WHAT DO YOUNG ADULTS READ?

A QUALITATIVE STUDY INTO WHAT TEXTS GRADE 12 STUDENTS

VALUE—PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

by

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MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Interdisciplinary Children's Literature Programme)

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

December 2002

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Date   December 29, 2002

Abstract: What do Young Adults Read?

What texts do young adults read and what media do they value? This qualitative study examines the breadth of texts that seventy young adults value—past, present and future. In this investigation, reading is the act of receiving a text and interpreting it. Students named their favourite texts—movies, videos, television, print and those that they valued from childhood.

The study took place in three stages—the first, collecting written survey responses from seventy students from three different Alberta high schools. Next, I conducted audiotaped interviews with twelve individuals, two boys and two girls at each site. Finally, I translated six of the interview transcripts into short representative narratives of young adult readers.

This multi-case study reveals how idiosyncratic the engagement with reading is for each individual. The findings show that there is little room for predicting how other readers might value texts after identifying the texts that some value. However, the student responses reveal a level of articulate thought as to why their particular texts were valued.

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Oh, the places you'll go!

…Out there things can happen

and frequently do

to people as brainy

and footsy as you.

And when things start to happen,

don't worry. Don't stew.

Just go right along.

You'll start happening too.

(Seuss, 1990).

My thesis process has been in part an example of "Oh, the places I'll go." The journey to proposing the study, collecting the data, and analyzing my findings has been filled with unexpected happenings, both good and bad. I have gone to the places of the memories and imaginations of seventy Grade 12 students who have told me about what it means to be a young adult reader. I invite you to just come along and read about my experiences, observations and findings and I am convinced that "*You'll* start happening too."

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Theresa Rogers for your constant and careful suggestions throughout this thesis process. Thank you to Judith Saltman and Marlene Asselin for setting me on the right course to complete this study as well as for joining me as I reached my destination.

A special thank you to the seventy students who so openly shared their reading histories with me. In particular, thank you to Anya, Erica, Steve, Stuart, Anita, Charlie, Denny, Anita, Vicky, Ronny, Joe, Tanya and Lori in your true identities for the richness of data that you gave me in order to tell your stories.

Thank you to Graham Foster, Toni Marasco and Mary-Ann McCallum, my work supervisors who gave me the encouragement, time and freedom to complete this study and to Cheryl Halfyard for being my sounding board amongst my colleagues.

Thank you to my family, my sisters: Carole, Christine, Michelle, and my stepfather, Michel and most of all to my mom Monique. Without you Mom, I would not have been able to finish this long and fulfilling journey. I value your part in my creation of my own and the stories of the students with whom I worked.

Chapter 1: Purpose for Research

1.1 Introduction

A house without books is like a room without windows. No man has a right to bring up children without surrounding them with books.... Children learn to read being in the presence of books (Mann, 1871-1950).

As a longtime reader, student, and teacher of print, books have held a very important place in my life [especially books for children]. I would agree with Mann that books are an important component in becoming a whole person and that allowing children to be immersed in a print-rich environment enables their entry into a literate society. However, it seems to me that today we need to revisit what other tools are required in the journey to becoming a literate citizen in today's society.

For approximately five years or so, I have been wondering, "What does it mean to be a reader in today's technological society?" Individuals are constantly being bombarded by messages in various text forms from which they must decide in a split second if they are worthy of attention and then later interpretation or if they should be disregarded and erased from their consciousnesses. Texts come to us through various media: print, images, moving images, television, radio, stereo sound, video-games, multi-media, and virtual messages on the Internet. Some of these texts have more immediacy than others. Teachers, librarians, publishers and other text creators need to know the full range of what young people are reading in order to help them learn to respond critically to the messages that surround them so that they can make the best sense of what is important in their world today and in the future.

In consideration of my earlier speculation about the rapidly evolving understanding of literacy, I have spent over one year's time in studying my broad research question, "What do young adults read?" Besides asking for a snapshot of their current reading practices, I wanted to know the meaning of this question as part of the students' reading pasts and their reading futures. To this end, the question could just as easily have been, "What have young adults read as children?" or "What will young adults read as adults?" My thesis is an exploration of this one question from the perspective of the reading pasts, presents and futures of seventy Grade 12 students' written survey responses and the later one-to-one interviews with twelve

of these same students in the spring of 2002. Together, they helped to create a mosaic of what it means to be a young adult reader on the cusp of entering into the adult world.

1.2 Personal Interest

"We are what we read, but we are equally what we don't read. What we, as a society, leave on the shelves defines us at least as much as the books they gobble up" (Manguel, 1998, p. 225). "No story elicited by an image is final or exclusive, and measures of correctness vary according to circumstances that give rise to the story itself" (Manguel, 2000, p. 13).

Like Manguel, I am a product of what I read as well as what I have not as yet read. Books and other stories that I have read have helped to create the reader that I am today. However, there are some types of stories such as horror novels, action films and video games that I decidedly have chosen to eschew because I do not derive a connection with or sense of enjoyment from them. My deciding not to read these stories also has helped to create the reader that I am today. For as long as I can remember—at least from the moment that I entered school at age six, many of my favourite experiences have been with my nose in a book. I have also "read" stories on television and video, in galleries [the images that Manguel, 2000, refers to in the second quotation], in movie theatres as well as on radio and stereo. Manguel's (1998) description of how the interpreter helps to define the story echoes my compulsion to understand and later tell the story of what young adults read today and in their childhoods. Yet, this story is not complete in this particular moment, as it may become something completely different in the mind of another reader with a very different reading history. These future readings will enrich the story of my research because my readers will add the circumstances of their reading histories to their engagement with this thesis. Knowing who I am at the time of this writing and my reading background will help to produce an understanding of why I wanted to create word portraits of what it means to be a Grade 12 reader in my three sites in the spring of 2002.

I am a teacher—for a long time a teacher of children, for five years a teacher of teachers in a consultative position in an Alberta school district [including the time that I collected the data for this research] and now as vice-principal in K-6 elementary school. After nineteen years as an elementary teacher, I have long wondered if literature continues to have importance in an individual's development of personal meaning. My observations of the

students in my classrooms, my discussions with colleagues in the staff room and my conversations with adult friends and family have me thinking that people choose to read print as a self-selected activity less and less. If this is so, what are people choosing to read? And are these texts that could be considered aesthetic or literary?

For me, we can engage with more texts that are literary besides those in print. Stories that come to us through a range of media can all be worthy of being called literature: oral tales, strongly voiced news essays, films [both feature and television formats], musical pieces and of course visual compositions. If there is something in any one of these modes of sharing a story that encourages me to revisit it again and again, and I find something new with each reading, I consider it a literary text.

How does my background as a reader connect to my observations of student interactions with print narratives and poetry? Before assuming my current administrative position as well as my former consultant position, my experience in teaching grades four to six showed me that many of the students in my own classroom chose to read books that I found of questionable literary value—*Goosebumps, Sweet Valley High, The Babysitters' Club,* and *Series 2000* shock-theme novels. During daily 30 minute periods of self-selected silent reading many students spent most of their time as browsers—flipping through pages and reading the captions of photographs; making several visits back and forth to the classroom library of more than 500 titles—primarily fiction but some non-fiction, too. In an earlier research project for a Master's of Education degree (2001), I interviewed eighteen students from the ages of ten to fourteen to discover if they had an idea of what literature, especially children's literature meant to them. I wanted to know if their experiences with stories in whichever way that they chose to define them, would be able to show me what literature is for them. I wondered if books had been supplanted by something else. The general findings from this research showed me that most readers are influenced by a reading mentor be it parent, sibling, teacher or friend. Favourite stories became favourites after experiencing them in a relationship. Those students in grades 5, 7 and 8 read a large variety of genres from slapstick humour to poetry; fantasy to informational texts; realistic fiction to stories with morals. There was also a difference in taste based on the age of the respondents. Younger boys liked slapstick humour. Older boys liked fantasy. An interesting finding from this research is that all but one of the interviewees spoke of stories as coming from books

even though I was careful not to define stories in this way. When no student initiated a discussion about a favourite story as film or music or family storytelling, I explicitly asked each individual about a favourite non-print text. When asked about their favourite non-print texts, they tended to speak of texts that they had experienced recently. This was a change from print stories because favourites did not always refer directly to current popular culture.

Coursework for my Master of Arts in Children's Literature degree at the University of British Columbia helped me to understand the need for a breadth of text forms for children's and young adults' reading in a library [school or public] in order to encourage young patrons to continue to read personally and critically. At the end of this coursework, I began to wonder at the effect of literature on older students. In my social life, when I talk about books with friends who are non-readers, I sometimes feel that I am living the life of a dinosaur—out of touch with what really matters. Colleagues who I greatly respect have often spoken to me about how there is no time to read in a day. A composite of what they have told me goes something like this, "We're too busy raising our families, driving to hockey practice, going to work, planning lessons, marking student work, supervising our children's homework and maintaining a household." Yet, these same people talk about programs that they watch on television and the latest sports scores. This led me to wonder if a sampling of Grade 12 students would spend as little time in voluntary reading in any format. I chose to study twelfth graders because as a group, they soon would be thrust into adult roles and responsibilities. Twelfth graders were a group that I had access to sample, as at the time of our interviews they still were members of my school system. I wondered if perhaps they would be able to project themselves into the role of who they would be as readers and citizens in the future.

My curiosity about what makes a person a life-long reader, together with my desire to help students and teachers become excited about the books that they read, led me to this thesis research. By finding out from the students' perspectives, which texts influenced their development of an appreciation for narratives, I hoped to uncover techniques that teachers of all ages of school children can use to bring students and books closer together. The information imparted to me by the students may be used in future professional development workshops with English language arts teachers who want to help make curricula come alive in their classrooms.

English language arts teachers are not the only individuals who have had to make adjustments for a broadening understanding of literary texts. I must admit that a large reason for my becoming the reader that I am today has come from excellent guidance by librarians in the public library system. Later, once I became a teacher, public librarians have helped me to find children's and young adult literary texts to share with my students and other teachers. This is a relationship that I continue to enjoy. My conversations with children's and young adult librarians in my city's public library system as well as through my studies at the University of British Columbia have shown me that they, too, must now be prepared to provide texts in a variety of media. Libraries are rapidly evolving into repositories for texts that are not just print. It is my hope that the findings in my surveys and interviews with Grade 12 students can help librarians create collections that may encourage more young adults to visit the library.

A final note about my personal interest. I have belonged to a book club for the past five years or so. Something that I have gained from this experience is to have the novel that I have read enriched by the readings of other members in the group. They bring up different questions and perspectives than I had considered earlier. This is an example of something that I truly believe—we become readers in a social context. Jerome Bruner is a theorist with whom I share an affinity about learning being a social activity. In his 1986 publication, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*, he explained that

> I have come increasingly to recognize that most learning in most settings is a
> communal activity, a sharing of the culture. It is not just that the child must make his
> knowledge his own, but that he must make it his own in a community of those who
> share his sense of belonging to a culture.

Although I did not always know the source for this theory, I have shared a similar belief since my earliest days as a teacher, over twenty years ago. My research into what young adults read has enabled me to wonder professionally about whether these Grade 12 students have felt the importance of reading with others in their reading histories. I was curious to find out who the people were who helped to make them the readers that they are today.

By doing this research, I stepped out of my teacher's role for part of the time. Since I truly wanted to learn something new, I asked the Grade 12 students to teach me about their

lives as readers. I wanted to be able to listen carefully [or read carefully as in the case of the seventy surveyed students] to be able to

> mak[e] space for the other, being aware of the other, paying attention to the other, honoring the other. It mean[t] not rushing to fill [these] students' silences with fearful speech of [my] own and not trying to coerce them into saying the things that [I] want[ed] to hear. It mean[t] entering empathetically into the student's world so that he or she perceive[d] [me] as someone who had the promise of being able to hear another person's truth (Palmer, 1998).

Young adults have definite texts that they value. Moreover, they are able to respond critically and aesthetically to these texts. Understanding what texts young adults value coupled with their abilities to respond critically to these texts, can help adults guide children and teens to examine everything that they choose to read with a more critical eye or ear. The open-ended questions in the interview protocol as well as the written surveys gave me a window into valued texts and why they are valued by youth. From the surveys and interviews, I learned from the students themselves what role that children's literature [in its many formats] has played in the role of making them readers.

1.3 Setting the Context for Interactions with Young Adult Readers

"Half my life is an act of revision." (John Irving in *Writer's Notebook*, 1984)

Irving's quotation is an apt description of my research process during this thesis as I collected, interpreted and reinterpreted data. I first had to participate in acts of vision [or audition] as I read and listened to the respondents' discussion of themselves as reader. What is particular meaningful in this quotation is the notion of "re-visioning", looking at something familiar with "new eyes" [and in some cases, new ears]. I had to look at the data in many ways to "really see" what was actually there.

I was not the only person who had to participate in an act of revision. I expected the student respondents to do likewise when I asked them to consider new definitions for commonly used terms associated with reading. In both the written and oral survey instructions as well as the opening to my interviews with twelve students, I began by clarifying some terms that I used in ways which the students may have been unaccustomed. The first word that I defined is "text". For the purposes of my research, the word text included any message that can be listened to like a family story, spoken like a prepared

speech, printed like a novel or newspaper article, viewed like a movie or television program, or something that mixes formats like hypertext or pop-up music videos that also include some print. The second definition that I clarified is the word "read." Just like the word text, the word read usually is associated with print documents. When I spoke to the respondents about my use of the word read, I explained that I was not limiting reading to eyes and brains working together to make meaning from writing. In this instance, the word read meant when our brains receive a message and make meaning from the message, no matter how the message is received. So, individuals could "read" a movie, "read" a set of instructions spoken by a teacher, "read" a photograph. I asked students to keep these terms in mind as they filled out their surveys or participated in our discussions.

1.4 Reading, Literacy and Valued Texts in Today's Society

What does it mean to be literate? Margaret Meek (1991) described a person as "literate [as someone who learns] to use the technology of our day and [who] decides… what [literacy skills] are good for." Hers is just one voice of many who are concerned that the children and young adults of today will join the ranks of adulthood without the literacy required in order to succeed in an increasingly technologically complex society.

There is large disagreement about what this literacy looks like. This is a question of meaning that is couched from the perspective of the adult who has specific literacy goals in mind for [a] youth [in general.] In its earliest context, to be literate was only attained by a privileged elite as in "educated, cultured; versed in literature or creative writing"(Merriam-Webster, 2001), two definitions close to the word's 15th century etymology (Merriam-Webster, 2001). What is acceptable literacy for one group of students may be totally unacceptable for another group of students. Meek wrote that British schooling continues to stratify the what and how of literacy for children from different socio-economic levels.

There are different versions of literacy, some much fuller than others, some much more powerful than others. *Where* they go to school seems to lead some children to positions of power in adult life even more directly than *how* they prove their competencies in examinations that are open to all. (Meek, 1991).

Meek's argument can be transferred somewhat to the Canadian context. In my school district, all professionals and newspaper readers recognize that some schools score better than others in terms of our academic performance measures—provincial examinations. Other

schools perform at a lesser standard. A quick look at the school's socio-economic background can sometimes hint at why a school's students perform as they do.

The literacy which moves furthest away from the original meaning of literate is the definition used by those who are concerned with a base level of literacy, often named "functional literacy". Again, this is a skill level which has many people disagreeing as to what it means to be "able to read and write." Statistics Canada (1998) uses a meaning ascribed to it by the International Adult Literacy Survey [IALS], "Literacy is the ability to understand and use print and written information to function in society to achieve goals, and to develop knowledge and potential."

Today, an entire children's culture has developed that is (often for marketing reasons) very attentive to the needs and interests of the younger generation. Whether through targeted literature, music, drama, movies, TV, sports, fashion or the ever-expanding world of cyberspace (computers, video games, the Net, the Web and so on), the highly significant child/consumer is anything but ignored (Rae, 1997, pp. xiii-xiv).

In writing this preface to her book *Everybody's Favourites,* Rae, a journalist and literary critic, described the reality of the sea of texts in which the child readers swim. Across Canada, English language arts curricula now also require students to be media literate. This is a daunting task for educators since teachers must first learn to read and deconstruct visual, aural and multimedia texts themselves before trying this out in the classroom.

> …To assume that literacy involves only the ability to produce and interpret (write and read) print or other permanently encoded texts is to capture only a small part of what is involved in literate practice. In addition to permanent codes, number or symbol systems, signs and even or unintentional movements contribute to making and representing meaning in addition to and in conjunction with written language. (Eisner in Moje, 2002, p. 108).

Teachers and librarians have a much larger job ahead of them in contributing to the literacy of readers than for which individuals in my era may have been trained. As Eisner (In Moje, 2002) describes, reading is not just for print anymore. The expanding understanding of what it means to be literate also has created an expanded notion of text. Text messages no longer are limited to print. In the *Alberta Program of Studies for English Language of Arts,* students are expected to read, write, speak, listen, view and represent texts. In this sense,

conversations, movies, songs, and mixed formats like hypertext messages are all messages that can now be called texts. All this leads to why I feel that it is essential to uncover what students feel is worth reading. For the purposes of this research, I was interested in the reception and interpretation of a text message in any modality—listening, viewing, and yes, print reading.

To my mind, few individuals have actually asked students still in the school system about what it means for them to be literate and versed in texts that they consider to behave enduring value. In writing about National Research Center for Literature Teaching and Learning [NRCLTL] reported on using literature in the classroom, Allington and Guice (1997) express a similar idea, "[W]e know less than we could about how different literature curriculum schemes effect the learners who might experience them" (pp.729-730). I wanted to ask students about their transactions with text because I believe as Louise Rosenblatt does that "every reading act is an event, a transaction involving a particular reader and a particular configuration of marks on a page, and occurring at a particular time in a particular context" (Rosenblatt, 1985). My research with Grade 12 students helped me to understand "their relationships with, and continuing awareness of, the text" (Rosenblatt, 1978).

Beyond the idea of experiencing text for simply functional purposes such as reading recipes, or writing a complaint to a governmental official, or calling into a radio talk show, schools, libraries and universities have traditionally valued and honoured texts that critics have named "literature" or "children's literature". Before embarking on this study, I believed that it was possible for students to experience deeply texts that may not belong to what schools, libraries and universities have called literature. After concluding my research, I feel this belief even more strongly. Like Allen Ginsberg, I sometimes have felt that, "Many writers have preconceived ideas of what literature is supposed to be, and their ideas seem to exclude that which makes them most charming in public (Ginsberg, *Writer's Notebook*, 1984)." I could even extend this quotation to include many "educated readers" as having preconceived ideas of literature and these notions of literature may not touch the lives of the non-professional reader. Taking an example from popular culture, the television program *Frasier* often presents similar scenarios with its characterization of the esthetes Frasier and Niles who are shown up by their presumed less erudite friends and family. Frasier and Niles are definitely less charming when in the midst of their critical pronouncements of popular

culture. It seems to me that sometimes schools create similar cultures around traditionally valued texts that have now been claimed as literature or children's literature.

Because I have sometimes felt out of step with the critical reading elite, I wanted to find out what graduating high school students believed to be the meaning of reading and valued texts or literature in their lives. Even now, when I use the term literature, I mean the artistic expression of any form of text: print, film, video, television, multi-media and aural. To me, a secondary requirement for literature is that the text has enduring value, in the sense that I, the reader, wish to revisit it again. Each of these rereadings uncovers something new about the text. Each rereading deepens the meaning of the first reading.

As Margaret Meek wrote in the concluding chapter of her exploration of this topic in *On Being Literate*, "What is it to be literate? We have to draw our own maps, trace our own histories, acknowledge our own debts and consider ways not taken. Our literacy autobiographies reveal riches and gaps, but these narratives are not solitary journeys. We [are] always in dialogue with others..."(Meek, 1991) I wondered about students' reading choices. Did they recognize the necessity for dialogue in order to make meaning from texts— even if this dialogue is a silent one with the text itself (Rosenblatt, 1938, 1989)? Were they able, like the former Premier of New Brunswick, Frank McKenna, to articulate the meaning that a remembered childhood text brought to their lives today like his favourite *The Little Engine That Could.* [This anecdote was recorded by CBC Radio during a Canada Reads Week in an elementary school classroom where Premier McKenna spoke to the children of the enduring messages of this text: "Always keep on trying and anything is possible."]

In short, I wanted to find out [and I still want to find out] what youth on the cusp of adulthood read and value, and how their past and present reading experiences and beliefs might affect them in their adult lives. I wanted to learn from the expertise of their own literacy stories.

1.5 Previews of Upcoming Chapters

As I researched the question, "What do young adults read?" I first looked at existing theory and research that is connected to my study in Chapter 2: *Theoretical Context and Literature about what Young Adults Read.* I conclude chapter 2 with specific questions around my general question. Chapter 3: *Methods* includes the rationale for and description of how I collected data as surveys and interviews with my research subjects. Chapter 4: *Surveys*

of What Young Adults Read, Past and Present includes discussion of my findings around the seventy surveys completed by students in three research sites. Chapter 5: *Interviews and Comparisons of Personal Understandings of What it Means to be a Young Adult Reader* is a discussion of my findings after interviewing twelve Grade 12 students about their reading histories. In Chapter 6: *Young Adult Reading Narratives*, I present six narratives about twelve of my respondents around a central metaphor uncovered after rereading their interview transcripts several times. Finally in Chapter 7: *Conclusions and Recommendations for Further Research*, I combine findings from chapters four to six to make general conclusions from this study as well as make recommendations for future research around the question, "What do young adults read?"

