeck, John	810
Of Mice and Men	Steinbeck, John	630
The Joy Luck Club	Tan, Amy	930
Walden	Thoreau, Henry David	
My Life and Hard Times	Thurber, James	1120
The Thurber Carnival	Thurber, James	1050
The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn	Twain, Mark	720 (HL)
The Adventures of Tom Sawyer	Twain, Mark	950
Ethan Frome	Wharton, Edith	1160
The Glass Menagerie	Williams, Tennessee	
Black Boy	Wright, Richard	950
Native Son	Wright, Richard	700
The Lord of the Rings	Tolkein, J. R. R.	860
Harry Potter	Rowling, J.K.	880
His Dark Materials	Pullman, Phillip	1000
Little Women	Alcott, Louisa M	1300
Tess of the D'urberville	Hardy, Thomas	1110
Catch 22	Keller, Joseph	1140
The Hobbit	Tolkein, J.R.R.	1000
The Time Traveler's Wife	Niffenegger, Audrey	780
War and Peace	Tolstoy, Leo	1180
Alice in Wonderland	Carroll, Lewis	980
The Wind in the Willows	Grahme, Kenenth	1140
Anna Karenina	Tolstoy, Leo	1080
Chronicles of Narnia	Lewis, C.S.	870
Emma	Austen, Jane	990
Persuasion	Austen, Jane	1120
The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe	Lewis, C.S	940
The Kite Runner	Hosseini, Khaled	840
Memoirs of a Geisha	Golden, Arthur	1000
Winnie the Pooh	Milne, A.A.	790
Animal Farm	Orwell, George	1170
The Da Vinci Code	Dan Brown	850
A Prayer for Owen Meaney	John Irving	1050
The Woman in White	Collins, Wilke	1100
Anne of Green Gables	Montgomery, L.M.	970
Far from the Maddening Crowd	Hardy, Thomas	1110

The Handmaid's Tale	Margaret Atwood	750
Life of Pi	Martel, Yan	830
Dune	Herbert, Frank	800
Sense and Sensibility	Austen, Jane	1180
Brave New World	Huxley, Aldous	870
The Curious Incident of the Dong in the Nighttime	Haddon, Mark	1180
The Lovely Bones	Sebold, Alice	890
The Count of Monte Cristo	Dumas, Alexander	780
On the Road	Kerouac, Jack	930
Jude the Obscure	Hardy, Thomas	1060
Midnight's Children	Rushdie, Salmon	1120
Oliver Twist	Dickens, Charles	970
The Secret Garden	Burnett, Francis Hodgson	970
The Inferno	Dante	1120
Vanity Fair	Thackery, William Makepeace	1260
A Christmas Carol	Dickens, Charles	900
The Color Purple	Walker, Alice	670 (HL)
The Remains of the Day	Ishiguro, Kazuo	1210
Madame Bovary		1030
Charlotte's Web	White, E. B.	680
The Five People You Meet in College	Albom, Mitch	780
The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes	Conan Doyle, Sir Arthur	1080
The Little Prince	Saint-Exupery, Antoine de	710
A Confederacy of Dunces	John Kennedy Toole	800
A Town Like Alice	Shute, Nevil	870
The Three Musketeers	Dumas, Alexandre	990
Charlie and the Chocolate Factory	Dahl, Roald	810

Accelerated Reader

Book	Author	Grades	Lexile Score
Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Hard Luck	Kinney, Jeff	7, 8, 9	1020
The Outsiders	Hinton, S. E.	7, 8, 9	750
Divergent	Roth, Veronica	All	700 (HL)
The Giver	Lowry, Lois	7, 8	760
The Hunger Games	Collins, Suzanne	All	810
The Fault in our Stars	Green, John	All	850
Diary of a Wimpy Kid: The Third Wheel	Kinney, Jeff	7, 8	1060
Rikki-Tikki-Tavi	Kipling, Rudyard	7	800
The Lightning Theif	Riordan, Rick	7, 8, 10, 11	740
Mockingjay	Collins, Suzanne	All	800
Freak the Mighty/The Mighty	Philbrick, Rodman	7	1000
Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Dog Days	Kinney, Jeff	7, 8	1010
The House of Hades	Riordan, Rick	All	680
Diary of a Wimpy Kid	Kinney, Jeff	7, 8	950
Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Rodrick Rules	Kinney, Jeff	7	910
Diary of a Wimpy Kid: The Last Straw	Kinney, Jeff	7	970
Allegiant	Roth, Veronica	All	830
Hatchet	Paulsen, Gary	7	1020
The Sea of Monsters	Riordan, Rick	7, 8	740
The Titan's Course	Riordan, Rick	7	630
Insurgent	Roth, Veronica	8, 9, 10, 11, 12	710 (HL)
Catching Fire	Collins, Suzanne	8, 9, 10, 11, 12	820
The Tell-Tale Heart	Poe, Edgar Allen	8	1350
The Diary of Anne Frank	Frank, Anne	8	1080
Night	Wiesel, Elie	8, 9, 10, 11, 12	570
To Kill a Mockingbird	Lee, Harper	8, 9, 10, 11	870
The Boy in the Striped Pajamas	Boyne, John	8	1080
Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Cabin Fever	Kinney, Jeff	8	1060
The Maze Runner	Dasher, James	8	770 (HL)
City of Bones	Clare, Cassandra	8, 9, 10, 11, 12	
The Mark of Athena	Riordan, Rick	8	690

Of Mice and Men	Steinbeck, John	9, 10, 11, 12	630
A Child Called "It"	Pelzer, Dave	9, 10, 11, 12	850
Animal Farm	Orwell, George	9, 10, 11, 12	1170
The Cask of Amontillado	Poe, Edgar Allen	9	1350
Looking for Alaska	Green, John	9, 10, 11, 12	930
Speak	Anderson, Laurie Halse	9	690
Fahrenheit 451	Bradbury, Ray	9, 10, 11	890
The Necklace	Maupassant, Guy de	9	1030
Lord of the Flies	Golding, William	10, 12	770
Things Fall Apart	Achebe, Chinua	10	890
Anthem	Rand, Ayn	10	880
The Great Gatsby	Fitzgerald, F. Scott	10, 11, 12	820
Thirteen Reasons Why	Jay Asher	10, 11, 12	550
The Perks of Being a Wallflower	Chbosky, Stephen	10, 11, 12	720
The Crucible	Miller, Arthur	11	1320
The Scarlet Letter	Hawthorne, Nathaniel	11	940
The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn	Twain, Mark	11	720 (HL)
The Catcher in the Rye	Salinger, J. D.	11	790
The Kite Runner	Hosseini, Khaled	12	840
1984	Orwell, George	12	1090
Ender's Game	Card, Orson Scott	12	780
Brave New World	Huxley, Aldous	12	870

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