Chapter 2: Theoretical Context and Literature about what Young Adults Read

We elaborate upon what we see by inventing ways to produce two- and three-dimensional images: sketches, statues, mosaics, paintings, photographs, film, video; and we elaborate upon what we speak through the invention of writing, printing, and audio recording (Langdorf, 1991).

2.1 Operational Definitions

Langdorf's statement supports my general research question, "What do young adults read?" It focuses on similar possibilities for text creation that I introduced to the participants in my study. I wanted the students to know that I was looking at a different type of text creation, the creation of text in the mind during and after "reading" a text. For the sake of simplicity, rather than use different words for various ways of receiving and interpreting messages such as viewing and listening, I chose to define two words, read and text, to set the context for the student surveys and interviews. In communicating to the participants, their parents, teachers, and principal, I gave them my definitions. For my purposes, I defined "read" as the ability of the brain to receive and interpret messages no matter the medium. I shared with them some examples of what a person can read by explaining that it is possible to read a conversation, a movie, a video game, a painting, a piece of music. In defining "text", I shared with the respondents that a text is any type of message that is received by the reader such as an orally recited poem, a music video, an on-line comic book, a television program, a sculpture. In this understanding of reading, the reader actively interprets the text in a transaction between self and the text (Rosenblatt, 1989). This sense of reading considers that a reader creates a text unique to the act of reading while the reader is engaged with the text. The word print is a third common word that featured prominently in my study—print, especially as it is used in connection with text and reading. For the purposes of my research, "print" texts included books, magazines, newspapers, brochures, comic books. Media texts that are predominantly "word based" are not included in this definition on the basis that a reader is able to manipulate a print text by flipping pages and not by clicking a mouse.

2.2 Background for a Broader Definition of Reading

My definitions of reading do not come solely from my own personal idiosyncratic views on reading and text. In my work as a Language Arts curriculum leader for my school district, I first began thinking about what broader literacy goals students are required to meet

when we began preparing for a new province-wide English Language Arts curriculum. The Alberta Program of Studies for English Language Arts Grades Kindergarten to 12 (2000) has expected outcomes for students at all grade levels to be able to respond personally and critically to texts and to create their own new texts. The concept of text in this document is very broad. It incorporates print, visual, aural and multi-media forms. This outcome stems from the belief that the successful adults of tomorrow are required to develop facility with language in a world of literacy which encompasses more than print and speech.

Alberta Learning is not the only body which is broadening the requirements for critical and personal response to more than just print-based texts. The Association for Curriculum Supervision and Development [ASCD], an organization which is not just interested in the need for literacy teaching during Language Arts instruction, recently published *Visual Literacy: Learning to See. See to Learn* (Burmark, 2002), a handbook for all teachers that gives them an appreciation of the levels of sophisticated reading required in order to respond critically to visual and multi-media texts. Earlier, the International Reading Association published a compendium, *Handbook of Research on Teaching Literacy through the Communicative and Visual Arts* (Flood, Brice Heath & Lapp, 1997), which considered research with media texts such as television (Shiring, 1997), film and video (Baines, 1997, Wohl, 1997), and comic books (Brice Heath & Bhagat, 1997). Research exists which demonstrates that adolescents are able to respond critically and articulately about their personal experiences with print literature and film (Moje, 2000; Riddick, 1997; Rogers, 1991). Recognizing the place of media in adolescent lives, editors of the International Reading Association's *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* published a special issue which looked at the breadth of texts that young adults currently read because like me, they understand that:

> [a]dolescent literacy is more complex and sophisticated than what is traditionally considered in school-based literate activity. Adolescents have multiple literacies. Because adolescents have multiple literacies, they have multiple texts and an expanded notion of text; that is, they transcend adult-sanctioned notions of text forms. An expanded notion of what text is includes film, CD-ROM, the Internet, popular music, television, magazines, and newspapers, to name a few. Literacy plays an important role in the development of adolescents' individual and social identities.

Readers act upon cues from what they read and how they perform in school to shape their emerging senses of self. Adolescents need spaces in schools to explore and experiment with multiple literacies and to receive feedback from peers and adults (Moje, Young, Readence & Moore, 2000, p.6).

Educational researchers are also calling for the teaching of critical media literacy in order to have students reflect on their interactions with all types of texts (Alvermann, Moon & Hagood, 1999; Moje, Young, Readence &Moore, 2000; Pailliotet, 2001). However, little qualitative research exists which asks graduating high school students about the breadth of texts that they currently read and value as well as those that they have read at younger ages that have contributed to their lives as a readers.

2.3 Print Reading as a Voluntary Leisure Activity

A 1980 research report, *Leisure Reading Habits: A Survey of the Leisure Reading Habits of Canadian Adults with some International Comparisons* (Watson, Ben-Gera, Zalinger, & Ermuth), compiled by Abt Associates for the Government of Canada's Department of the Secretary of State was a quantitative study of approximately 17 000 people that examined all types of adult reading: books, magazines, newspapers, television, radio, audio recordings. This study did delineate between adult readers, non-book readers, and non-readers where reading was seen as the engagement with print texts. It set adults engaging in voluntary print reading against other leisure activities such as participation in sports, crafts, classes and television viewing as well as attendance at other leisure activities such as visits to movies, theatre, museums, concerts, sporting events, bookstores and public libraries. Individuals who considered themselves to be readers spent an average of 6.4 hours weekly in leisure reading. Non-readers reportedly spent no time in reading print texts. Television viewing was the activity in which all groups of adults spent the largest amount of their leisure time, an average of 13. 7 hours weekly. Non-book readers topped the amount of time at 14.9 hours weekly, non-readers spent 13.7 hours weekly watching television, and the book readers watching television for the least amount of time—13.2 hours weekly. All in all there, is an unappreciable difference in the time spent in viewing by all of the three groups. One finding particularly interesting to me was that non-readers had various levels of education, including university degrees. This connects to the wonder that I have for the future reading of my young adult respondents.

A more recent Statistics Canada survey of approximately 7 000 Canadians' reading habits, *Reading in Canada 1991* (Graves, Dugas, Remai & Bellier, 1992), reported on the reading behaviours and opinions of Canadians 14 and older and made a comparison to the earlier 1978 survey. Again, in this survey, reading was defined in conventional terms—the engagement and interpretation of print texts. Similar to the 1978 results, the 1992 findings reported that Canadians "read quite frequently and devoted a very substantial chunk of their discretionary time to reading with the largest amount of their reading time spent [4.4 hours weekly] reading books. Reading newspapers and magazines occupied 3.6 and 2.1 hours of weekly leisure time. In total, leisure reading accounted for ten hours weekly with another average three more hours weekly spent non-leisure reading". In reporting on the intensity of participation in various leisure activities, reading came third [7.0 hours weekly] in a list of ten items after the top of the list—television viewing [14.4 hours weekly] and listening to the radio or audio recordings [9.3 hours weekly]. This 1992 study also reported on the reading habits of children linked to the reading habits and gender of their parents. Mothers read to or with their children 1.9 hours weekly and fathers read to or with their children 1.3 hours weekly. In these instances, children spent 2.9 hours weekly in independent reading. I shared a similar curiosity of what memories of print my young adult respondents had from their early childhood. The significance of these two Canadian surveys have an interesting connection to my research because I have long wondered about the voluntary reading habits of high school students in consideration of various print forms as well as other media texts.

2.4 Encouraging the Reading of Print

Many educators of children and young adults have advocated that in order for children to become readers of print later in life, they must be given the opportunity to read broadly as well as deeply (Chambers, 1993; Krashen, 1996; Krashen, MacQuillan, 1996; Meek, 1994, 1991,1988; Smith, 1988). Most of these authors wrote from personal and professional experience of working with children and young adults. Meek (1991) in particular wrote from the philosophical stance on what it means to be a reader or literate today and substantiated her beliefs with findings from her work with students who have difficulty reading or are indifferent to this act. Chambers' (1993), Krashen's (1996) and MacQuillan's (1996) work are how-to guides for parents, teachers or librarians in order to make the act of reading enjoyable and thus, a gratifying life-long experience. One individual,

Smith (1988), a former journalist, wrote purely from a theoretical stance. However, his work has long influenced the research and writings of other language and reading educators such as Meek (1988).

2.5 Young Readers and Media Literacy

Further calls for media literacy are now being incorporated in discussions with language arts and library professionals (Alvermann, 2002; Alvermann, & Hagood, 2000; Asselin, 2000; Elkins & Luke, 2000; Moje, Young, Readance & Moore, 2000). New how-to manuals for teaching media literacy (usually ways to deconstruct advertising for gender, racial, and cultural stereotypes and misconceptions), many of them on-line, are designed for teachers to help students respond critically to such texts (*Media Awareness Network*, 2001; Pungente, 2000). Some noteworthy guides look at some of the critical aspects in the creation of moving images (Piazza, 1999; Purves, Rogers & Soter, 1995; Teasley & Wilder, 1997). At a conference of the American Library Association (1989) focusing on the selection, collection development, and use of quality Children's Video in libraries, William Reider of Baltimore County Public Schools spoke to professional librarians about *The Moving Image: The Language of the 21st Century* (1989). At this time, librarians began to discuss critical elements of videos. Reider's discussion of this theme as well as other participants' contributions to the American Library Association's 1989 study group were compiled in a videocassette called *Children's Video in Libraries: Highlights from the ALSC Pre-conference* (1989).

2.6 Children, Text Preferences, and Public Libraries

Library professionals have also written about their attempts to draw young adults into their libraries. In one such study using a simple questionnaire of what material was desired and unrealized, Wilson (1990) observed that attempts to design services based on middle schoolers' real unmet needs, the Bethlehem, Pennsylvania Area Public Library was able to increase "middle schoolers' annual visits per capita nearly to the level of the elementary school children". The survey asked teen patrons to share their reasons for visiting the library and the success that they had in meeting their needs. One question in particular showed some broader understanding of students' experience with text, "Did you come to the library for other reasons like to attend a program or view a filmstrip? YES NO" (p. 22). Even in 1988 when the data was collected, this librarian was aware of the need to include many text forms

in her library's young adult collection. "For middle schoolers, the library added new media including nonfiction filmstrips and music audiocassettes. These were incredibly popular from day one" (Wilson, 1990, p. 22).

Adèle Fasick, a library researcher, has also studied the selections of various text formats by young patrons in library systems: Regina Public Library, 1978 and Hawaii School Libraries, 1985. In particular, her 1978 study for the Regina Public Library looked at children who were between the ages of ten and twelve to examine the frequency of their voluntary print reading in the context of their everyday lives. She interviewed 156 ten to twelve year-old patrons at the public library and compared their responses from a similarly aged school sample of 109 students about the frequency of television viewing as well as their frequency of reading. 97% of the boys at the public library as well as 93% of the girls were daily viewers of television. Of this same sample, 88% of the boys and 93% of the girls responded that they were sometimes or frequent readers of print. The school sample had 93% of the boys and 100% of the girls responding that they were daily viewers of television. Print reading featured less frequently in the school sample. In this case, 67% of the boys and 55% of the girls spoke of sometimes or often reading something of their own choice. The difference between the results from the two sample populations was explained on the basis that library users potentially would be more likely voluntary readers of print since their purpose for visiting the library would be to read or withdraw texts. An interesting connection between television viewing and reading led some more than sixty percent of all the students to select a print text because of previous exposure as a television text.

Fasick's 1985 research with Hawaii elementary school children compared the print reading interests of younger children to older children. She found that as young elementary students' interest in imaginative stories waned greatly by sixth grade, interest in realistic fiction and mysteries increased. Content area non-fiction also became more popular with children as they moved through the elementary grades with a slight drop-off in interest from fifth to sixth grade. This same study also compared Fasick's findings to earlier studies with young patrons' reading preferences, that of: Summers and Lukasevich in Richmond, British Columbia and London, and Windsor, Ontario in 1983; a 1981 British study by Bird; Ashley in British Columbia in 1972. Despite each of these studies concerning themselves with middle school to upper junior high readers, reading preferences were similar to Fasick's

findings with the students in grades four to six. One last notable comment on the significance of these findings was Fasick's analysis of Ashley's earlier work in British Columbia where she noted the difference in responses between girls' preferences and boys' preferences. Reading preferences by gender also feature greatly in my results.

Another Canadian library professor, Lynn McKechnie, has been involved in a longitudinal study of girls and their use of public libraries (1991). She has been following thirty girls' use of the public library since beginning the study when the now school aged children were within of three months of their fourth birthdays. She built on Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development which simply stated is the belief that what a child can do with help today (like reading), she will be able to do independently tomorrow. McKechnie (1991) posits that public libraries can help girls become independent retrievers of information by providing appropriate materials [not just in print forms] for different levels of ability and by improving services to support this learning.

2.7 Media Texts and Their Influence on Reading Print

Television viewing and book reading have often been seen as activities which interfere with each other. The Gallup Report for the American Library Association (1978) also tried to determine the influence of television watching on reading. Based on this study the findings against television were inconclusive. "49% of the respondents shared the belief that their children *would read more* if they watched less television. Another 49% believed that they *would read the same amount* if they watched less television with 43% believing that they *would read more* if they watched less television" (Gallup, 1978, p.5). Similar to Fasick's work with children, the adult respondents reported that television influenced some of them to read books, "28% reported reading a book in the past year because of something that they saw on television" (Gallup, 1978, p.5). The incentive to read a print text after first viewing a similar text on television is particularly interesting to my own research because I believe that many students choose to read a work of fiction or non-fiction because they have been introduced to this text in another format. Jon Krakauer's *Into Thin Air* (1997) is one such title that comes to mind. Shortly after the television film version of this novel-length docudrama, high school English classrooms began to include the print version of this title as students began discussing the impact of the television drama. Likewise, the popularity of Oprah's book club may have encouraged teens to read some of the novels recommended by her panel.

Television and other moving image texts have not always been believed to have literary merit. Frances Smardo (1983, 1982), a public library researcher compared orally told storyhours to storyhours that incorporated media presentations. She found that preschool children's receptive language showed less growth with the latter type of storyhours. However, she did also report on a third group's growth in receptive language, preschool children who did not participate in storyhours at the public library. These children's receptive language showed less growth than either of the two previous groups (Fasick, 1983, 1982).

One educator's content analysis of the film versions of three literary novels commonly read by adolescent students found that in all three cases, the language of the film was greatly simplified (Baines, 1996). In many instances, television is seen to be a detriment to the reading of print. In an earlier study, as part of her doctoral study, library researcher Fasick (1973) compared the difference between television language and book language and found that television language is not as syntactically sophisticated as book language. She later built on this research by predicting the need for librarians to build collections that "provide a variety of materials on a multitude of levels—the variety of materials would essentially be based on different media, yet require the appropriate intellectual content" (Fasick, 1984). In her final recommendations to librarians in this 1984 article, she observed that film texts are able to create an "affective impact, the vivid power of the images projected by visual and auditory media [that] grip children and arouse strong feelings. Librarians must decide whether a given topic is best treated in this way, or whether we want to induce the more contemplative mood associated with books" (Fasick, 1984). Her early recognition of the availability of content in various media was one of the first discussions of the responsibility of librarians for building multi-media collections that included digital resources. She understood the role of librarians in mediating the information and imaginative needs of young patrons.

Comments in the popular press make claims such as the following, "Blaming television is easy—and in a large part justified.... Television's capacity to enthrall and distract children has probably been helpful to parents in the short run but destructive to children's tendencies to read and imagine" (Sherman, 1991). Parents are also cautioned about the negative aspects of television viewing by social theorists and advisory groups (Postman, 1982; Slipp & Ritco, 1997).

In today's culture, students spend much more time watching television or home videos than reading print. "Children may spend 12 000 hours in public school, while as average viewers they will watch 18 000 hours of television over the same period" (Manley-Casimir, 1987 in Manley-Casimir and Luke, 1987, p. 237). In a study of 122 American fifth graders' out-of-school daily activities, Anderson, Wilson, and Fielding tabulated the average minutes of a variety of activities in which students participated. "Television viewing contributed to approximately 130 minutes of these students' average daily activities. Pleasure reading consisted of approximately twenty minutes in an average student's out-of-school activities" (Anderson, Wilson & Fielding, 1988, p. 292). Another study with upper elementary students in the southeastern United States looking at their leisure reading habits found that "the amount of time spent watching television did not prove noteworthy". (Shapiro & Whitney, 1997) A major compilation of research connecting students' television viewing and print reading asked and answered the following question, "Does television *cause* poor reading or does it *stimulate* reading? Neither statement, of course, can be made from current research designs" (Neuman, 1995). The author went on further to analyze an attempt to connect television viewing and reading achievement to eight statewide reading assessments. Again, the effect of television watching was negligible. "…[F]or a small minority of students, very heavy television viewing is associated with low achievement scores" (Neuman, 1995). Neuman questioned if television viewing was the only factor which affects these students' low achievement scores. In other words, she wondered if television really had anything to do with how these students score on reading tests.

Educational psychologists and theorists have also struggled with the reading/viewing influence/counter-influence. One such theorist, Langdorf (1991), explained that although print [verbal experience] and video are different experiences, they still require the exercise of intellect.

> …[B]oth video and verbal experience demand that we *reason,* in order to accomplish the task. Yet, curiously, it is only television, not reading books and not even conversation, which is typically judged as *passive* entertainment—albeit, one that can also supply a good deal of information that can expand our horizons in a comparatively effortless way, compared to lived and verbal experience (Langdorf, 1991, p.59).

A body of experimental research about television viewing and the development of the mind in children demonstrated that television viewing might contribute to a person's intellectual abilities (Crawley, Anderson, Wilder, Williams & Santomero, 1999; Field & Anderson, 1985; Schmitt, Anderson, & Collins, 1999). The 1985 experiment with preschoolers (Field & Anderson, 1985) reported that children were able to learn strategically from television if they were given a purpose for viewing. This conclusion implied that strategic viewing might yield results similar to when children are prepared for verbal tasks in the classroom or in the library. Videotapes of ten days' television viewing in 99 family homes with a child within three months of a fifth birthday revealed that "children looked more at child programs and adults looked more at adult programs" (Schmitt et al, 1999). In other words, adult content was less attractive to them. This refutes critics of television's beliefs that children voluntarily seek out programming that is often considered inappropriate for children because of the adult content. In this study, viewers generally were more involved in the television programs when action was set to character—a typical, narrative structure. "Viewers prefer to look when a character is actually doing something whether or not it involves substantial movement..." (Schmitt et al, 1999). Finally, the third experiment likened 3-5 year-olds' repetitious viewings of one episode of the program *Blue's Clues* to the natural impulse of preschoolers' request for repetition of storybooks and videos in the home. This study showed that repetitive viewing [revisiting of a text] might enhance learning and participant involvement with the text (Crawley et al, 1999).

One noteworthy study of the influence of popular culture on student-created text (Dyson, 1997) discusses how children use their experiences with television as fodder for their own writing and dramatization, a transposition of one literary medium to another. Dyson with her co-researcher, classroom teacher Kristin, used Kristin's students' experience with television and film characters as initial texts for second and third grade writing. Later, Kristin and Dyson worked together to introduce the students to Greek myths in print literature because they shared similar superheroes as valued television and moving image characters. The students made a seamless transition to print and soon incorporated the print-based characters into their writing and dramatizing. What makes this study so appealing to me is that the researchers began by *valuing* what the children were initially reading—moving picture texts. I believe that although my study population is much older, they need to an

opportunity to discuss any text which is important to them, no matter my disinterest in content or format and to not privilege my favourite form of literary text—the novel.

2.8 Gender and Reading Preferences

For a number of years, both educational and library researchers have been studying the differences in reading habits and preferences of boys and girls, men and women. Ashley's (1972) work in British Columbia as cited in Fasick (1985) found that grade four girls preferred horse stories and grade four boys preferred adventure stories. Grade five girls enjoyed mysteries and grade five boys enjoyed sports. Grade six girls liked Nancy Drew and grade six boys liked Hardy Boys. Grade seven girls liked love stories and grade seven boys liked adventure and sports stories. Girls of all grades most disliked war stories and boys of all grades disliked love stories the most (Ashley, 1972). A shortcoming of Ashley's research was that she did not uncover the underlying reasons for the differences between boys' and girls' responses. Bird (1981), a British researcher also cited in Fasick (1985), made the following observation about the difference between girls' and boys' reading preferences, "for girls, reality centred around people, whereas for boys, reality centred around things or events (Bird in Fasick, 1985, p.20)". This is a commonly held view that girls prefer to read texts where interpersonal relationships figure predominantly.

A noted educational psychologist, Gilligan (1982), built her groundbreaking research with girls' expressions of themselves on the common understanding that males and females have different worldviews. Her first results pointed to how girls and women respond in a different voice to the traditional, patriarchal manner of men and boys. Gilligan told the story of how young girls upon reaching puberty lose their voices in a passive manner similar to female archetypes from folklore and literature. "Adolescent [fairytale] heroines awake from their sleep, not to conquer the world, but to marry the prince and this means that their identity is inwardly and *interpersonally* defined… [A]ctive adventure is a male act, and that if a woman is to embark on such endeavors, she must at least dress like a man" (Bettelheim, in Gilligan, 1982, p. 13). The interpersonal definition of self is similar to Bird's observations of why girls read what they read. Gilligan, later expanded on her doctoral findings by using the paradigm of female loss of voice at puberty to conduct a second study with adolescent girls on the cusp of young womanhood (Brown & Gilligan, 1992). While compiling the data for their study, Brown and Gilligan recognized their own way of being female researchers who

respected the voices of their girl subjects. They made an interesting link to my definition of reading, that it is the interpretation of a message no matter how received by connecting to voice to print. "Our voice-centred approach thus transforms the act of reading [interview transcripts] into an act of listening, as the reader takes in different voices and follows their movement through the interview" (Brown & Gilligan, 1992, p.25).

Later researchers have used Gilligan's findings around the differences in voice between the genders [especially the silenced voices of women] in order to consider how females learn what they know (Belenky & Field, 1997). One particularly poignant finding from this study has a connection with my findings—the silence and seeming passivity of three of the young women interviewed in my study. Perhaps the silence of women and young women in particular, is connected to "the tendency to allocate speaking to men and listening to women. … [I]t is mothers more than fathers who are most likely to still their own voices so they may hear and draw out the voices of their children" (Belenky & Field, p.188). An extensive Canadian ethnographic study of seven sixth grade girls and their reading of fiction set the reading stories of the subjects in the rich context of their homes, school, and community, a fictitious Ontario town, Oak Town (Cherland, 1994). Along with several interviews with the girls, the author also included stories from their mothers, fathers, teachers, principal, and in the case of one of the girls, her brother. Cherland, like many other researchers, was very interested in what her subjects felt were "girls' books" and what they thought were "boys' books". The brother provided a counterpoint to the girls' understanding of fiction and identity by clearly resisting texts that he considered to be "girls' books". Some of the girl subjects, unlike the boy, Anthony, were able to read books against their usual gender preferences (Cherland, 1994).

Gilligan's research with girls and identity has also influenced therapeutic practitioners. Pipher is one such noted psychological counsellor who has spent much time in a practice working with adolescent girls (1994). Based on a long career in counseling adolescent girls, Pipher has published warnings about the dangers of "ideal" misrepresentations of women in the media for troubled young women as well as for young men. She sees portrayals of women in terms of excessive thinness as well as sexually fraught images as insidious misogynistic manipulations of young women as they construct their identities. Her discussion of teenaged girls being bombarded with society's mixed messages

such as "Be beautiful, but beauty is only skin deep" (Pipher, 1994, p.35), has a connection to my research because it reflects the necessity for readers to view texts with a critical eye and to listen to messages with a critical ear. Some of my respondents were able to read against common gender preferences. Some of these readers were responding critically to their favourite texts, no matter the medium.

With the influence of feminist deconstruction of texts, researchers have begun to examine the effect that an emphasis on personal response and collaborative meaning making has had on boys' reading behaviours and preferences. Similar concern about boys' identities has begun to enter the discourse as researchers study how feminist readings of texts may undermine the true expression of male identities in homes, classrooms, and society. One particularly harsh criticism of the feminist sensitive transmission of knowledge and reading behaviours is *The War Against Boys* by Christina Hoff Sommers (2000). In fact, she was concerned that by trying to make classrooms more sensitive to girls' ways of knowing, boys are becoming less successful in schools. In particular, she dispelled the popular misconception that boys cannot read print (Sommers, 2000).

Joseph Campbell, an academic theorist, specialized in comparative religions or as he might call it comparative mythologies. An amalgam of all his discussions around how societies have been constructed around common male and female mythological archetypes is his book, *The Power of Myth* (1988). Other educational research looked for strong male role models in modern and classic literature as a response to the absence of fathers in many of today's homes (Brozo & Schmelzer, 1997). These authors argued that boys can learn to be male by reading print fiction about the male archetypes: pilgrim, patriarch, warrior, magician, king, wildman, healer, prophet, trickster and lover. After completing a content analysis, Brozo and Schmelzer (1997) suggested a bibliography based on the ten male archetypes. This bibliography encompassed a range of texts that includes easy print, adolescent novels and adult literary texts. Again, Brozo's and Schmelzer's (1997) work with male archetypes has a connection to the gendered responses in my study. In their responses, some of the young men professed a preference for texts that often contained traditional male archetypes, in moving image texts for the most part.

Another feminist educator has also concerned herself with the readings of boys and how they find their masculine identities (Young, 2000). In an eighteen week study based on a

homeschooling project involving her two sons [aged eleven and thirteen] and another duo of brothers [aged ten and thirteen], Young concerned herself with the boys' text selections and the reasons for their selections. Her role as an educator was to introduce the boys to activities which would ask them to critically examine gender portrayals in the print texts that they read and to question the target audience for the books that they selected, essentially by gender. In this qualitative study, Young's data included written responses, class discussion transcripts, field notes of the boys' facial expressions, photographs of the boys at work, as well as artifacts that the boys produced during the project. Young's (2000) research has another direct connection to my study, her qualitative methods and descriptive analysis.

2.9 Earlier Research as Support for My Study

By reviewing literature about reading preferences, media texts, critical literacy, gendered readings, and qualitative methods, I have been able to discover that there is a strong argument for sharing literary texts with students of all ages. Although many researchers clearly agree in the value of print literature as a means to the full development of a human person, there is much debate about the value of media in one person's reading story. It is for this reason, that I have tried to incorporate research studies which favourably discuss film and video texts as means to developing a person's understanding. As Alberta Learning's requirements for literacy have broadened to include moving image, audio and multimedia texts, it seems worthwhile to me to research if students have ways to respond critically to what they view as literary texts.

2.10 Research Questions

As I continue to be curious about the breadth of possibilities to engage with texts in various media, I explore my general question further which began my research journey, "What do young adults read?" Chapters three to six deal with findings around my specific research questions and the qualitative methods that I used to answer them. These questions are:

1. What texts do some young adults value?
2. How are various texts valued?
3. What are their reading histories?
4. What texts have had an impact in making them readers?

5. Who shared these texts with them—currently and in their reading histories? Has the social reading of a shared text affected its enduring value for an individual?

6. What do youth name as literary texts versus what do they consider to be literary texts?

7. Does a person's chosen career path imply a specific type of literacy? Is there a correlation between career path and a person's recreational reading selections?

2.11 Preview of Upcoming Chapters

Chapter three is a description of the methods that I used to collect data and to organize my findings. Chapters 4 to 6 are analyses of my findings. Specifically, Chapter 4 deals with survey results from 70 twelfth graders at three different research sites. Chapter 5 compares interview responses of twelve students, six boys and six girls, by interview question. Chapter 6 is an interpretation of the reading stories of six interviewees, three girls and three boys as a range of examples of what it means to be a young adult reader of today.

Chapter 3: Methods

[Children] create their own culture as they interpret and *re*construct the legacies offered by adults. Although many of us live with and teach children, few adults listen intently enough to children to become privy to the meanings and symbols of childhood culture (Daiute, 1997).

3.1 Introduction to Methodology

In this multicase study (Merriam, 1998), I wanted to learn from young adults themselves what texts they feel have enduring value from their own culture, and the culture of their childhood reading stories. I was also curious about which texts these readers valued that were produced for adult audiences [if there are such texts]—into the culture that they would shortly enter. Student responses about preferred text formats and what they believe to be of artistic or lasting merit may help teachers, parents and librarians understand better why students make the selections that they do [or better still, why they do not select a particular type of text].

Rarely are children permitted to select a text without prior adult intervention. This intervention may be informal with the day-today suggestion of a single text for one child by a caring adult or more formalized as when a professional children's literature critic recommends or pans a particular text for a general audience of children of a particular age or reading ability. In early childhood, parents are often the first filters of such works. Parents, caregivers, teachers, and librarians are responsible for matching texts that they believe to be appropriate for the children in their purview. In the more formalized naming of materials as children's literature, these texts have been traditionally as "literature" by adults versed in text criticism. Collections of student choices for "best" texts the world over begin with a list of texts for young readers to review that originally have been compiled by adult reviewers such as: Our Choice Awards, Red Cedar Awards, Young Reader's Choice Awards, "Young Adults' Choices" in the *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* and "Children's Choices" in *The Reading Teacher*. Seldom are texts created for children reviewed first by their primary audience (Worthy, Moorman, Turner, 1999). For this reason, I am curious about what youth name as their "literature" with the enduring value that this implies. Similarly, with the hue and cry of the public's concern about popular media's dominance of student reading material, I was curious to see if media texts have long-lasting currency for these young adults.

Likewise, I was curious to see if this concern was overblown in the instance of the lives of these young adults.

Qualitative research methods worked best for a close look at what is meaningful to students—one individual at a time (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The contextual elements which contribute to a young adult's entry into an adult community of readers allowed for uncovering of themes such as who figured strongly in a number of participants' current experiences with text; or the favourite modes of girls' early childhood texts which later could be compared to the experiences of readers in other settings. Qualitative research also allowed for individual subjects to define or re-define terms that long belonged to the community of literary critics and educators. As a researcher, qualitative research allowed me to provide rich description of the ideas and feelings of the participants in my study (Maxwell, 1996). Later, these descriptions may allow other researchers, educators and librarians to see the heuristic implications of a particular vocabulary or jargon in the context of one student's story (Merriam, 1988). Understanding what is valued and the criticism at work in a particular youth's literary reading may help adults guide children and teens to look critically at everything that they are asked to read (Alvermann, Moon & Hagood, 1999; Moje Young, Readence & Moore, 2000; Pailliotet, 2001). I especially wanted to learn from the students what role "Children's Literature" [in its many formats] has played in the role of making them readers.

To this end, I had several specific research questions around my overall research question, "What do young adults read". These questions are:

1. What texts do some young adults value?
2. How are various texts valued?
3. What are their reading histories?
4. What texts have had an impact in making them readers?
5. Who shared these texts with them—currently and in their reading histories? Has the social reading of a shared text affected its enduring value for an individual?
6. What do youth name as literary texts versus what do they consider to be literary texts?
7. Does a person's chosen career path imply a specific type of literacy? Is there a correlation between career path and a person's recreational reading selections?

I employed both qualitative and quantitative descriptive statistical analyses in order to interpret the data generated in the exploration of these questions.

3.2 A Qualitative Context for Research into "What do young adults read?"

In preparing my study, I consulted several qualitative research texts (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Maxwell, 1996; Peshkin, 1993). From Bogdan and Biklen, I considered the characteristics of qualitative research which make it an honourable way to learn about the lives of others. In particular, I chose to uncover *"grounded theory* by inductively finding the interconnections to other theory. …[I am] concerned with the meanings [of texts] in the lives of my participants" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, pp. 31-32). I wanted to collect written "open-ended survey responses and to transcribe subjects' thoughts and feelings in their own words as I tried to describe the phenomenon" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, pp. 50-52) of what adolescents read. Admittedly, this "created difficulties in reducing the data into a format that was easy to report but it did allow for making constant comparisons between different subjects' responses" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p.52). Peshkin's discussion about the goodness of qualitative research helped me to understand that in interpreting the data, I may contribute to the "clarification and understanding of complex" (Peshkin, 1993, p.24) phenomena.

Merriam's definitions of case study research (1998) have direct connections to my research because I believe my study to be a multicase study. She defined a case study as the "intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit. … [A] case [is] a thing, a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries. I can 'fence in what I am going to study. The case could be a person such as a student…" (Merriam, 1998, p. 27). My study as Merriam defines it, is also a multicase study because I worked with more than one student. A multicase study "involves collecting and analyzing data from several cases" (Merriam, 1998, p. 40). From an initial sample of 70 surveyed youths, I was able to interview twelve students who became the cases in my multicase study. Each case study was comprised of a single interview and transcript with one of these twelve students. Later, I wrote narratives about six of the cases that I interviewed after examining their stories for a consistent and coherent metaphor. Together, the interview case studies and the later metaphoric narratives comprise the multicase study. In Merriam's earlier handbook on case study research, the text ends with criteria for exemplary case studies:

- The case study must be significant.
- The case study must be complete.
- The case study must consider alternative perspectives.
- The case study must display sufficient evidence.
- The case study must be composed in an engaging manner.

(Yin, in Merriam, 1988, p. 206). In the following chapters, I will use these criteria to discuss my multicase study research.

In order to collect significant data from my individual subjects about their reading histories, I also consulted references on interview techniques (Patton, 1990; Weber, 1986). Because I wanted to elicit responses from each participant that I could compare later, I constructed "an interview guide so that I could decide on the questions and sequence in advance while allowing for the flexibility of asking additional questions during an interview which could clarify an interviewee's earlier response. This allowed for the systematic collection of data in an informal, conversational framework" (Patton, p. 288). Weber's article reminded me of the ethical considerations of conducting an interview. "Respondents would be taking risks and together with their parents trusted that I, as an interviewer would be faithful to the agreement as authorized in their signed consent" (Weber, 1986, pp.66-67). In my study, I initiated interviews that allowed "for the growth of new human relationships, and of new or deepened understanding" (Weber, 1986, p.66).

Once I transcribed each subject's interview responses, I drew on the suggestions of Mishler (1986) to write narratives about six of the students' reading stories. In choosing a title for each of the stories, I asked myself, "What is this story about?" (Mishler, 1986, p. 236). I also understood that although these stories were written by me, the students' interview responses suggested narratives that are "forms of self-presentation, that is, a particular personal-social identity [was] being claimed; second everything said function[ed] to express, confirm, and validate this claimed identity" (Mishler, 1986, p. 243).

3.3 Data Collection

Data collection for the study "What do Young Adults Read?" took part in two phases (see Figure 1, p. 31). Phase 1 involved the distribution and collection of survey data from 70

Figure 1: Methods of Data Collection

1. Written survey of 70 students [both boys and girls] at three different research sites

Charted survey
findings
question by
question
to select
interviewees
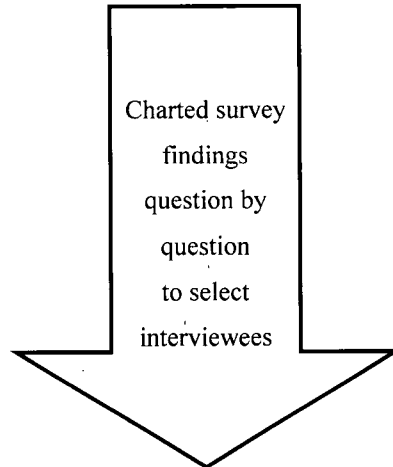
2. Audiotaped interviews with twelve students;

two boys and two girls at each research site

Transcribed
each
interview
with 12
students
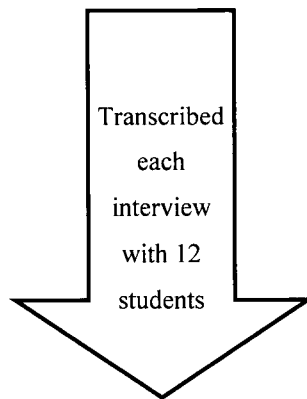
3. Read each transcript to uncover narratives with coherent themes [irrespective of site]

Six
reading
narratives
3 boys/
3 girls
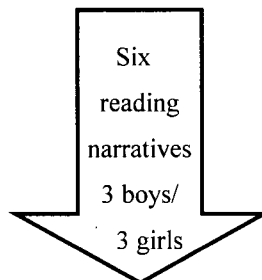
students in three high schools that served as my research sites. Phase 2 [See Figure 1: Methods of Data Collection, p. 31] involved 12 audiotaped interviews with students, two boys and two girls from each of the three sites, which I transcribed shortly after the interviews. Data analysis included three separate analyses. Part 1 involved the sorting and tabulating of the survey data. Part 2 was a comparative analysis of the interview transcripts across the twelve respondents by question. Part 3 involved the creation of narratives from six of the audiotaped transcripts [See Figure 1: Methods of Data Collection, p. 31], three from girls' responses and three from boys' responses. The two phases of the data collection and the three analyses in this study allowed for a close look at what is meaningful to young adults first as a group, secondly in comparing one individual's interview responses to those of others, and finally as one individual's reading story at one time.

The findings from the survey responses were analyzed in two ways. Firstly, broad descriptive statistics were used to describe the range of student responses of the entire study by self-professed career goals or by gender. [Although I had initially selected three research sites in order to generate cross-site comparisons, I later set aside this plan because the three research sites generated unequal samples of students. The rural school only afforded me a sample of six students to survey.] Secondly, the range of surveys based on students' self-professed career plans were used as a screening device to select twelve individuals, two boys and two girls from each site, for an interview to get a close-up look at what makes a children's and young adult text meaningful to any one person. These open-ended interviews allowed each student to tell part of his/her story as a "reader." The stories derived from these interviews were placed in the context of other stories about what texts that readers choose and value from other educational, library and public policy reports. It is my hope that these students' stories will contribute to theory of what it means to be a reader in this age of rapidly changing technology.

3.4 Research Sites

The multicase study research was conducted at three Alberta high schools in a school district where I have been employed for almost twenty years. The school district has more than ninety schools for children from kindergarten to Grade 12—ten of these schools are high schools offering university matriculation, trade certification and general diploma courses for students in Grades 10-12. The three schools that I selected as research sites represent a range

of instructional and vocational programs that are available in our school district. With the research sites, each school serves a broad range of socio-economic levels. One school is in a suburb of a major city and draws students from rural homes as well as from the suburb, itself. Its population includes students from Grades 7-12 with a substantially lower student base than the other two research sites. In particular, I conducted my research with a class of nine Grade 12 students. Forty-two students in total were then enrolled in Grade 12. This number is substantially smaller than any other high school within my school district.

My second research site is a centrally located high school and operates on the students' self-selecting their daily timetable as well as assignment deadlines. This high school draws students in Grades 10-12 from all over the city. It operates on a unique model in our district because it is a school where students do not attend regularly scheduled classes. Students choose their activities, courses, and seminar classes in a model that is called independent progress. If and when students choose to attend a seminar with other students who are enrolled in a class, they may then choose to work together as a group. Students work independently on sequenced individual lesson outlines and unit outlines all aligned to the province's authorized curriculum. Such resources are available in print and also on-line. Because students at this school do not attend regularly scheduled classes, I recruited students from three large resource areas where they congregate to complete units and withdraw print or technological materials: Religious Studies, Fine Arts, and Disability Support. Again, the thirty-two respondents at this school represented a variety of career interests and current academic or technical programs.

The third school has the largest population of the three schools with the broadest range of academic and vocational programs including Advanced Placement classes for first-year university. During the 2001-2002 school year, it recently lost approximately a third of its population due to the opening of another high school from its earlier catchment area. However, it still has a population of more than 1200 students.

All three schools' students generally exceed the provincial average for high school diploma examinations. All three of the schools are operating at more than 100% plant capacity. As a rule, the entire school district performs better than the provincial average on Grade 12 diploma examinations. The majority of the students in the school district are of European descent. However, the district has students from more than 100 countries who

speak more than sixty languages as a first language other than English. A feature that distinguishes this district from other large publicly funded school districts in Canada is that students' parents must be baptized in the Catholic Church. For this reason, the district has few immigrant students from non-Christian homes. In this sense, this can limit the breadth of the range of student abilities and cultures that are educated in a public school district with no declared religious affiliation. This is a differentiating feature of this school district.

Before embarking upon this study, I had professional relationships of mutual respect with the school district's Supervisor of Research and Student Evaluation as well as with the principals of the various schools. Despite my limited experience with high school teaching, on prior occasions, I had worked directly with two of the three principals in my role of district curriculum resource teacher. At the third site, I worked directly with teachers during this current year on issues of professional development. All three principals espouse a student-centred approach to education at the same time as understanding the need for teacher/student accountability. For this reason, they were able to nominate classroom teachers who were willing to offer students the opportunity to participate in my study. Because the nature of high school education is to stream students of like abilities, goals and interests into homogeneous classes, I elicited survey and interview responses from compulsory heterogeneously grouped classes. All Grade 12 students in my school district must complete a half-semester of Religious Education. These classes drew from the broadest range of high school students available to me in each of the three schools. For this reason, I chose to survey Grade 12 students who were currently studying in the Religious Studies department in each school. In two of the schools, this meant that they were enrolled in a Religious Studies class. In the third school, the students agreed to be surveyed in the Religious Studies, Fine Arts or Disability Support Centre. Again, these resource areas were selected as recruitment sites because they were not necessarily connected with future post-secondary academic or non-academic programs. These surveys served as the selection tool for the later interviews with individual students in the three research sites.

In my initial proposal, I thought that I would be able to approach 90-120 Grade 12 students in three research sites in order to survey a sample of seventy-five students altogether. This did not prove to be the case. I was able to survey 70 students in total. However, the three research sites did not generate an equal number of participants since I did

not realize before beginning the study that the rural school in my school district had only a total of forty-two Grade 12 students registered in the entire school. At this rural school, the heterogeneously grouped class from which I derived my subjects had a total of nine Grade 12 students and only six of these students gave their consent to do the research. At each of the other sites, I was able to collect surveys from 32 students. Since the school sites provided a range of students to draw the cases from, I combined the results in Tables 1-5 [See Chapter 4, pp. 45, 50, 54, 58, 61]. In the end, I received completed surveys from seventy students—39 boys and 31 girls.

3.5 Data Collection Phase 1: Descriptions of Survey Questions

I visited each selected classroom or resource centre once to explain and administer the survey [See "Survey: Favourite Childhood and Young Adult Texts", Appendix 1, p. 158]. Each survey participant responded in writing to a series of eleven questions with similar, repeated elements nested in all but the first question. The first question asking students to identify their current career aspirations was used as a marker to select potential interviewees since I wanted to interview a broad range of individuals—not just students who planned to go on to university but also some who wished to learn a trade or who planned to find a job directly after high school. The subsequent ten questions prompted students to name their favourite: texts of all time, movies, videos, television programs, print texts, and their favourite childhood: texts of all time, movies, videos, television programs and print texts. Along with their naming of these texts, participants were asked to respond to supporting details about the texts: why they valued these particular texts, under the circumstances that they would reread the texts, who shared the texts with them and the frequency of their reading a particular mode of text.

In planning the order for the surveys, I consciously structured the protocol (Babbie, 1998) to begin with the participants' near futures and then slowly asked them to think backward of memories of valued early childhood texts. In preparing the survey questions, I referred to Babbie in considering the order for the questions. "The order in which questionnaire items are presented can also affect responses. [T]he appearance of one question can affect the answers given in later ones" (Babbie, 1998, p. 167). Although, my preferred text format is print, I consciously placed questions about favourite print texts last in the series of favourite texts in order to not privilege print as the most socially desirable literary text.

3.6 Analysis Part 1: Survey Data Sorting and Reporting

While this is a qualitative study, I did find it useful to create some descriptive statistics from the open-ended seventy survey responses in order to find patterns in the data. In order to compile the data, only I, the researcher, knew the identity of the student's name and school. An initial alpha-numeric code was used in charting individual student responses by career aspirations and favourite texts in the following broad tables:

1. Girls' Favourite Children's and Young Adult Texts

2. Boys' Favourite Children's and Young Adult Texts

3. Girls' Frequency of Readings—Youths' Favourite Children's and Young Adult Texts

4. Boys' Frequency of Readings—Youths' Favourite Children's and Young Adult Texts

5. Girls' Who do I Read with? Youths' Favourite Children's and Young Adult Texts

6. Boys' Who do I Read with? Youths' Favourite Children's and Young Adult Texts

7. Girls' Why read? Youths' Favourite Children's and Young Adult Texts

8. Boys' Why read? Youths' Favourite Children's and Young Adult Texts

These codes enabled me to tabulate student responses by gender and research site while guarding their privacy. Later, these individual responses were grouped together into tables in order to create descriptive statistics of survey findings that could compare the responses of girls to those of boys. Findings from all three of the sites were grouped together. However, differences in responses by gender were reported on in the following tables.

Table 1: *Young Adult Career Choices, Gender, and Current Favourite Text Medium*, p. 45

Table 2: *How Often Young Adults Read Favourite Modes of Texts*, p. 50

Table 3: *Favourite Genres of Young Adult Readers, Today and as Young Children*, p. 54

Table 4: *Readings in Relationship. Who do young adults read with? Who did they read with?* p. 58

Figure 2: Methods of Analysis

Chapter 4: Tabulated written survey findings of 70 students [both boys and girls]
at three different research sites

Table 1: Young
adult favourite texts
Table 2: Frequency of
young adult readings
Table 3: Young adult
favourite genres
Table 4: Young adult
readings in
    relationship
Table 5: Why young
adults value texts
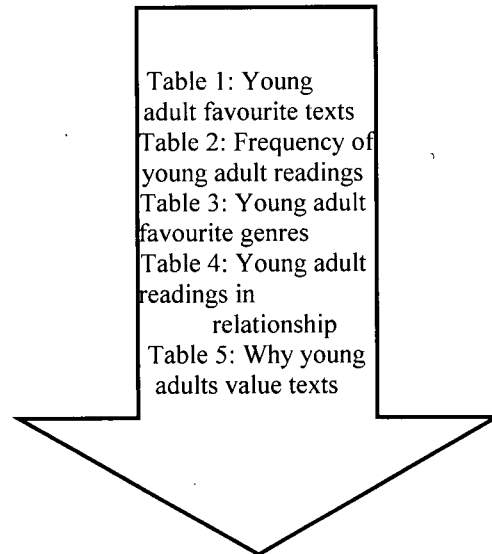
Chapter 5: Comparing and interpreting interview findings from 12 respondents

-What is read
-Media read
-Purpose—how:
    pleasure/
    information
-Read with
    whom
    -Define read
    -Define text
    -Define
     literature
-Name
    literature
-Encouraging
    advice
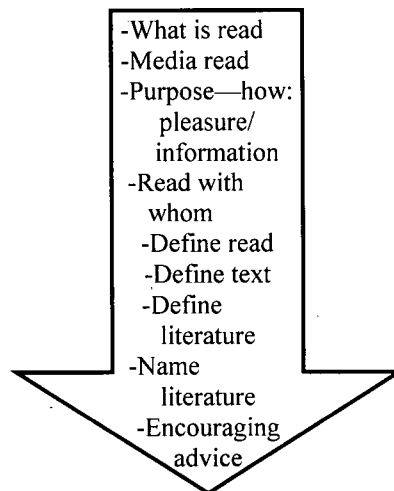
Chapter 6: Interweaving Student Reader Narratives and Celebrity Reader Narratives

Denny's
Anita's
Steve's
Lori's
Ronny's
Tanya's
Narratives
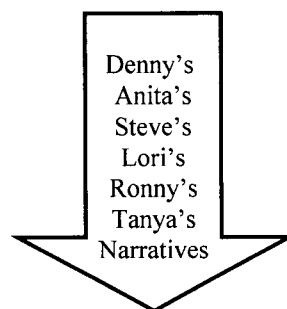
Table 5: *Why Young Adults Value the Texts They Read Now; Why They Valued the Texts that They Read as Children*, p. 61

In the case of Table 3, I researched genres valued by students in appropriate data bases: the Public Library catalogue, Amazon.com and Indigo.com for print references, IMDb.com for movie, video, and television titles, and astraweb.com for song lyrics and references to music. I chose the first descriptor for genre that appeared in the text summary as many of the texts fit categories of multiple genres. Sometimes students helped me to make this decision easy by responding in a fashion such as: "I like the action." "I like the suspense." "I like the romance." Otherwise, I used a system much like Health Canada's guidelines for the listing of ingredients in a product where the most substantial ingredient is listed first. I chose to group a movie, video or television text by the first genre on the IMDb website because it was the first ingredient and therefore, the most relevant choice of genre.

3.7 Data Collection Phase 2: Audiotaping and Audio-taped Interviews

3.7.1 Audiotaping

Audiotaping the students during the interviews produced verbatim texts of the students' responses. The audiotapes helped me to hear what I may have missed while living in "the moment" of the interviews. The tapes served as a memory aid as well as an opportunity to revisit a conversation many times. Just as an audiotape may reveal what a participant says, it also revealed my unknown biases in leading discussion in a certain direction or in eliciting desired responses. In this way, the tape recordings together with their transcriptions helped to reveal the heuristic nature of a conversation (Merriam, 1988). It made the students' speech available for "rereading" and no longer subject to the passage of time and a faulty memory.

3.7.2 Audio-taped interviews

After analyzing the range of survey results to select an equal number of male and female interviewees within a range of self-professed career plans, I returned to each site in order to conduct an audiotaped interview [See Appendix 2: Interview Protocol, p. 163 & Figure 2: Methods of Analysis, p. 37] with four students at that site. Each interview lasted no longer than 30 minutes. During the time allotted to the collection of data, I was able to interview students who represented a range of self-declared career aspirations and responses

to texts from the seventy surveys. This meant that I interviewed two boys and two girls at each of the three sites for a total of twelve interviews.

At the first site, I selected boys with very different career plans, one who wanted to join the military and another who aspired to work in film production. I selected two girls, one who planned to be dental hygienist and another who wanted to become a commercial baker. The second site's four participants included two boys—one who responded that he planned to be an accountant and the other who desired a career as a self-employed mechanic; and two girls—an aspiring commercial artist and the other with no definite plans. The third site included boys—one who planned to play Junior A hockey and another to become an investor banker, and girls—one who planned to become a police officer and another who planned to become a teacher. Together, these twelve students reported plans that reflected much of the range of the career goals: unspecified career plans, professions, trades, work in military or law enforcement, artistic endeavours and self-employment, which were recorded in the seventy written surveys. For this reason, I invited them to participate in the interviews.

The twelve-interviewee case studies had themselves reached the age of majority and initially agreed that they would participate in the study or had their parents' consent to participate in Phase 1 of the study. Participants with spoken and written consent for the interview had completed the written survey about their attitudes about the role of reading and literature in their lives with reference to their proposed careers from Phase 1. The interviewees contributed a range of attitudes and understandings about text reading, literature, and literacy.

I chose 12 students in order to capture a range of student reading behaviours and career goals and to maintain a gender balance in the completed surveys. Twelve interviewees meant that there were two girls and two boys from each research site, an equitable number for later gender comparison. All twelve interviewees had signed parental or student consent forms [when they were eighteen years of age or older] in order to participate in the data collection interviews.

The interviews began with introductory comments about my purpose for the interview, ground rules to protect the individual's safety and privacy, and operational definitions of key terms. The interview questions were open-ended and I was able get some

understanding of each student's reading story [see Interview protocol: *What do Young Adults Read?* Appendix 2, p. 163].

      The audiotaped interviews with the twelve participants occurred in a confidential space in each school. Each participant was asked a series of sixteen questions about his/her reading habits beginning with the current favourite text and the reason for its' having been chosen and ending with each participant sharing advice for parents, teachers, and librarians in order to help their children become readers. I later transcribed the audiotapes using pseudonyms to protect participant confidentiality. All notes, tapes, computer disks, and transcripts are stored in a locked filing cabinet in a location that is known only to me so that each participant's privacy can be maintained.

3.8 Analysis Part 2: Transcriptions, Grouping Responses by Question

      In transcribing the student responses, I left out my research voice for the most part since I wanted to be able to group the responses in categories by the number of the question that I had asked [See Figure 2: Methods of Analysis, p. 37]. However, when a transcript required an explanation or transition in order for it to maintain coherence and flow, I inserted my text in brackets. The following example comes from my conversation with Lori, "Talking, Internet. Yeah, I probably will [get my information in the same way in 10 years time] because I want to go into education and stuff." Other readers may not know the context of Lori's " Yeah, I probably will" without my interjection of the sense of the question that I had asked her.

      As well as creating a complete transcript for each of the twelve interviewees, I also grouped the student responses to each question by gender (Belenky & Field, 1997; Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Brozo & Schmelzer, 1997; Cherland, 1994; Fasick, 1985; Sommers, 2000; Young, 2001) in order to be able to make a fluid analysis of the same question. This meant for each of the questions, I had a grouping of responses from six girls: Anya, Erica, Vicky, Anita, Tanya, and Lori [all pseudonyms] and a grouping of responses from six boys: Steve, Stuart, Denny, Charlie, Joe, and Ronny. I chose to separate out the boys' thoughts from the girls' thoughts in order to compare these thoughts by same and different genders in order to see if there is any pattern that is gender-based or ungendered.

3.9 Analysis Part 3: Case-study Narratives

Lastly, to create an even more coherent sense of the voices of some of the individuals that I had the fortune to interview, I wrote narratives about six of the twelve interviewees [See Figure 2: Methods of Analysis, p. 37]: Ronny, in *Fly Me to the Moon*, Denny in *An Ideal and Unlikely Hero*, Steve in *Much More than Meets the Eye*, Tanya in *I'll Just do it!* Anita in *Lighter Shade of Dark* and Lori in *Sound and Silence*. These stories are my impression of who these individuals were as readers on the date of our interview. After reading through the complete transcripts for each of the twelve case studies, I found that each of the six students whose stories became narratives provided me with a coherent theme about what and why they read. These six students' favourite text media were also representative of the twelve interviewees because they included books, music and moving image texts. Likewise, the stories also tell of genres that these young adults valued. Sometimes the title of the student's favourite text became the guiding metaphor for the narrative as in big dreamer, Ronny's *Fly Me to the Moon* story about becoming an investment banker. Sometimes a repeated statement reflected a student's story about the place of writing in her life as in Tanya's "I'll just do it" belief in learning through experience. Overall, I felt that each of the titles became the guiding metaphor for a narrative since it reflected a coherent theme uncovered by reading and rereading an interview transcript. Each of these six individuals' stories reflected a depth of thought about what texts young adults named as literary juxtaposed against the personal literary texts that had lasting value for them. They had very strong voices that continue to resound loudly in my ear. For this reason, I felt that these six stories needed to be shared with a larger audience.

3.10 Preview of Upcoming Chapters

In Chapter 4, I will discuss the findings around my research questions in terms of the rich data that I collected from the seventy surveyed students by tabulating and analyzing descriptive statistics. In Chapter 5, I will discuss my findings from the twelve interview transcripts by identifying patterns, comparisons, and contrasting data. In Chapter 6, I will present and discuss the case-study narratives by making comparisons across Ronny's, Denny's, Steve's, Tanya's, Anita's and Lori's reading stories. In Chapter 7, I will present a discussion of the findings and implications from my study.

Chapter 4: Surveys of What Young Adults Read, Past and Present

However readers make a book theirs, the end is that book and reader become one. The world that is a book is devoured by a reader who is a letter in the world's text; thus a circular metaphor is created for the endlessness of reading. We are what we read. The process which the circle is completed is not, merely an intellectual one; we read intellectually on a superficial level, grasping certain meanings and conscious of certain facts, but at the same time, invisibly, unconsciously, text and reader become intertwined, creating new levels of meaning, so that every time we cause the text to yield something by ingesting it, simultaneously something else is born beneath it that we haven't yet grasped (Manguel, 1996, p. 173).

4.1 Introduction

The readers who responded in writing to the *Survey: What do young adults read?* [Appendix 1, p. 158] helped me to read the text of what it means to be a young adult reader today. They helped me to participate in the circle of creating a text which deepens in meaning each time I reread it. In the above citation, Manguel wrote about the experience of reading a book making the reader and the text one. I would like to apply this understanding of reading to the different media texts with which young adults engage: print, film, audio, television, multi-media and video games. While they are engaged in favourite texts with which they consider worthy of re-engagement, they create a reading unique to that particular engagement, one that no matter the motivation to relive a particular experience, will never be exactly the same again (Rosenblatt, 1989). Each reading changes a reader. A reader's continuously growing life experience changes every new reading.

Although I had originally planned the *Survey: What do Young Adults Read* [Appendix 1, p. 158] as a means for generating a sample of readers who I would later interview, I discovered that the surveys yielded me with very rich data and at least a partial understanding of what it means to be a young adult reader. In order to communicate my learnings from this data collection, I have created five tables of descriptive statistics: Table 1: *Young Adult Favourite Texts by Career Plans and Gender* [p. 45], Table 2: *How Often Young Adults Read Favourite Texts* [p. 50], Table 3: *Young Adults' Favourite Genres, Current and Past* [p. 54], Table 4: *Young Adult Readings in Relationship* [p. 58], and Table 5: *Why Young Adults Value Texts* [p. 61].

In the surveys, seventy students shared in print their feelings and understandings around their favourite current and childhood texts. These feelings and understandings all contributed to my understanding of my major research question, "What do young adults read?" The survey data also helped me to understand some of my more specific research questions:

1. What texts do some young adults value?

2. How are various texts valued?

3. What are their reading histories?

4. What texts have had an impact in making them readers?

5. Who shared these texts with them—currently and in their reading histories? Has the social reading of a shared text affected its enduring value for an individual?

6. What do youth name as literary texts versus what do they consider to be literary texts?

7. Does a person's chosen career path imply a specific type of literacy? Is there a correlation between career path and a person's recreational reading selections?

Results from the surveys have partially enabled me to answer questions 1-3, 5 and 7. Table 1: *Young Adult Favourite Texts by Career Plans and Gender* [p. 45] looked at uncovering a connection or pattern between student career choices and favourite texts, as a consideration of question 7, "Is there a correlation between career path and a person's recreational reading selections." Table 2: *How Often Young Adults Read Favourite Texts* [p. 50] looked at the amount of time that young adults read texts in all media with a range of daily to rare frequencies in one year. This table was an attempt to describe some understandings around my second research question, how are various texts valued. Table 3: *Young Adults' Favourite Genres, Current and Past* [p. 54] also helped to contribute to question two, how texts are valued by listing and comparing particular media texts by genre and by gender. This table also provided insight to question one, what texts do young adults value as well by identifying favourite texts around genres. Table 4: *Young Adult Readings in Relationship* [p. 58] helped to address learnings around question five about the people in their lives who shared these texts with the participants. Table 5: *Why Young Adults Value Texts* [p. 61] grouped student responses around similar statements of why they valued the

texts. Responses to question three about texts in the participants' reading histories were dealt with in the childhood favourites section of tables 3-5.

4.2 Career Path and Favourite Texts

The first question in the *Survey: What do Young Adults Read* [see Appendix 1, p. 158] asked students to identify their future career plans. Students responded with a range of careers and jobs [See Table 1: Young Adult Favourite Texts by Career Plans and Gender, p. 45], some of which might be considered stopgaps before entering the world of their life work. The stopgaps included: academic upgrading, taking a year off to travel, jobs in landscaping or in the service industry, playing Junior A hockey. Most of the students planned to pursue post-secondary education at some time if not immediately after high school. In total, only five students did not respond to the question of their future career plans. Since I did not have an opportunity to question these individuals further, I am unable to determine if their lack of response to the question is based on indefinite plans, a desire to protect their personal privacy, or a wish to conceal their plans because they may not be as socially desirable as planning a university degree for a professional career. At any rate, I was surprised at the low number of individuals who were planning apprenticeships for a career in a trade. Again, I wonder if some of the seventy respondents were self-editing their career plans in order to appear as planning for a more socially desirable occupation. In total, 41 of the 70 students were planning on attending university, another 15 planned on attending a community college or technical school, which leaves twelve individuals who did not declare a plan to attend any post-secondary institution.

The girls' and boys' career aspirations did not as a rule stray from traditional occupations for men and women. For example, not one of the 31 girls was planning a career in engineering, firefighting or the military. One young woman, however, had an interest in pursuing a career as a police officer, a less than traditional role for women. In looking at the more traditionally creativity-inspired careers in the Fine or Applied Arts, not one boy had an interest in dance whereas two of the girls were planning on training for this career. However, not one girl expressed an interest in a career in film-production, a behind-the-scenes artistic endeavour, or technical careers in computer science, engineering and the construction industry. Thus saying, what does all of this discussion around the respondents' career aspirations have to do with their preferences for a particular medium for reading? As

Table 1

Young Adult Favourite Texts by Career Plans and Gender [Page 1 of 4]

Current Career Aspirations	Boys' Current Favourite Text by Medium	Girls' Current Favourite Text by Medium	Total Current Favourite Texts by Medium
Building/ Construction: architect, architectural design (3 respondents)	2 fiction 1 magazine		2 fiction 1 magazine
Business/ Entrepreneur: small business owner, accountant, general business degree, graduate degree in business (7 respondents)	3 fiction 1 magazine 1 music	1 magazine 1 movie	3 fiction 2 magazines 1 movie 1 music
Computers/ Information Technology: computer engineering, computer science, IT programmer (5 respondents)	1 fiction 1 magazine 1 on-line publication 2 video games		1 fiction 1 magazine 1 on-line publication 2 video games
Education: secondary teacher, English Second Language- Disabilities teacher (4 respondents)	1 movie	1 fiction 2 music	1 fiction 1 movie 2 music
Engineering: engineer, applied science degree (3 respondents)	1 fiction 1magazine 1 video		1 fiction 1 magazine 1 video

Table 1

Young Adult Favourite Texts by Career Plans and Gender [Page 2 of 4]

Current Career Aspirations	Boys' Current Favourite Text by Medium	Girls' Current Favourite Text by Medium	Total Current Favourite Texts by Medium
Fine Arts/ Design: film production, multimedia production, theatre degree, graphic design, interior designer, fashion design, advertising, dance (14 respondents)	1 fiction 1 movie 3 music 1 video	4 fiction 2 movies 2 no responses	5 fiction 3 movies 3 music 2 responses 1 video
General university degree/ Part-time post-secondary studies: art classes, high school upgrading (12 respondents)	2 fiction 3 magazines 1 movie 1 video game	1 comic book 2 fiction 1 magazine 1 TV show	1 comic book 4 fiction 4 magazines 1 movie 1 TV 1 video game
Health care/ Social service: doctor, paramedic, dentist, nurse, psychologist, social worker (6 respondents)	1 movie	3 fiction 1 movie 1 non-fiction book	3 fiction 2 movies 1 non-fiction book

Table 1

Young Adult Favourite Texts by Career Plans and Gender [Page 3 of 4]

Current Career Aspirations	Boys' Current Favourite Text by Medium	Girls' Current Favourite Text by Medium	Total Current Favourite Texts by Medium
Law, law enforcement, military: lawyer, police officer, enlisted person (7 respondents)	2 fiction 2 movies 1 TV show	2 fiction	4 fiction 2 movies 1 TV show
Trade: commercial baker, pipefitter (2 respondents)	1 fiction	1 fiction	2 fiction
Veterinarian (2 respondents)		2 fiction	2 fiction
No specific plans (5 responses)		1 fiction 1 magazine 1 movie	1 fiction 1 magazine 1 movie
	2 no responses		2 no responses

Table 1

Young Adult Favourite Texts by Career Plans and Gender [Page 4 of 4]

	Boys' Current Favourite Text by Medium	Girls' Current Favourite Text by Medium	Total Current Favourite Texts by Medium
Total texts	0 comic books	1 comic book	1 comic book
	13 fiction	14 fiction	27 fiction
	7 magazines	3 magazines	10 magazines
	6 movies	7 movies	13 movies
	4 music	2 music	6 music
	0 non-fiction books	1 non-fiction book	1 non-fiction book
	1 on-line text	0 on-line texts	1 on-line text
	1 TV show	1 TV show	2 TV shows
	2 videos	0 videos	2 videos
	3 video games	0 video games	3 video games
	2 no responses	2 no responses	4 no responses
Total respondents	39 boys	31 girls	70 respondents

recorded in Table 1 [pp. 45-48], it is clear that few connections and patterns can be identified. For example, the seven students planning a career in business named four different media as favourite texts and the six individuals considering a career in health care or social service had three different media choices. Except for the three young men planning a career in Information Technology who expressed an interest in on-line publications and video games as their favourite text media, it is impossible to predict what text medium a particular individual would prefer based on declared career aspirations. Because it was so difficult to make a correlation between different text interests and future career plans, I chose not to report on childhood media favourites. However, again in the case of the two current video game enthusiasts, individuals interested in a career with computers, one of these young men named another video game as his favourite childhood text. Is this observation significant? Likely not overall, except for that one individual's reading history.

It was not possible to find decidedly different media preferences between the two genders. However, what interests me about the findings reported in this table is the breadth of the media texts and the place of print fiction for individual in every category aspirations. A considerable number of young adults, 14 girls and 13 boys for a total of 27 out of 70 [the largest number of responses for any text medium] in every category read fiction as their favourite text. This may be interpreted as an encouraging detail for the future of print (Graves, Dugas, Remai & Bellier; Ekos Research Associates Inc., 1992) in today's world of ever-burgeoning media texts. Then again, perhaps these individuals fell to the convention of interpreting the word read to mean a transaction with print since further contextual clues about other types of text media followed after the discussion of the respondents' favourite text of all time or they may have wanted to present themselves as having more socially desirable values.

4.3 Time Spent Reading

Table 2: *How Often Young Adults Read Favourite Texts* [p. 50] looked at how much time the respondents spent in various types of reading activities. Again it is impossible to make a categorical comparison right across the board because the nature of the texts may suggest that the reader would engage with some types of texts more than others. In the case of movies, for example, if the student interpreted this question for them to mean viewing movies at a theatre, this would require an outlay of a considerable amount of money to

Table 2

How Often Young Adults Read Favourite Texts

	Current Movie		Current Video		Current TV		Current Print		Child Movie		Child Video		Child TV		Child Print		Total Across Categories
Boys (B)	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	All
Girls (G)	/39	/31	/39	/31	/39	/31	/39	/31	/39	/31	/39	/31	/39	/31	/39	/31	/560
Hours per week																	
0-10					16	20							3	14			53
10-20					12	5							16	6			39
20-30					6	1							8	2			17
30-40					2								2	1			5
40-50													2	1			3
50+					1								2				3
Daily			3	3			7	14			4	8			10	14	63
Many times weekly			13	7			2	1			5	7			11		46
Weekly	10	3	10	12			8	5			6				6	4	64
Many times monthly			5	3			4	4			5	2			1	5	29
Monthly	14	9	4	1			7	3	2		4	4					48
Bimonthly	9	11							7	3							30
Few times yearly	3	5	2				7	3	15	13					1		49
Yearly				1		1	2		12	9		0					25
Never							1					3	1				5
No response	3	2	2	4	2	5	1	1	3	3	15	9	6	7	10	8	81

participate in this type of reading which could restrict the engagement with this type of text. Even if the reader interpreted the prompts around reading movies to include videos, again, an outlay of money could be required to either purchase or rent videos or DVDs at their local video store. Television viewing would presumably incur no costs to the young adult since a television would already be in the home and the parents would likely pay any cable or satellite fees. Magazines and comic books could cost the student money if they were texts not of their parents' taste or subscription. However, newspapers would probably be part of a family subscription paid by the parents. Books, fiction and non-fiction, may or may not cost the reader money depending upon if the book is borrowed from a library or a friend, or purchased elsewhere.

Because of the ease of access and the pervasiveness of television in many homes, I made the assumption that there was likelihood that the young adults would read a television text at least once daily. In order to identify the actual amount of time spent in viewing television texts, I asked the students to identify a range of hours per week that they spent in this activity and found similarly to Neuman (1995), that students do not spend as much time in watching television as might be expected. The vast majority [53 respondents] currently watched television an average of less than 20 hours weekly or approximately three hours daily. Similarly, earlier in their childhood, 39 students responded that they spent less than 20 hours weekly viewing television. These findings seem to connect to the Neuman study which could not categorically affirm television viewing as having a negative effect on the reading of print. Compared to these 53 respondents, 21 students responded that they read print daily [14 girls and 7 boys], three students voluntarily read print several times weekly, and another 13 [eight boys and five girls] for a total of twenty-seven respondents engaged in print at least once during the week. This smaller number again may point to the ease of engaging in television texts. Print reading often is a solitary activity whereas television viewing often occurs in the company of someone else in the household. By walking into a room in a busy home where the television is on, a student may become engaged in the text [or texts] that are being viewed by others in the home. Print requires more deliberate engagement. It requires finding a space to read in silence [or at least in a soundscape that does not interfere with the reading] and it requires isolating oneself from other interactions in the environment in order to make one's own meaning from the text.

Movies and videos, the other texts that require viewing, are similar to the television reading experience. They easily engage the reader because again, they do not require as much isolation in order to make one's own personal meaning from the text. They differ from television viewing with its ease of attracting in attracting viewers in that they too, often require some deliberate action to select a text with which to engage. Several of my respondents understood a nuanced difference between movies and videos in that movies were always feature films and videos may or not have been. For example, of the six viewers who responded that they watched videos daily, three of them wrote of watching a favourite music video as a course of habit. Others of this group of daily video watchers spoke of their family as owning many full-length feature films on videocassette or on DVD. When this was the case, favourite videos named were movies and again, the frequency of the viewing was higher than the group who would primarily rent a movie video less frequently. For most of these readings, movie viewing whether in a theatre or in one's own home, was a social event with only one girl responding that she read movies by herself and 16 individuals [10 boys and 6 girls] responding that they read videos by themselves [see Table 4: *Young Adult Readings in Relationship*, p. 58]. Texts from these media require less determined readings than print since print is the one form of text that the reader must choose to read alone. For this reason, it is unsurprising that voluntary print reading occupied proportionately less time than all of the visual engagements with text. After reading several student explanations for why print occupied less of their voluntary reading, I was able to synthesize some of their general voices into the voice of one individual regardless of gender. "I would like to read more [print] but I just don't have the time. I have a job, I play sports and I have lots of reading in my homework. I need a life and I need to socialize. I like to read during the summer or when I'm on vacation." In short, even something pleasurable, as reading one's own selection of print requires more effort in order to be able to get the job done.

Noticeable differences between the young adults' current responses and their childhood memories of how much time that they engaged with text were that movie viewing outside of the home occurred less frequently. The higher rate of video watching corresponds to informal conversations that I have had with parents of young children. These parents have often remarked that their children form strong attachments to a particular video and never tire of watching it repeatedly for an extended period of time. To be fair, parents have made

similar remarks about the print texts that their children request over and over, often as complaints about how tired they are of reading the same text repeatedly. Sometimes once a new favourite text is introduced, the children may disengage from the earlier text and begin a new cycle of repeated readings no matter the medium. Strong believers in the power of print fiction in order to expand the child's imagination and non-fiction print to explain questions about the world (Chambers, 1983; Fasick, 1977; Meek, 1991; Smardo, 1982; Smith, 1988) may take encouragement from the findings that I reported in the amount of time that these young adults remembered special adults reading to them when they were children. 24 remembered being read to daily and 11 remembered being read to several times a week. In all, a vast proportion of these young men and women [50/70] remembered that someone read to them often in their young lives. This information is exciting to me as a teacher because it suggests that the efforts that these special adults, largely their parents, paid off by helping these readers to understand that reading can be a pleasurable experience.

4.4 Genres of Favourite Texts

Table 3: *Young Adults' Favourite Genres, Current and Past* [p. 54] broke down the named favourite texts into the genres in which they best fit. In this instance I tried to combine similar print and film categories into one genre such as action films and adventure novels. I also tried to create categories to divide out the students' interests in non-fiction texts. Generally, the actual titles of the texts were unique to one individual. However, in some categories, one title was named more than once. For example, the most appreciated text in the fantasy/science fiction category was Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955) as either the original novel or in the recent feature film directed by Peter Jackson (2001). Several of the girls related that their favourite print text was *Cosmopolitan Magazine*, in the category of fashion information. Similarly, *Car and Driver* was a title often selected by the young men in the survey as their favourite print text as reported in the category of personal interest information. Another text that was cited as a favourite enjoyed in two media was *Dead Poets Society*, a feature film directed by Peter Weir (1989) and a young adult novel based on the film by Norma Kleinbaum (1989). Several print readers of science fiction enjoyed the *Axis* series [also known as *The Wayfarer Redemption* series] by Sarah Douglass (1997-2002). The overall favourite television show was *Friends*, a situation comedy which was reported in the comedy/ humour category. Stephen King's novels topped the list of thrillers favoured by the

Table 3

Young Adults' Favourite Genres, Current and Past [Page 1 of 2]

Genre	Current Favourite		Current Movie		Current Video		Current TV		Current Print		Child Favourite		Child Movie		Child Video		Child TV		Child Print		All	Total Across Categories
Boys (B)/ Girls (G)	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G		
	/39	/31	/39	/31	/39	/31	/39	/31	/39	/31	/39	/31	/39	/31	/39	/31	/39	/31	/39	/31	/700	All
Action/ Adventure fiction	3	3	3	7	5				4	11	2	13	2	7	10	3	3					75
Comedy/Humour	3	2	8	7	8	20	25		3	8	7		2	3	2	3	12	3	3	2		116
Drama/Realistic fiction	2	8	2	5	5	3	2	3	4	3	2	2	2	2	2	2			3			55
Fantasy/Science fiction	12	2	4	3	4		3	5	8	13	10	20	17	11	17	7	16	16	16	6		194
Historical fiction	1	1		1		1	1					1		1	1					2		4
Music/Poetry/Dance	4		4	4	2	1	1	1			6	5		1	2	3	5	3	7			45
Mystery/Suspense fiction	1	1						1		1									1			4
Romance fiction		3		1		1		1		1		1								1		8
SUBTOTAL																						501

Table 3

Young Adults' Favourite Genres, Current and Past [Page 2 of 2]

Genre	Current Favourite		Current Movie		Current Video		Current TV		Current Print		Child Favourite		Child Movie		Child Video		Child TV		Child Print		Total Across Categories
Boys (B)/ Girls (G)	B /39	G /31	B /39	G /31	B /39	G /31	B /39	G /31	B /39	G /31	B /39	G /31	B /39	G /31	B /39	G /31	B /39	G /31	B /39	G /31	All /700
Thriller/Horror fiction	1	4	5	1	7	1	2	2	2												24
Documentary/History/ biography	2	4	5	1	1	1	4	1	3		1										22
Personal interest information	6	2							7	9	1										23
Fashion information									5												5
Popular culture information			1	2			1	1													5
Sports	2						1	1	1								1		1		7
Other																	1		1	1	5
No response	2	2	4	5	3	2	2	3			7	5			14	10	5	3	11	12	108
SUBTOTAL from p.1																					501
TOTAL																					700

respondents.

I noted that a surprisingly low number of the male readers selected sports as their favourite genre, whether in print or on the screen. With over 20 years of classroom experience, sports has often been the only topic that has been the means of engaging some 10 to 12 year-old boys with print as they identified with sports heroes. In terms of overall preferences, almost a third of the boys expressed an interest in fantasy and science fiction, texts that include a large number of the strong male archetypes or as in the case of video games, require the reader to assume an archetypical role (Brozo & Schmelzer, 1997 & Campbell, 1988). In almost every one of these young men's favourite texts, the portrayal of the hero was one of the person who actively triumphs over evil whether Darth Vader in the *Star Wars* saga (Lucas, 1997-2002) or to destroy the ring of the Dark Lord Sauron in *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Rings* (Tolkien, 1954).

The girls however, did not share this same fervour for fantasy and science fiction. The largest group [approximately 25%] of them expressed a liking for dramatic film or realistic fiction. Because more than one young woman shared only one text, it is difficult to make correlations between the texts and a possible reason for them liking this genre as a group. One possibility is that the texts: *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Pakula & Mulligan, 1962), *Anne of Green Gables* (Montgomery, 1908), *Save the Last Dance* (Cort, Madden & Carter, 2001), *Crosses* (Stoehr, 1991), *Two Moons in August* (Brooks, 1991), *Sound of Music* (Wise, 1965), and *ER* (Baer, Crichton, Flint, Spielberg & Wells, 1994-2002) featured story-lines with developed characters and relationships, the textual elements more typically favoured by young women (Bettelheim in Gilligan, 1982; Bird in Fasick, 1985).

When it came time for the young adults to write about their favourite childhood texts, a marked difference in taste was observed. As young children, many more of the respondents preferred fantasy [as in texts that inspired the imagination] than for whom listed it as their current affiliation. Fewer of the respondents admitted to preferring non-fiction texts as young children. Unlike the large variance in the favourites for any of the selected media for discussion, the young adults often named the same titles as others especially in the categories of movies, video and television. The most often selected favourite print texts were Dr. Seuss books, which although largely humourous, were reported as fantasy texts. Likewise, for the *Berenstain Bears* series of illustrated books. Disney animated films dominated both the

movie and video categories with *The Little Mermaid* (1989) named most frequently. The most common favourite television program remembered as a childhood favourite was *The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles [TMNT]* (1987-95) and the live action costumed movie version based on the same series (1993). *Ninja Turtles* in live-action and animated cartoon versions was reported in the category of action/adventure because of its many battle scenes and because it was the first category on the Internet Movie Database [IMDb] where I sought reference support for film texts. Other researchers could easily make the case that this text could be Science Fiction or even Comedy. However, since many of the readers naming this text were the same young men who expressed a preference for films like *Top Gun*, *Pulp Fiction*, and *Exit Wounds*, I chose to record their responses within the action/adventure genre.

In comparing the girls' responses to the boys' memories of their childhood favourites, only one girl named *TMNT* and only one boy selected *Little Mermaid*. *Dr. Seuss* (1937-2002) and *The Berenstain Bears* (Stan & Jan Berenstain, 1962-2002) attracted similar numbers of readers of both genders. It seems that overall most of these young adults were responding within gender conventions (Fasick, 1985). *Ninja Turtles* favoured by boys are filled with action and heroes triumphing over evil. *The Little Mermaid* is a romantic story which features characterization and budding relationships. Apparently, the humour in Dr. Seuss and *The Berenstain Bears* series appealed to both boys and girls. For many of the readers, they were often the first texts that the young adults remembered reading independently during childhood.

4.5 Reading Histories and Relationships

Table 4: *Young Adult Readings in Relationship* [p. 58] yielded interesting findings of the people with whom these young adults read favourite media texts. What interested me was discovering that many of the respondents continued to spend their viewing time currently with family members, especially viewing of videos [25/70] and television texts [25/70]. It was not surprising that the vast majority of students [54/70] tended to view movies with their friends if one makes the assumption that movie viewing is a social activity that occurs outside the home in theatres, in other words with their peer group. Family members influenced a large number of the readers' taste for their favourite texts [17/70] no matter the medium, including recommendations for some print texts.

Table 4

Young Adult Readings in Relationship

Read with	Current Favourite		Current Movie		Current Video		Current TV		Child Favourite		Child Movie		Child Video		Child TV		Child Print		Totals Across Categories		
Boys [B] / Girls [G]	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	All
	/39	/31	/39	/31	/39	/31	/39	/31	/39	/31	/39	/31	/39	/31	/39	/31	/39	/31	/351	/279	/630
Dad	3	3			1				3		2						4		10	6	16
Family	3	2	2		5	7	4	8	3	4	16	10	8	9	8	7	4	7	51	56	107
Mom	1	1	2	2	1		1	1	12	10	3	3	1		1		7	5	28	23	51
Parents			1	1		2	1		5	6	10	10	8	4	4	2	11	12	38	39	77
Sibling(s)	1	2	3		6	3	6	4	2	3	3	3	10	10	7	11	1	1	40	36	76
Friend(s)	12	7	32	22	16	8	9		3	1	3		1	1	1	2	1		78	41	119
Caregiver																1		1	0	2	2
Teacher	3	1							3	3									6	4	10
Self	12	10	1		10	6	16	12	2	1			2	1	7	4			50	34	84
No response	4	4	5		2	3	3	3	6	4	3		6	9	8	6	5	12	50	38	88

In terms of the relationships that helped the young adults to become the readers that they have become today, their childhood favourites were strongly influenced by the people who shared them with them. In particular, their overall childhood favourite became so when a family member read or viewed it with them [49/70]. Of this group, mothers shared texts with the readers more than any other individual or family grouping [22/49]. The fact that fathers figured less prominently in this sharing [3/49] is similar to Cherland's finding that fathers in Oakville, Canada did not read print fiction (1994, pp.84-87) with their children. When responding in their own words, the fathers in Cherland's study admitted that they read for "utilitarian reasons... and they did not regard reading as an acceptable pastime" (Cherland, 1994, p. 87).

Unlike their current readings of favourite texts, in my research, the students' childhood viewing was almost exclusively in the company of family members. Movies [60/70], videos 59/70], and television programs [45/70] were viewed with family members more than with individuals or groups outside the home. In the case of print favourites, remembered readings occurred almost always with family members [53/70]. Although students remembered their mothers as sharing the texts with them most often, a difference from the Cherland study was that both parents shared print texts with them more often than readings with just mom or dad. Seemingly, for my young readers, their fathers' reading fiction with them as children was a valued activity in their households. Both parents figured greatly in their reading histories.

Educators and librarians might feel dismay that their influence was limited in the students' selection of their favourite texts. I, however, do not feel this way. Teachers and librarians were not included as choices in any of the questions with multiple responses [See Appendix 1, Survey: What do Young Adults Read? p. 158]. What is interesting to me is that in the open-ended questions of the students' overall favourites, four individuals felt that a teacher had introduced them to their current favourite text. What is even more interesting to me is that six students felt that teachers had influenced their early childhood text. This result is somewhat surprising because I had framed the question to ask students about their favourite childhood text before beginning school. Despite this prompting, six individuals ignored the boundaries and responded that teachers had influenced their favourite text. I am unsure if this means that for these individuals, they had no memory of texts read before

school or if they felt that overall these texts were the most important reads of their entire childhood. At any rate, this may explain the result of any favourite texts being shared by teachers with the respondents.

4.6 Why Read What is Read

Table 5: *Young Adult Valued Texts* [p. 61] is my means to reporting on the reasons why the students surveyed valued the texts that they considered their favourites. In deciding how to uncover why the young adults valued the texts that they did, I had them answer the prompts of why they enjoyed a particular text and under which circumstances if any, that they would care to reread the favourite. Understandably, this caused some difficulties in reporting findings in a table that could make correlations between different groups of respondents when the responses were idiosyncratic to each individual. In an attempt to solve this problem, I tried to class similar types of responses together in the same category. For example, when I asked the students to elaborate on why they would like to revisit a particular childhood text, a very common response was "to relive what it felt like to be a child again". Statements such as these were sorted together into the why valued category of nostalgia. I chose to use the word nostalgia for this expression of sentiment because I believe it to have this meaning even if the youths themselves did not use this term. Another category which may seem to be somewhat out of place in Table 5 is the reason for valuing a childhood text on the basis of it being appropriate for children because it is simple. This response was applied by a number of students who felt this way about the favourite texts from their childhoods. I separated the four "i" terms: information, insight, inspiration, and interest because I believe them to have very different effects on one's person. Information feeds the intellect. Insight provides a person with a deeper understanding of something that s/he already knows to some extent. Inspiration provides a person with the motivation to do better things or to be a better person. Interest is what occupies a person's curiosity and attention for a time, be it cursory or for a lifetime. A small number of students had memories of texts that they remembered fondly from childhood that they now are convinced that they will never value them again in the same way (Rosenblatt, 1985, 1989). In other words, at one time they had a transitory interest in something and now they have matured beyond this text. For these individuals, perhaps this made a text appropriate for children because they felt that there was a distinct difference in sophistication between adult and children's texts.

Table 5

Young Adult Valued Texts [p. 1 of 4]

Why Valued	Current Favourite		Current Movie		Current Video		Current TV		Current Print		Child Favourite		Child Movie		Child Video		Child TV		Child Print		All	Total Across Categories
	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	All	
Boys (B)/ Girls (G)	39	/33	/43	/35	/42	/32	/42	/36	/41	/31	/40	/34	/43	/34	/39	/34	/39	/31	/39	/32	/739	
Appropriate for children/ simplicity											7									1	1		9
Connection to beliefs, values, experiences	1	2	1	2	1	5			1				1		1		1		2	3		21
Creative/ Imaginative	1								2		1		1	3			2	1	1			12
Enjoyment/ Entertainment	9	6	10	9	4	7	6	4	11	2	6	4	8	13	6	4	9	6	4	2		130
SUBTOTAL																						172

Totals greater than the number of participants reflect how some participants shared more than one reason for valuing a text.

Table 5

Young Adult Valued Texts [Page 2 of 4]

Why Valued	Current Favourite		Current Movie		Current Video		Current TV		Current Print		Child Favourite		Child Movie		Child Video		Child TV		Child Print		Total Across Categories
Boys (B)/ Girls (G)	B /39	G /33	B /43	G /35	B /42	G /32	B /42	G /36	B /41	G /31	B /40	G /34	B /43	G /34	B /39	G /34	B /39	G /31	B /39	G /32	All /739
Escape/Passtime	7	6		1	4		2	2	5	6	2	1	3	1		1		1		1	43
Relaxation																					
Film elements:			10	7	13	1					1		1	2	6	4	1	1	1		48
Special effects, images, acting, animation, costumes, make-up, dialogue, direction, shots																					
Humour	1		5	5	6	7	19	12	2		1	3	3	1	1	1	7	2	3	1	79
Information/				1																	1
Education																					
Insight		1		2		1				1				2						1	8
SUBTOTAL																					180

Totals greater than the number of participants reflect how some participants shared more than one reason for valuing a text.

Table 5

Young Adult Valued Texts [Page 3 of 4]

Why Valued	Current Favorite		Current Movie		Current Video		Current TV		Current Print		Child Favorite		Child Movie		Child Video		Child TV		Child Print		Total Across Categories
Boys (B)/ Girls (G)	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	All
	/39	/33	/43	/35	/42	/32	/42	/36	/41	/31	/40	/34	/43	/34	/39	/34	/39	/31	39	/32	/739
Inspiration	3	4	1	2	2	2	1	2													17
Interest	6	1	1	1	2	3	6	3	2		10	2		1	1	3	2	3	1	1	40
Nostalgia/Memories of Childhood									1		9	4	2	3	2	1	3	2	1	1	24
Part of a series	2																				2
Realism	2		2			1	1								2	1	1	1	1	1	4
Shared interest with another person									1		3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2		11
Story elements: plot, character, theme, genre, illustrations	2	6	3	3	2	5	3	5	3	3	5	8	11	2	3	3	3	4	6	8	81
SUBTOTAL																					184

Totals greater than the number of participants reflect how some participants shared more than one reason for valuing a text.

Table 5

Young Adult Valued Texts [Page 4 of 4]

Why Valued	Current Favorite		Current Movie		Current Video		Current TV		Current Print		Child Favorite		Child Movie		Child Video		Child TV		Child Print		Total Across Categories
Boys (B)/Girls (G)	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	All
	/39	/33	/43	/35	/42	/32	/42	/36	/41	/31	/40	/34	/43	/34	/39	/34	/39	/31	/39	/32	/739
Vicarious Experience		2		1						3		1		1							8
No longer valued											1		1		1		4		1		8
No response	6	12	4	4	7	9	6	8	5	11	4	4	9	8	18	18	11	13	16	14	187
SUBTOTAL p. 1																					172
SUBTOTAL p. 2																					180
SUBTOTAL p. 3																					184
SUBTOTAL p. 4																					203
TOTAL																					739

Totals greater than the number of participants reflect how some participants shared more than one reason for valuing a text.

Earlier in my Master of Art in Children's Literature program, I did independent research on media and print fiction. At that time, I began thinking about the similarities and differences between the various means of presenting similar stories. For this reason, I chose to include all the elements that could belong in a story no matter if the elements are in a novel, a film or television program. I grouped them together in the category of story elements. For the purposes of this reporting, I selected out the common elements of plot, character, theme, genre and sometimes illustrations as story elements. The elements of text which are not part of the craft in creating a print text have their own category as film elements: images, acting, animation, special effects, costuming, make-up, dialogue, direction, and camera shots. All of these elements, whether they are story elements or film elements, contribute to the overall effect of creating a text that is meaningful to the individual reader.

What can be learned from the groupings of the students' responses? First of all, the students did not have clean, simple responses to texts. They often shared more than one reason for valuing a particular text and this contributed to total responses that surpassed the total of all the individuals surveyed. Noting this, the greatest reason for valuing a voluntary reading of a favourite text was because they enjoyed them or found them entertaining. Humour was valued by both genders, especially in a television text. An argument could be made that humour can contribute to a text's entertainment value as can suspense or soundtrack. However, I chose to report entertainment and humour as separate categories because I believe that entertainment need not always have humour as a major element. The "story elements" category was another popular reason for valuing a text, especially for the boys' favourite childhood texts. Personal interest was another reason for valuing a text. For instance, some boys expressed an interest in *Car and Driver* because they liked working on cars and one girl's favourite print text was *Natural Horse-Man-Ship* (Parelli, 1993) since she owned a horse.

4.7 Circling Back in the Reading, Circling Further

Returning to Manguel's metaphor of the recursiveness of the reading experience (Manguel, 1996), I found that making a reading of what 70 young adults read a challenging task. Taking individual interests and translating them into groups of responses that can easily be compared and contrasted required careful reading and sorting. The 70 young men and women surveyed who shared their ideas and feelings about favourite texts in their lives have

given me much to think about in my life as a teacher. I am now wondering about how I can make place for voluntary media reading in the classroom. From their responses, I read about textual experiences that I have difficulty in understanding such as the participation in a video game as a favourite text. More importantly from these 70 responses, I was able to select eighteen potential interviewees for the *Interview Protocol: What do Young Adults Read?* [See Appendix 2, p. 163] that I will discuss in Chapter 5. From the initial 70 participants, I conducted interviews with a representative twelve individuals who expressed a range of favourite text responses as well as career aspirations.

4.7.1 Summary of survey findings

What did I find out about what young adults read based on their survey responses? I found some answers to the following questions:

1. What texts do some young adults value?
2. How are various texts valued?
3. What are their reading histories?
5. Who shared these texts with them—currently and in their reading histories? Has the social reading of a shared text affected its enduring value for an individual?
7. Does a person's chosen career path imply a specific type of literacy? Is there a correlation between career path and a person's recreational reading selections?

Question 7 was answered in part by Table 1: *Young Adult Favourite Texts by Career Plans and Gender* [p. 45] yielded few if any clear patterns in young adult reading preferences for a particular medium for reading. Except for the three young men planning a career in Information Technology who expressed an interest in on-line publications and video games as their favourite text media, it now seems nearly impossible to predict what text medium a particular individual would prefer based on declared career aspirations. In terms of gender, it was not possible to find decidedly different media preferences between the two genders. However, the findings reported in this table presented a breadth of the media texts and the place of print fiction for individual in every category aspirations. A considerable number of young adults in every career category read fiction as their favourite text. These individuals may have interpreted read in its conventional relationship with print since further contextual clues about other types of text media followed after the discussion of the respondents'

favourite text of all time. I also wonder if some of them may have wanted to present themselves as having more socially desirable values.

Table 2: *How Often Young Adults Read Favourite Texts* [p. 50] helped me to get a limited understanding around question 2, how are some texts valued. By reporting on the time spent in various reading activities, I discovered that again it was impossible to make a categorical comparison right across the board because the nature of the texts may suggest that the reader would engage with some types of texts more than others. For example, television reading may require less effort than print reading. For some texts, such as external movie viewing, there is likely a cost involved which may prohibit the same level of engagement as television. Print may require a more sustained effort since it likely asks the reader to separate oneself from a group in order to engage in the text. Table 3: *Young Adults' Favourite Genres, Current and Past* [p. 54] also helped to give some idea of question 2, how young adults value some of their favourite texts. Regardless of medium, many of the young men expressed a preference for fantasy as their favourite genre. The largest number of boys seemed to prefer texts with strong heroes in a plot-driven text. The girls, on the other hand tended to prefer texts which featured strong relationships and character development. In reporting why they enjoyed their favourite childhood texts, there was less difference between gender responses. Both boys and girls reported that they enjoyed favourite childhood texts because they were humourous and because they appealed to their imaginations, thus, speaking to an early appreciation for fantasy texts.

A third table helped to explain how young adults valued their favourite texts, Table 5: *Young Adult Valued Texts* [p. 61]. In this table the respondents reported reasons for why they appreciated their current and childhood favourite texts. As with all the tabulated responses, the students' answers to why they would like to revisit a text did not fall into cleanly organized categories. Sometimes, the youths shared more than one reason for why they would like to reread the text. Overall, all of the students felt that they valued their favourite texts because they were entertaining or they enjoyed them.

Responses to question 5, what were the surveyed students reading histories, was partially answered in Table 4: *Young Adult Readings in Relationship* [p. 58]. The major findings in this table were that most young adults developed a preference for a favourite text because of it having been introduced to them by another individual. Current favourite texts

were often shared with friends but many of the young adults expressed that they shared a liking for texts introduced to them by family members. Childhood favourites became favourites almost always because a parent or other family member shared it with the young adult during early childhood. Many of the surveyed students expressed that they would like to share these texts with children of today or in their futures. These young adults' reading histories like all readers' reading histories were largely inculcated in the home. A very small number of respondents connected a favourite text to having first experienced it in a classroom or school library.

4.7.2 Preview of Upcoming Chapters

Each interview produced a case study which represented one individual's feelings about favourite texts, literature and literacy. Comparisons between the twelve case studies, two boys and two girls from each school, follow directly in Chapter 5. Later, I will take a closer look at some of these individuals' reading stories as I discuss their narratives in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 includes discussion of the findings in this chapter as well as from Chapters 5 and 6. The significance of my study will also be discussed in Chapter 7.

Chapter 5: Interviews and Comparisons of Personal Understandings of

What it Means to be a Young Adult Reader

"Five Common Fallacies to Reader Response"

- First, all literature is political, in the sense that it always influences the political consciousness of the reader;

- Second, the influence of a given text is directly proportional to its circulation

- Third, "popular' culture has a much larger following than "high" culture, and therefore it more accurately reflects the attitudes of the masses

- Fourth, "high" culture tends to reinforce acceptance of the existing social and political order (a presumption widely shared by the both the left and the right); and

- Fifth, the canon of "great books" is solely by social elites. Common readers either do not recognize that canon or else they accept it only out of deference to elite opinion.

...[W]e the readers are commonly guilty of subscribing to at least some, if not all, of these fallacies (Jonathan Rose in Manguel, 1996, p. 313).

5.1 Interview Context and Questions

As a professional educator, one especially versed in the value of earlier "canonized" texts, I, like Manguel's readers am guilty of subscribing to some of these fallacies. At times I have felt uncomfortable watching some of my students only read print fiction that I feel is of inferior value such as the *Sweet Valley* series, the *Goosebumps* series and V.C. Andrews' thrillers, texts that have never received literary notice. I must admit that my reading choices have tended to reflect my Euro-centric, middle-class values and that I have felt compelled to read critically acclaimed texts in the past just for the reason that they were critically acclaimed. However, I also love to read mystery novels, a popular genre, and guiltily enjoy romance novels about once yearly. I also attend the symphony and the opera, other forms of "high culture" because I have learned to appreciate and enjoy them. On the other hand I have little understanding of loose improvisational jazz, which critics have identified as the American highest form of musical art. In the pecking order of popular music, I choose not to attend Garth Brooks concerts and I have little understanding for the cult of Elvis. I have also given up commercial radio for the most part. It seems to me that these contradictions in my

own reading practices are as Rose describes them, political and social ones. I want to appear cultured as is socially desirable in our Euro-centric, middle-class society. Yet, at the same time, as a woman, I read against patriarchal archetypes and genres as I enjoy popular culture.

What does all of this discussion of my reading responses have to do with the interview responses that the young adults shared with me? Before beginning the process of thinking about collecting students' favourite texts, I had to come to the realization that no matter their selections, the selections were legitimate and deserved close attention because of the responses that they evoked in the readers. In other words, I had to set aside a lot of the baggage from literary criticism that some responses are better than others and that some texts awaken better responses than others. I required humility and non-judgmental openness to enter into a relationship with each student in order that I could hear what mattered in each case.

> The fore-structure or pre-understanding of the researcher who has entered the circle with humility and inquisitiveness will include a kind of caring concern that accommodates a perspective or way of reading which might otherwise be impossible to achieve (Ellis, 1998, p. 29).

In our interview times together, the twelve students [two boys and two girls at each site] openly shared their feelings and understandings around their favourite current and childhood texts. They gave me some ideas of what it means to be a reader and the place of voluntary reading in their lives. These feelings and understandings all contributed to my understanding of my major research question, "What do young adults read?" In particular, each case study: Anya, Erica, Vicky, Anita, Tanya, Lori, Steve, Stuart, Denny, Charlie, Joe and Ronny, also helped me to understand these more specific research questions:

1. What texts do some young adults value?
2. How are various texts valued?
3. What are their reading histories?
4. What texts have had an impact in making them readers?
5. Who shared these texts with them—currently and in their reading histories? Has the social reading of a shared text affected its enduring value for an individual?
6. What do youth name as literary texts versus what do they consider to be literary texts?

7. Does a person's chosen career path imply a specific type of literacy? Is there a correlation between career path and a person's recreational reading selections?

The protocol for my data gathering *Interview: What do young adults read* [Appendix 2, p. 163] began with the following prompt

> Tell me about your favourite text of all time explaining why it is your favourite. How did you come to know this text? Who, if anyone, introduced it to you? What are his/her feelings about the text? Has _____'s liking for this text affected your own feelings about it? Why or why not?

Responses to this prompt helped me to gain understanding around research questions 1, 2 and 5. The second prompt helped me to make meaning around research questions 3-5. As did the prompt which deals with the readers' sense of themselves as readers.

> Tell me about your favourite text from before starting school explaining why it is your favourite. How did you come to know this text? Who, if anyone, introduced it to you? What are his/her feelings about the text? Has _____'s liking for this text affected your own feelings about it? Why or why not? Please tell me about your favourite text in the years that you were: 6-11; 12-16 and explain why it is your favourite. How did you come to know this text? Who, if anyone, introduced it to you? What are his/her feelings about the text? Has _____'s liking for this text affected your own feelings about it? Why or why not?

> Do you consider yourself a reader? Please explain your answer. If **no**, was there ever a time that you considered yourself to be a reader? Can you tell me about what happened to change your enjoyment of reading? If **yes**, please tell me about the text that first convinced you that you were a reader as well as any other important texts that you have "read" in your life.

Answers to question 7 were addressed in the following interview prompts which looked at the reading required in order to do one's work effectively.

> Tell me about your favourite way to get information. Put yourself in the future; let's say in 10 years. Do you think that you will continue to get your information in this way? Please explain.

> Tell me about your career goals. How will you learn what you need to do your new job?

Two prompts led to why texts were valued and worthy of lasting value, responses which created understandings around questions 2, 4 and 6.

Do you have a text that you would consider going back to? If so, please tell me about it: why you value "reading" it again and when you might do so.

Please give me your list of characteristics of what makes a text worth a second, third, fourth, etc. read. What makes such a text different from a text that you only want to read once?

The students' later discussion of the following terms "read, literature, literature titles, children's literature, children's literature titles, literacy, literate and text" helped me to gain greater understanding to questions 6 and 7. All in all, the interviews helped me to comprehend better the meaning of what young adults read and why they read what they read. The interview case studies complemented what was uncovered earlier in the survey data collection and analysis.

As a point of clarification, I used square brackets to add text that would help make sense to what the students were responding without having to input my voice to the students' source material. Following is an example of how this worked. Vicky shared that "probably it made me like [Ghostbusters] more since my friends liked it." Had I used the pronoun "it" instead of [Ghostbusters], some of the context would have been lost and the quotation would have been less meaningful.

5.2 Young Adults' Favourite Texts of All Time

In my conversations with the young adults about their favourite texts of all time, I found that it was difficult to categorize what they read into any specific pattern because they were very individual in their selections with unique reasons for selecting their particular favourites. However, there were some points of comparison between the various students especially by gender. Within the similarities and differences resides the story of what these young adults read.

Beginning with the six boys' responses, Steve's favourite text of all time was *The Lord of the Rings* as novel series and film. Denny spoke of *Star Trek* as both film and television series, especially *Deep Space Nine*. Stuart's favourite text was *Top Gun*, a movie. Joe shared his enjoyment for the print autobiography, *99: Wayne Gretzky*. Ronny felt passionate about Frank Sinatra singing *Fly Me to the Moon* and Charlie admitted to enjoying

The Simpsons after originally sharing that he had no favourite text, "I just read whatever, see whatever".

Some commonalities exist between the boys' favourite text selections. *The Lord of the Rings* and *Star Trek* arguably belong to the similar genres of fantasy and science fiction, genres that are sometimes difficult to separate as distinct from one another. These texts along with *Top Gun* share archetypical characters—strong heroes. Although, Gretzky is an actual person and not an archetypical character involved in a quest, it could be argued that he too, could be considered to be a type of ideal and inspirational hero (Brozo and Schmelzer, 1997). *Fly Me to the Moon*, short as it is, is another text that deals with a level of fantasy—romantic love that is able to transport one beyond the confines of the earth. "Fly me to the moon and let me play among the stars. Let me see what spring is like on Jupiter and Mars. In other words, hold my hand. In other words, darling kiss me..." (Howard, 1991). Of all the texts, *The Simpsons* is alone in its characterization of what it means to be a hero. Steve's favourite text is one that embraces the anti-hero: bold, brassy, unmotivated, and uncourageous, Bart Simpson.

The girls' responses were equally broad. Vicky's favourite text form was music, "just music in general". Lori also enjoyed a musical text, *Angel,* by singer-songwriter Sarah McLachlan. Anita spoke of *Dead Poets Society* as her favourite text, both in film and print. Anya and Erica shared their enjoyment of children's literature classics, *Charlotte's Web* and *Anne of Green Gables*, respectively. Erica's first exposure to the *Anne* series was as film, "I saw the movies when I was really little." Later, she read the books because "Mom gave me the books for Christmas one year." Tanya's favourite, *Oh the Places You'll Go,* also belongs to the realm of print children's literature classics [late entry as it may be into this designation since it was first published in 1990].

In finding commonalities between the girls' favourite texts, it seems that a different type of identification with text is occurring. Except for Vicky's response, which did not include any text as her particular favourite and Tanya's favourite *Oh the Places You'll Go* [a book about personal motivation and accomplishment] the girls' texts shared strong characterization especially at the level of developing interpersonal relationships. Wilbur in *Charlotte's Web* is able to avoid being butchered through the help of Charlotte and others in the barnyard. Anne is able to install herself into the lives of Matthew, Marilla, Diana and

others in Avonlea by being interested in them and caring for and about them. *Angel* is about being able to make a connection with another human being. "In the arms of an angel fly away from here... you're in the arms of the angel. May you find some comfort here" (McLachlan, 1997). *Dead Poets Society* has as its central theme the developing close relationships between the charismatic teacher and his students (Bettelheim in Gilligan, 1991, Bird in Fasick, 1985).

Enough about what I speculate is significant about these texts as a group. It is time to let their words speak directly to what they as individuals value about these texts. For the boys, Steve spoke of *The Lord of the Rings* as being "really different from anything else that I've ever read... seen. ... [My] parents liking it got me to read it". Denny told me that he valued his favourite *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* because "it holds the dream of what humanity can become". Stuart's enthusiasm for his fifty or so viewings of his favourite *Top Gun* was expressed in the following explanation.

> What I'm kind of interested in is the military, flying planes and it goes through funny jokes. It adds a lot of humour to the movie and it's got serious moments, and it's just making light of serious moments. It just makes people feel better if you can do that.
> ... My mom likes humour and she likes a little action and suspense and stuff like that.
> It had it all and some good actors, too. ... I watch it whenever I can...

It is interesting to note Stuart's enjoyment of a long-standing literary plot structure—the mix of building tension and comic relief, a structure that was employed by Shakespeare in his plays.

His personal interest in the setting was another reason that he valued this text. Joe shared a similar feeling for why he connected with his favourite text *99: Wayne Gretzky*, "It's my favourite book because he plays hockey and I play hockey." Charlie shared his liking for *The Simpsons*, "It's interesting". Ronny's gave an analysis and early memory of why he liked his favourite *Fly Me to the Moon*. "There's lots of little messages in the song and whether it's sung fast or slow, I like it. It has a good tune to it. ... I've loved this tune since I was a kid."

Tanya gave a similar reason for liking her favourite *Oh the Places You'll Go.* Instead of talking about the text's "little messages", she spoke of its power to inspire.

I believe pretty much that it is something you can read as a child to something that you can read when you're older. It kinda gives you inspiration like you can start off anywhere with all your dreams or whatever.

Another strong emotional connection to text was the reason that Lori gave for enjoying *Angel*. "I guess it really touches me in a way that nothing has ever touched before kind of thing." Vicky also spoke of her enjoyment for music as being connected to emotional responses. "I listen to music because of all the different feelings and emotions that you get by listening to music." Being memorable was the reason that Anya gave for enjoying her favourite, *Charlotte's Web*. "… [W]hen I was younger, it was read to me. Like for some reason it stuck with me for a long time. A lot of things remind me of *Charlotte's Web*. … It seemed really interesting…" Erica looked to *Anne of Green Gables* for "happy stories". Anita gave a textual analysis for enjoying the theme of *Dead Poets Society*. "I find that it's really deep even as a movie but also as a book. It talks about the instincts of boys who are growing up going to a private school. They're just finding themselves along the road."

As for relationships with others and a favourite text, many of the respondents spoke of one or both of their parents as being their connection to the text: Erica's and Charlie's mothers, Ronny's father, Steve's and Stuart's parents. Another member of Tanya's family gave her *Oh the Places You'll Go* as "the best present she ever got" on her eighteenth birthday. Anya's Grade 2 teacher read *Charlotte's Web* aloud to her class and later gave the children the opportunity to watch the movie. Vicky had a common interest in music with a close friend. A friend recommended *Dead Poets Society* to Anita. Denny, Joe, and Lori found their favourites on their own.

5.3 Favourite Childhood and Young Adult Texts

5.3.1 Preschool favourites

Charlie's memories of his favourite preschool texts were books: Mercer Mayer's *Little Critter* series that he supposed were given to him by his cousins. Before school, Denny remembered his father telling him stories but was somewhat unsure about which stories that he was told. He also had memories of asking his father to read him fairytales, *The Three Little Pigs* and *Red Riding Hood*.

All of the other boys' favourite preschool texts came from memories of television shows. Steve and Stuart enjoyed cartoons. Joe enjoyed *Sesame Street* and Ronny liked reruns

of *Bewitched* and *The Addams family*. Steve spoke of a specific series that he enjoyed, *Inspector Gadget* and Joe liked cartoons in general, *Bugs Bunny/Road Runner*, *Flintstones*, *The Jetsons* and *Bucky O'Hare*. Even with *Sesame Street*'s variety and educational format, it would seem that all of these young men's favourite preschool texts involved some level of fantasy and adventure, a common thread between all of the responses.

As for the girls' preschool media preferences, they included an equal mix of print and television texts. Anya and Vicky preferred television programs, *The Smurfs* in Polish and *Ghostbusters* respectively. Anita and Tanya enjoyed print texts with Anita's being *Ten Apples on Top* and Tanya enjoying the *Peter Rabbit* series. Lori expressed no memory of a favourite text when asked this question. "I have no idea" was her response. Erica spoke of having both television and print as favourite texts. She enjoyed *Sesame Street* on television and the *Berenstain Bears* series in print. In a manner akin to the boys' responses, the girls also enjoyed texts that included some element of fantasy.

As the youths explained their reasons for enjoying their favourite texts, some similarities were uncovered. Steve, Charlie and Joe liked their favourite texts because they found them interesting or they had seemed to share a personal connection with the text. In speaking about his favourite, *Inspector Gadget*, Steve shared the following memory. "I used to take apart stuff in by basement when it was broken. I took apart our TV once when I was four. I took apart our washing machine when I was five." Stuart, Ronny and Anya enjoyed the humour in their favourite texts. As Ronny explained the reasons for enjoying *Bewitched* and *The Addams Family*, "I think that the older humour kinda gets the younger audience a little better. It's not as complex in entertainment kinda thing so younger ages can catch on a little easier."

The rest of the readers except for Lori, who had no memory of a favourite, felt strongly about the texts that they valued because of a relationship that they shared with others. Vicky shared that "probably it made me like [*Ghostbusters*] more since my friends liked it". Erica, Anita, Tanya and Denny explained that they enjoyed their favourite texts because of them having been shared with them by their parents. As expressed earlier, Denny spoke of how important his father was in his preschool readings. Erica, Anita, and Tanya expressed fond memories of their mothers' reading to them. Anita's memory was especially poignant.

My favourite text when I was little was probably a book because my mom wouldn't let us watch movies or a tape. She read to us a lot. So it was this one called *Ten Apples Up on Top!* because it rhymed and it had funny pictures. I think that [Mom] got tired of reading the five books we had. She just had this great reading personality. So she was always fun to listen to.

In a sense, even as children, the girls largely expressed conventional preferences for texts in relationship. Excepting Denny's response, the boys' preferences were less influenced by whom if anyone shared the texts with them. For them, the topic, or emotional effect on them as readers figured more importantly in their reasons for valuing an early childhood text.

5.3.2 Favourite texts aged 6 to 11

Memories of elementary school favourite texts eluded three of the twelve young adults: Charlie, Erica, and Vicky. Stuart spoke of a continued interest in cartoons with a new interest in informational television programs. "I'd watch cartoons whenever I could. I like learning about how things are done like how machines are made like how pants are made or something like that.... I like learning about wildlife and stuff like that." Like Stuart, Denny spoke of an animated television program, *The Real Adventures of Johnny Quest* [unable to locate citation]. He watched this fantasy program in Nigeria before his family immigrated to Canada. "I felt like I was in the adventures". Ronny and Lori also spoke of television texts as their favourites from this stage of their lives. Ronny's was *Family Matters* because of the humour and the convenient time slot right after school. Lori's was a similar situation comedy, *Full House* "'cause it showed me how children have a family and everybody pulling together."

Joe, Anita and Tanya spoke of favourite books from this time of their lives. Joe enjoyed a lot of R. L. Stine and Roald Dahl especially, *Matilda.* Anita read *The Narnia Chronicles* and *The Little House* series by Laura Ingalls Wilder. Anya and Tanya spoke of their fondness for *Charlotte's Web.* In particular, Anya explained how it was memorable. "...[F]or some reason it stuck with me for a long time. A lot of things remind me of [it]." Tanya explained how she enjoyed its elements of fantasy. "I thought it was so magical and I thought it could happen. I wanted to believe that animals and spiders were all important and they could talk. I don't know it was something you could believe in..."

Along with his enjoyment of *Family Matters*, Ronny spoke of another favourite moving image text, *The Ninja Turtles Movie.* "I like its good blend of action and comedy and drama. It's a good movie for that age." Steve's favourite popular music texts do not belong to the traditional realm of children's literature. He spoke of his reason for their enduring value in his life. "I'd go with any Beatles' song. I got my first Beatles' CD when I was probably seven years old, a tape it was back then. I just liked to listen to them. It was really happy."

Sharing favourite texts with others did not seem as important to the respondents during this era in their reading histories since few of them spoke of who influenced their readings of these particular texts. Ronny spoke of his brothers and sisters watching television together each day after school. Once in elementary school, a relationship with a teacher was influential in creating a valued text experience for Anya. She remembered how in

> Grade 2, Ms. P_____ read it out to the class. It seemed really interesting and she taught it very well and then later we got to watch a movie on it. I liked it because of the excitement instead of just the story behind it.

Similarly to their earlier responses, the readers' favourite texts of both the boys and girls had elements of fantasy. Cartoons, *Johnny Quest*, Dahl, *Ninja Turtles*, *Charlotte's Web*, and *Narnia* were all fantasies with an element of magic or the unexplained. Second to fantasy were the realistic fictions of the sit-coms *Family Matters* and *Full House* as well as Ingalls Wilder's fictionalized memoirs in *The Little House* series. Music and informational texts were also valued to some degree.

5.3.3 Favourite texts aged 12 to 16

Building on his enjoyment of the Beatles, Steve's favourite adolescent texts continued to be music, especially the songs in the "metal" genre [a combination of punk and heavy metal] that he wrote for the band in which he played then, and in which he continues to play today. Erica expressed that she too enjoyed music. "Mostly I listened to a lot of music and it's all different kinds and it really meant a lot during the time. It was a lot of music. A **lot** of music." Stuart continued along the same vein as first expressed in his preschool favourites. He consistently spoke of moving image texts as his favourites from early childhood, elementary school years and right up to his early teens. Beyond movies, he spoke of a merger between informational and entertaining texts.

My dad and I watch *The Crocodile Hunter* because he's got like a comic sense where he's dealing with like massive animals and you make a big joke out of it. And there's like you're learning about 'em. And he tells you stuff about 'em about how they live.

When asked what was his favourite text from this time period, Charlie originally did not think that he had one. After light prompting, he admitted that he continued to watch *The Simpsons,* a habit that began around the age of ten. Lori and Anita did not identify favourite texts from this same period of their lives as readers. Denny, Joe, Ronny, Anya, Vicky and Tanya all spoke of novels as some of their favourite texts. Erica added to her liking for music with a mention of Montgomery's *Anne* series. Ronny expanded his explanation of his favourites by sharing that he also enjoyed the film *Wall Street* and *Fly Me to the Moon,* the song that was also his current favourite.

What novels were these young adult favourites and where did they first encounter them? Denny's was *The Wayfarer Redemption,* the first of Sara Douglass' science fiction/fantasy *Axis* series which was shared with him by his school's library technician. [No school in this particular school district employs teacher librarians.] Anya and Vicky told me about favourites in another genre of popular fiction, the young adult problem-centred novel with their top picks of *The Journal* [unable to locate author] and *Crosses* by Stoehr that they found in the library. Joe, Ronny and Tanya told me about "literary classics" that they encountered in school, *The Old Man and the Sea, To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Lord of the Flies.*

Ronny spoke of how he read *The Old Man and the Sea* at least once yearly upon his first having encountered in junior high school for its motivational qualities.

> [I]t reminds me of the messages, the roles that people have in life and fulfilling 'em and not giving in, working their hardest. I guess reading it once a year helps motivate me to working towards what you want for yourself.

Unlike Ronny's reading of his favourite text being one of personal inspiration, Joe's experience with *To Kill a Mockingbird* marked an important moment in his life as a reader. To hear him speak, it may have been an epiphany.

> [I]t was probably the first book that I've read where there was more symbols rather than the actual literal aspect of it. It opened up my eyes a bit to different parts of reading how you look at it non-literally.

Tanya's connection with *Lord of the Flies* was based on its situation and theme. She did not look to this text for personal motivation or as momentous time in her reading history. Her reason for enjoying this text was one of reading "relationship" (Bird in Fasick, 1985).

> It kinda made me think about how people change in different atmospheres and different settings. It really kinda scared me how people can be your friend and how something happens that turns them against you. But it talks about friendship too.

All three of these individuals had very special experiences with these texts. I wonder if having to read them as school assignments meant that they had to read and reread these texts several times—in other words live aesthetically in these texts (Rosenblatt, 1938).

> Denny's response to *The Wayfarer Prophesy* was one of connecting to the archetypical plot structure in these novels. He explained his voluntary reading of this text in terms of the description of its plot and characters.

> It's about… the hero's this man and his mother was married to the king and she had an affair. Basically there's this other race called the T_____s. And they win but he doesn't know this but he finds out there's a prophecy, ancient prophecy about how the races have to be united…

Sharing similarities with the story of Moses or Jesus in the Bible and Odysseus, this series is one of epic proportions. It is the saga of the unexpected hero serving the quest of righteousness (Brozo and Schmelzer, 1997). Anya's and Vicky's discussions of their favourite texts also fit into a conventional plot structure. Their identified novels, *The Journal* and *Crosses*, fit into the popular fiction genre of "problem novels" (Egoff, 1981) which focus on building relationships in the midst of difficult circumstances. Anya related a plot summary for *The Journal*.

> It's about a boy has experienced his days and he has a hard time at home. How he meets a girl and he buys a motorcycle and stuff like that. [This is my favourite] 'cause you got to know what someone else is like with them and like what they go through.

Hers was a classic story of troubled boy meets girl who helped him to surmount his problems. Vicky described a similar situation with outsiders as protagonists as her explanation for enjoying *Crosses*.

> Well, it's about these girls who kinda find each other at 'cause they're alike. They're kinda like the outcasts of their school and then they begin, they find out some family relations. It's kinda grotesque book but it's really interesting.

In their early adolescence, these two young women shared a preference for novels that were targeted directly to them, the young adult problem novel.

5.3.4 Reader or no, influential moments in young adults' reading histories

After talking about what texts were their favourites during various stages of their lives, these young men and women shared thoughts around whether or not they considered themselves to be readers. For those individuals who responded yes, they thought that they were readers; I also asked them to think of the text that convinced them that they were readers. For those individuals who responded no, they did not consider themselves to be readers; I asked them to respond as to whether or not they ever considered themselves to be readers. Steve, Denny, Joe and Ronny were the boys who thought themselves to be readers. As for the girls, Erica, Vicky and Anita thought themselves readers. While Anya, Lori and Stuart did not currently consider themselves to be readers, they did have memories of a time that they were readers. Tanya and Charlie did not ever consider themselves to be readers.

Steve shared with me his current and past feelings about himself as a reader.

> Yeah, I read a lot. I read science fiction, fantasy, poetry… I like poetry, I've read Hamlet four times…. Back before I was a reader, my mom was trying to get me to be one because both my parents read tons and so does my big sister and I didn't like to read. They bought me the *Goosebumps* books series and that's when I started reading.

Series fiction also figured prominently in Ronny's reading history.

> I like reading the classics and I guess I enjoy reading what I like and I guess that reading's a good place to pick up good messages, basically philosophical thoughts. I guess that [I first realized that I was a reader with] *The Hardy Boys*. I remember that when I was younger my mom always told me that she read them so I always wanted to read them to be just like her. I guess that you kinda get hooked. Kinda the same gist in every novel. The repetition's good and they're not that long of a read so you can tackle at least one in a week.

Ronny's clear explanation for why he thought himself a reader and his connection to his mother's favourite childhood series was not echoed in Erica's memory of series fiction. She

offered a succinct memory of reading. "Yes, I enjoy doing it [reading]. *The Berenstain Bears: My Messy Bedroom* is the first book I ever read and I remember reading from it."

Denny, like Erica, had a short confirmation of his enjoyment of reading.

Yes, I read a lot of books. I remember this one book. It's *The Fox* or something by Roald Dahl [*Fantastic Mr. Fox*]. I enjoy the experience of reading even the books that are movies. The books are usually more in depth.

Joe felt that he had always read. However, he had lately come to consider himself a reader.

I'd say [that I read] a couple of books, three books a year other than outside of mandatory reading for school. Yeah, [there was a time when I read more] when I was younger, probably in Junior High school. I read more books for leisure [then] rather than mandatory. [Now] I have more of a social life. I go out more on weekends instead of staying and reading. Hockey got more intense so I'd rather go to bed instead of stay up and read for a bit. [As for when I discovered that I was a reader], I'd go back to *To Kill a Mockingbird* because it was the first thing, real reader. Sure I'd read stuff before but a real reader I think is able to interpret it directly and catch things that other people won't be able to see.

Despite his liking for reading, Joe spoke of the many demands for his free time that precluded his selection of reading for pleasure. In this regard he was much like Anya and Lori who felt that life in general got in the way of leisure reading. Anya shared how she was not currently a reader.

'Cause I don't really like… I like to do other things, more active things, get out, and don't really have the time to sit down and read. My reading would be like when I'm restricted down to sitting. Yeah [I considered myself a reader], like when I was in elementary 'cause like everything seemed so interesting. I was thinking this before, I think like I started—got a job, and then a part time job. I don't know. None of the books I could really find caught my interest. [After elementary] when I went to a library, I just read a couple of things and it didn't really seem as the same as before.

Anya's sentiments were echoed in Lori's short statement of her not being a reader. "No. Yes, [there was a time when I considered myself to be a reader]. I started losing interest. I don't

have a lot of time. I'm always on the go. I have a job. I have two jobs." Stuart's reason for not currently reading was unlike any other response.

> No, I've never really liked reading. I guess that I'm more of a visual person. So I'd rather see it done than read about it and try to picture it. I guess that when [I was] younger, I used to read a fair bit. I used to read animal books and things like that. But when you get older, teachers give you these texts that you're not interested in like poetry or novels. Doesn't treat you to read anymore because it kind of ruins if you like to read…. I really don't like books too much because I have to see it in my head and sometimes if you don't read it properly, you don't get the right picture.

Stuart suggested two reasons for not enjoying print at this juncture. Firstly, he preferred the visual image already created for him. Secondly, he did not like the mandatory texts set for him to read in school. In some ways, he was presupposing the questions that I asked later about what they considered to be literary texts. Charlie alone of all the respondents expressed that he had never felt himself to be a reader. "No, I haven't read a book in a long time. I have never considered myself to be a reader. Not ever. No real reason. I just don't like reading." Tanya spoke of herself not being a reader yet she contradicted herself to some degree in her explanation of this belief.

> Um, [I'm] not really [a reader]. I'm a reader if I'm interested in it. No, I'm not really a reader. I read to go to bed but barely. I like magazines. I like things what's going on now, looking for the future rather than the past. I tried reading when I was in Grade 5, *Goosebumps* books by R. L. Stine because I have a whole collection. I don't even think I read half the books I bought. I tried, I really did. Probably life [stopped my enjoyment of reading]. Like things. I work. I volunteer. School. Like I need to be free. People don't realize that students and people who work in offices, they read a lot. If you didn't read, you wouldn't be able to… you **would** be able to continue reading. It's just like communicating. It's just like talking. You don't forget.

As much as Tanya tried to convince me that she was not a reader, she offered much evidence of how much she does read—before bed, at school. Aspiring to the shared experience of reading *Goosebumps*, Tanya purchased all of the series. However, unlike Ronny's experience with *The Hardy Boys*, she was not hooked. She did not feel connected to the formulaic stories.

Noteworthy in all twelve students' discussions of their lives as readers, was that to a person; they all chose to speak of reading in terms of print experiences only. Even Stuart, who throughout his interview spoke always of moving image texts as his favourites, spoke of himself not being a reader because he did not care to voluntarily choose read print. Some surprises occurred when Steve, the "metal" musician spoke of reading poetry, especially Shakespeare for his own enjoyment. Had I not asked him this question; I would not have presumed this about him. Tanya's description of reading for work or school seemed to be her attempt to speak of how we read for different purposes and that the reading that we are assigned is quite different than what we choose for ourselves. Her discussion was quite similar to Rosenblatt's efferent and aesthetic transactions with text (1989). She was able to set me up with these two types of reading that I will discuss in the next two sections about valued texts and texts for work.

Another interesting dissonance with all of the twelve respondents' understanding of themselves as readers came later when I asked them to define the term "read". In not every instance did these young adults refer only to the reading of print. Steve and Erica believed that reading required "interpretation" with no mention of what they would be interpreting. Tanya spoke to the sense of reading for meaning. "I think it's comprehension. My thought is reading is understanding… experience, learning." Joe and Ronny both spoke of reading as the act of taking in information. Joe's taking in of information suggested an aesthetic transaction with text.

> I would say it is to take information in that you haven't heard whether it would be a story, whether it would be fact, whether would be fiction. It's for entertainment.
> Actually it can help you come out of this world.

Unlike Joe's broader sense of the effect of reading on the reader, Ronny's explanation was one of an interaction with a source. "[Reading] is to take in knowledge, to take information from any kind of source, whether it be a book, film, CD or anything." Ronny's description of what one can read was much more expansive than his sense of himself as a reader might have suggested. When speaking of himself as a reader, his examples were all connected to print. However, his favourite text of all time, *Fly Me to the Moon* was an example of what he read and how he responded as a reader.

5.4 Characteristics of Valued Texts; Texts Worth Rereading

> *5.4.1 What makes a text worth rereading?*

In responding to the question of what makes a text worth a second, third, fourth and so on reading, there was a large variance in what the young adults had to say. Three of the girls, Erica, Vicky, Lori, Tanya and three of the boys, Stuart, Charlie and Joe expressed that the texts need to be interesting. For Erica, interesting meant a "good plot or story and interesting characters." For Vicky, interesting implied a topic for which she had a prior liking.

> It has to be interesting. I like novels... that are like realistic that have to do with goals and finding stuff out. Kinda like *Go Ask Alice*, books like that. And TV shows that are interesting like criminology and that.

Tanya felt that interesting texts required a strong beginning. Stuart's requirements for interesting readings were primarily motion picture elements.

> It's got to have a lot of good effects and things like that. It's got to have a storyline with comedy, action, suspense.... It's got to have sounds to it, good music for a movie or television. Stuff in the background for television.... It makes me want to be a part of the movie or a part of the story or the book or something.

Charlie's response was very general and he did not elaborate. "It would have to be interesting. It would have to have a lot of stuff in it." Joe's requirement for rereading a text was that it would be "interesting, valuable to the reader, pictures the audience intended for it catches them, has some humour to get you back."

As has been illustrated already, many of these individuals felt that interesting texts were those to which they could relate personally. However, what made each of these individuals feel a personal interest was as varied as the interests of the twelve people who answered the questions. Anita did not use the words interesting or personal connection in her description of what made a text worthy of her rereading. However, everything that she said belied what the effect of the text was on her personally. "I just like the characters really believable. I don't like the books that are really flat.... I like a storyline that doesn't have too many plot twists. I have a hard time following those even in movies." Anya, too, did not speak of texts being interesting or with which she felt a personal connection. However, she

spoke of the effect that the text had on her, the reader, "Something that puts me like in a good feeling and takes me away from things. It makes me want to be there."

Sometimes the respondents explained what they liked in terms of what they did not like. Stuart spoke in terms of genre. He did not like "a chick flick or something like that." Lori explained that she would not reread "something not humourous or has no connection or interest to me at all. Such as… golf." Anita felt uncomfortable with complex storylines. "Some of them [texts] that are really flat are like by Margaret Atwood where you can't really follow the storyline. You wonder, 'What is she talking about?' They're just too obscure." For Denny, personal connection meant identification with a character.

> Basically if you can identify or understand their point…. I'll take for example, a
> British author, Dick Francis. In his books, he doesn't make his main characters to be
> the hero. You know that his characters experience pain and they're afraid unlike some
> authors who make their main characters just basically the hero.

Like Denny, Tanya spoke about a general sense of what it meant for readers to select texts for their voluntary reading.

> I think that if people are interested in what they're reading, they'll continue to read
> about that particular subject. But not everybody likes non-fiction. Not everybody
> likes sci-fi. Not everybody likes that so I think a general interest makes a difference.

Beyond personal interest or connection, some of the students felt that texts worth rereading required greater attention from the reader since the meaning could not be uncovered only in one reading. Anya explained, "It has to be kinda detailed and like things that I wouldn't catch like the first time so that I have to read it again." Joe echoed this feeling in the following. "It also has to be difficult enough so that you'd want to go back and get more out of it than you did the first time." Steve spoke of uncovering details in the context of textual elements.

> Suspense and excitement if you know for sure what's going to happen it's not going
> to be worth it doing it again. Little details that you wouldn't catch the first time.
> When you feel like you've got everything that you can out of it then it's not really
> worth reading again.

Erica shared a similar sentiment.

> Something I'd only want to read once is something that I got everything out of it the first time like the *Harry Potter* books. They were really good but they were a mystery [now solved] so I don't read them again.

Personal interest, personal connection and levels of meaning seemed to be the underlying themes of what made a text worthy of reading more than once to the twelve students in my interviews. Because personal interests varied as much as the individuals, no one reason could describe all of the responses. However, these young adults helped me to understand their reasons for valuing texts perhaps with an eye to what they might consider "literary" in their lives.

5.4.2 What texts are worth rereading?

When discussing texts that they would like to reread, this time not all of the students responded in terms of print texts. Both Ronny and Lori expressed a wish to revisit their favourite songs, *Angel* and *Fly Me to the Moon*. Anya, Steve, Stuart and Joe spoke of their desire to revisit movies, *Original Sin, Star Wars, Top Gun* and *Jerry Maguire* respectively. The students who favoured print rereadings spoke of a variety of texts and moments of when they first experienced them. For Tanya, it was *The Cay*, a novel read to her when she was in elementary school. Anita also spoke of a text often associated with child audiences, Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy. Denny expressed a desire to reread Sara Douglass' *Axis* series. Erica felt that she would like to reread a recently published novel, *The Virgin Suicides*. Vicky wanted to re-experience Edgar Allan Poe's writings. Charlie, alone of all of the twelve students spoke of rereading non-fictional texts because he spoke of rereading car magazines.

After expressing a preference in one medium some of the readers also spoke of rereading a text in another medium. Besides Poe, Vicky felt that she would like to revisit some of Silverchair's music. Along with his enjoyment of science fiction in print, Denny felt that he would like to see *Star Trek* again. Ronny also told me that he reread *The Old Man and the Sea* at least once yearly because of its motivational message.

In order to understand the depth of their reasons for rereading a particular text, I feel that it would be helpful to cite what the students themselves had to say about the texts of which they spoke. Lori's desire to reread *Angel* by Sarah McLaughlin was due to "a connection". Ronny's discussion centred around motivational texts.

Fly Me to the Moon or my favourite novel, *The Old Man and the Sea*. I like to read that once a year. It's good to go back to it once a year, it reminds me of the messages, the roles that people have in life and fulfilling 'em and not giving in, working their hardest. I guess reading it once a year helps motivate me to working towards what you want for yourself.

In terms of the movies selected by the students, they often fit into a genre preference. Steve discussed his liking for *Star Wars* because it belonged to science fiction. "A text that I would go back to is… I've watched the Star Wars movies on countless numbers of times. The science fiction aspect really interests me. I've always liked Space and that kind of stuff." Even though Denny first mentioned a print text, his taste in both print and moving image texts tended to science fiction. He seemed to enjoy texts that offered a hope for a better world.

A book that I'd reread, probably the Sara Douglass series. It's like they're books that I don't know how to describe. They seem to be different from other authors that I don't really like. I like her method of writing. The *Star Trek* shows are worth rewatching. They're exciting to watch. It's idealistic. Something like that. For them the Federation is to exist without currency. Without the need for money. I like their idealism and the decisions that they have to make.

Joe who played sports connected with a sports movie, *Jerry Maguire*.

A text, I'd like going back to and watch… Yeah, there's a movie that I haven't watched in a while, "Jerry McGuire". I like that movie. I thought it was pretty inspiring. It's about this guy's a sports agent and I'm really into sports so I find it really interesting what he does. Like even the little things are funny to me and interesting. They really catch me.

Stuart felt that he was only interested in film. However, he did not speak of it in terms of genre. His discussion centred around his maturing understanding of the medium especially after rereading a particular text. "Movie based. "Top Gun" is my favourite text, movie based. You get more things from them because you understand more. Your brain works more." Stuart shared earlier with me that he had seen *Top Gun* at least fifty times and this meant that he felt that his understanding of the film had changed greatly from his earliest viewing as a young boy.

Anya's discussion of why she wanted to reread the film *Original Sin* was quite different than the other students' responses. Her reasons expressed a desire to have a deeper experience with the film.

> I think I'd like to see a movie again. *Original Sin.* 'Cause I'd like to refresh it in my mind and to keep it, stuff like, so I can remember it. The setting, what it's about and it's kinda like different like you had to expect things It's kinda like a dream, I kinda want to be there. I don't want to be right in the film but I just wanted to be there.

Like her discussion of texts that were worthy of a second read, Anya's greatest reason for rereading a text was one of escape or a dream, one that would take out of this reality and put her into another one. Tanya's discussion of her reasons for rereading *The Cay* were somewhat similar if expressed in a different manner.

> I'd really like to read the novel *The Cay* again. I read it in Grade 3. Well, my teacher read it to us. I remember how much I thought about it and I haven't read it again. I'll read it again. It's probably one of my favourite books. I think that scenarios that identify with real life situations make you think. I like fantasy but I like things that are more real, probable, say. The thing about the book is that it happened and knowing that it happened intrigues me to wonder about it more and to learn about it more and put myself maybe into that situation and wonder if I could be a survivor of that.

Tanya like Anya wanted a vicarious experience with text, an opportunity to take her outside the realm of her direct experience.

For the other individuals who spoke only of rereading print texts, their reasons were widely varied as well. Similar to Tanya's wonder if she could survive life on the cay, Erica felt that she enjoyed texts that motivated her to think. "There's a lot of books that I read over and over. *The Virgin Suicides*, I've read that a lot of times. It's really good. *The Virgin Suicides* is kinda disturbing. It makes me think." Both Erica and Anita spoke of a liking for authors who wrote darker pieces, Poe and Pullman. Erica's reasons did not touch on darkness as part of her aesthetic response. "I have a big fat book of all the Edgar Allan Poe stuff. He's really an interesting writer.… I like his style of writing." Anita's reasons however, did speak of her enjoyment of dark themes.

> I always read these books and they're by Philip Pullman and they're called *The Golden Compass, The Subtle Knife...* They're really good books. I've read them all about four times. I don't know [why I like them] they're kind of dark and they're kind of suspenseful and they're fun at the same time. Every time that I read them I find something that I didn't realize that I ran into the last time.

Anita's last statement is a good place to finish this discussion around texts worthy of rereading. In the earlier discussion in this section of what makes a text worth a second read, many of the students spoke of the need to uncover something new in each reading. Anita's transactions with Pullman's trilogy certainly have caught her interest and have given her reasons to continue to go back to these books in order to find something not seen before.

5.5 Reading for Information; Reading for Work

> People don't realize that students and people who work in offices, they read a lot. If you didn't read, you wouldn't be able to... you **would** be able to continue reading. It's just like communicating. It's just like talking. You don't forget.

> (Tanya, interviewee)

5.5.1 Favourite ways to get information

Although Tanya's response was to an earlier question about herself as a reader, she had a sense of prescience by making this her answer to how these young adults read for information. Her clear understanding of how one's purpose for reading dictates how one reads made this quote a useful introduction to this section. In order to get a sense of how the various students read for information, I asked them for their current favourite means of finding information as well as to make a prediction of how they will meet their need for information in approximately ten years' time. Six of the students used the Internet or computers as a major information source: Steve, Joe, Ronny, Anita, Tanya and Lori. Three girls sought information from others. Along with the Internet, Lori got her information through talk. Erica spoke of how she currently relied on her father to answer questions to get information and Anya also felt that she got information through hearing. Some of the young adults sought information in more than one way. Charlie, Denny and Vicky used some or all of television, print and radio to read for information. Charlie spoke of how he retrieved information from all three media, "Magazines, car magazines, news on the radio and on TV. Yeah, [I'll continue to get my information in the same way] since they'll always be there."

Stuart, true to his earlier pattern of answering questions with visual texts, spoke of how he got information by viewing texts that were

> visual. It can be posters or pictures or TV. [In ten years] I will get information in the same way. I don't know. I'm a visual type person. Like I hear things, and I can see things and I can understand things. So I can't really think of in-depth stuff. Like I mean, you can learn stuff off the TV and things like that, that you can't learn by textbooks.

Vicky, although expressing that she sought information from print, gave specific details of television programs from which she extracted information. She explained that she found information by

> probably reading or watching TV. I like to read and then I like *The Learning Channel* and the *Discovery Channel*. Yes, [I will get my information in the same way]. [In addition to these] probably the Internet because probably life will be more technological ten years down the road.

For the most part, the means that the students currently used to seek information was the means that they predicted that they would use as working adults. Lori was one such person who connected her future career goals to her means of seeking information.

> Talking, Internet. Yeah, I probably will [get my information in the same way in 10 years time] because I want to go into education and stuff. You'll be talking with other teachers so the communication's there. There'll be Internet resources, there'll be the computer, stuff that's really… and movies.

Joe however, was one individual who could not make a comfortable prediction for his current method continuing on into the future because of the rapidly changing world of technology. His discussion was as follows.

> Internet. It's the easiest, it's fastest. If I go from history, if I was doing it 10 years ago, I wouldn't be getting information via the Internet so I'm assuming that 10 years from now I won't be getting information through the Internet. I'll be getting it from something new. I don't know [what though] satellite television or something. So I'm not sure.

Steve also made the interesting speculation that today's technology might be obsolete in as early as ten years' time. His current favourite was "the Internet. In ten years, I'll continue to

get information in this way unless there's a little thing that I can plug in to the back of my head, probably." Erica realized that her father would no longer be on hand to be her major information source so she predicted that she would find out what she needed to know through the "Internet 'cause I like won't have my dad around to ask questions". Denny's prediction was also different from his current information-seeking behaviour. However, his reason differed because it sounded as if he was setting a personal goal for himself in the future.

> Like I probably watch TV the most but I read a lot, too. But there's some times when I read a lot that I decide to stop reading. It's [based on] more entertainment. [In ten years] I don't think that I'll watch TV as much and I don't think that I'll still be reading as much because I think that I should go out and experience more instead of the TV.

I like Denny's notion that he did not want to limit his information gathering to virtual experiences. It seems to me that he understood that virtual reality was no substitution for personal experience and the lessons that one can learn from personal experiences.

I would like to leave the last discussion of how comfortable all of the students felt with computers as a major information source. Tanya reflected on how people depend on the increasingly ubiquitous computers.

> I think that the easiest way to get information is from a computer. I don't have one, though. Um, I really depend on computers. Here is a good resource for getting information. I'm really not a fan of research so I just like things coming at me rather than me looking for them in books. So I think that the computer is the easiest way. [In ten years] I'm sure that there'll be advancements in technology. I'm really not sure what they'd have so I think computers will be around. 'Cause the world probably depends on computers. It's kinda sad though.

As a rebuttal to Tanya's final statement, I can only wonder if it is sad that the world depends on computers. I think that Denny's understanding that he will want to be out experiencing things is the counter to Tanya's bittersweet observation.

5.5.2 Where does reading fit in young adults' career aspirations?

I asked the interviewees to identify their career aspirations in conjunction with their expected means of learning how to prepare for their chosen careers. It was my hope that they would identify a type of reading that would be required to prepare themselves for their

careers. My question was so open-ended that for the most part, few of the students gave responses that were connected to reading as a means to learning for a career. Extracted from their responses are any connections between career and reading. Stuart did make one of these connections. He expressed that he planned to go into "I guess like, law enforcement or the military or something. [I'm going to get there] by a lot of hard work. Studying books and stuff." Charlie who throughout most of his interview about favourite texts gave short cursory answers elaborated on his career goals. He explained that he planned to

> Open my own shop where I work on vehicles. I wouldn't be able to call it mechanics work because it'd be doing modifications. [Where I soup up vehicles]. [I'd learn to do this work] through magazines and in college. I'm hopefully getting into general business at Mount Royal. From there, I'd go to SAIT and take mechanics or something.

For him, Charlie's voluntary reading like his choice to read car magazines was linked to preparing for a potential career. Joe believed that his preparation for a law career after playing hockey in college would involve reading oral texts and "not really text book learning but more discussion, more broad study about a piece of the world". Ronny also believed that he could learn through mentoring in conversations or oral texts.

> My goal is to be successful in business probably in the financial side of it like an investment banker. I guess in finance, you get your schooling. It's basically in learning it on the job. Hopefully, I can surround myself with people that can teach me how to be successful.

When Ronny shared that he wanted to surround himself with people who could teach him to be successful, I extended his thinking to mean that he would require mentoring. This mentoring might also require kinesthetic readings, especially in order to understand the behaviours of other successful bankers.

> Three of the girls: Anya, Erica and Tanya also felt that they would require kinesthetic readings in order to best prepare themselves for their careers in dental hygiene, commercial baking and law enforcement. It was quite sensible for Anya to express a need for experiential readings since she explained that "My career goal is to be a dental hygienist and I have to go to university in Edmonton. [I'll learn by] touching it, hands on". As a person who periodically has to visit a dental hygienist, I am grateful that Anya planned to learn her career

by touch more so than by book. Erica's requirement for kinesthetic learning was also sensible in the light of her career goals.

> I want to go to SAIT and take a baking course.... [I'll learn what I need to do a job] probably by experience. 'Cause right now in the case of a baker, it's more of a hands-on thing than a book learning thing.

Again, hands-on learning for a commercial baker seems a sensible requirement because as a consumer, I would not want to eat bread that had been prepared by someone who had never baked it before but who had only read about it. Tanya's plans to be a police officer also make sense in the context of reading experiences rather than manuals.

> I would like to be a police officer. Hands on training. Definitely, I can't see myself learning procedures through a book. I'm a very hands-on person rather than a reading person. But I can see myself doing what I need to do. I'm more stimulated through people talking to me. I'm very out-going. I need the communication aspect of it rather than sitting in a room for eight hours, reading and reading and reading. It's like nothing is going in so I think that by someone talking to you and using examples and really touching you, I think it makes a difference.

As in the concluding thoughts for the section on reading for information, Tanya's words served to sum up the thoughts of the kind of learning required to prepare herself for her career. Her articulate explanations helped me to understand social readings required in order to be a successful communicator.

5.6 Young Adults' Definitions of Reading, Literature and Text

In order to complete my understanding of what reading and texts meant in the lives of these young adults, I asked them to give their own meanings to several terms that are commonly bandied about in discussions of reading. These terms were: read [already discussed in terms of the respondents' view of themselves as readers], literature, children's literature and text. I also asked them to give examples of what they believed to be literature and children's literature by naming some titles for each category. In many cases the meanings what one respondent gave as a meaning for one term was often similar to a meaning given by someone else for another term. There were also situations where some of the respondents chose not to define a particular term. What follows next are their definitions and their examples of what they believe to be literature.

5.6.1 Definitions of "read"

The first word that I asked the respondents to define was read. For Steve, it meant "interpretation". Stuart described read as the ability "to understand something that is on paper, looking at words and making pictures from them". Denny felt that the ability to read was "to get meaning from texts by reading a book or something else in writing. Like when you watch a movie or read a book, they're two different ways of taking in something". Charlie had some difficulty with his definition. "I couldn't explain it. Just to read, I guess. Interpret what's on paper." Joe on the other hand defined read in quite great detail as

> I would say it is to take information in that you haven't heard whether it would be a story, whether it would be fact, whether it would be fiction. It's for entertainment.
>
> Actually it can help you come out of this world.

Ronny also spoke at great lengths about what the meaning of read. "[To read] is to take in knowledge, to take in information from any kind of source whether it be a book, film, CD or anything." His definition differed from the other definitions because he specified how reading could involve texts besides books.

Anya spoke of reading as having a relationship with print when she defined it as "like interpret words, visualize, get an imaginary picture of what's being made quick." Erica also felt that reading had to do with the ability to interpret text. Her definition was to first question, "Read books? Interpret something however you can interpret it." Vicky also began her definition with a reference to reading print. However, she ended her definition with a reference to reading aural texts. She said that to read was to "Like read a book or visually read words or like listen to something." Anita's definition of reading was similar to my belief of how reading required the reader to make meaning from text. She however, limited reading for meaning as making meaning from print. "Books. Magazines. Printed word. To read for meaning is to draw a conclusion from a set of given topics". Tanya also felt that reading required the reader to read for meaning in her synonym, comprehension. "I think [reading] means comprehension. My thought is reading is understanding... experience maybe, learning. I don't know". Lori's answer was the succinct "to read a book". I suspect that perhaps this response was based on twelve years of schooling that taught her that reading implied the reading of print.

5.6.2 Definitions of "literature"

The second word that I asked the students to define was literature. Lori again gave a very short definition. She explained that literature was "understanding on the page". Her form of literature implied print but she did not elaborate on what she meant by understanding. Anya also believed that reading required the audience to engage in print, "Like plays and like scripts, stuff like stories written by authors". "Writing, English, poetry, songs... I guess you can call them literature" was Charlie's definition of literature.

Steve gave literature a broad meaning. He said that it was "anything that's written by anyone like could be a poem, could be a script, could be a song". Perhaps this was connected to his desire to be considered a creator of literature with the songs that he wrote. Although he spoke of literature as being more than just books, he did explain literature in terms of it being written as print. Ronny too, felt that literature could be any text with some kind of meaningful message.

Literature would be any source of... not just entertainment, any source of information so it could be, there's a wide variety. It can't be just a book. It can be anything with a story or anything like that. Anything with a message to be given out.

For Tanya, literature implied more than just a simple message. She explained that for her, literature required text with a level of

sophistication. The word is sophistication. Literature makes me think of something Shakespearean, uh thick novels. I don't usually read literature, like books and that. Honestly, it's so frustrating. I could read something if it was interesting. I really like this movie *The Joy Luck Club*. And I really thought it was such a good movie. I'm sure it was a book, once. By making movies from a book, it takes away from the book. For example, the *Harry Potter* book is so much better than the movie because of your imagination. It can be anything that you want it to be. And everything that you want it to be can be different for another person. So I think books control what you want better than movies where you have no say.

Tanya gave me much me more than I asked for in her definition. To some degree, she explained the difference between experiencing text as print from reading it as film. I like how she believed that reading books meant that the reader was in greater control of the text. Although this was just her opinion, I would like to believe that there was some truth in this

statement. However, for many of the other students, literature had negative associations. Many of them found literature to be boring. For example, Stuart explained that for him literature was

> boring. It's just like old-fashioned. Well, you think of literature, you basically think of Shakespeare and he's using all the old English terms people don't understand anymore. Or ways they say it like proper English. Nobody talks proper English anymore. It's all like basically what comes to your head, whatever comes up. [Shakespeare is literature] because it's what I got from school to be associated with it.

Stuart, the consistent moving image reader, did not feel that the texts that he read regularly were literature. To some degree this definition echoes Professor Rose's fifth fallacy from the beginning of this chapter, "Fifth, the canon of 'great books' is solely by social elites. Common readers either do not recognize that canon or else they accept it only out of deference to elite opinion" (Rose in Manguel, 1996, p. 313). Stuart's understanding of literature excluded him rather than included his favourite texts.

> Denny also felt that literature was something that had to be mediated by someone else. He explained that

> When I think of literature, I think of what they make you read at school. Like Shakespeare, like *The Grapes of Wrath*. Sometimes I think of the things that I find on my own are literature. It's just when I think of the word 'literature' what we read in school is not very interesting. The literature that I find on my own is what is important to you.

Erica also felt that literature was not for the ordinary person. It required an introduction by a teacher usually under coercion.

> Literature to me is big boring books which sometimes can be good but not usually because you're forced to read them by teachers. Not something I'd choose for myself. Small literature is something I enjoy. That I can read or watch or listen to over and over and over. And I can still enjoy it like I did the first time.

Not everyone who described literature as belonging to the classics found it boring. They did have a sense that they were important texts. Vicky explained that she felt that literature included texts "like Edgar Allan Poe, Shakespeare. Probably because they have more of a history type thing. Like they were way back in the days. I can't [give a definition of

literature]". Vicky also admitted earlier that she valued Poe's writing and that she would like to revisit these texts. Perhaps she felt about these texts as Anita defined literature,

> I find that that's really well put together. Subject matter. Not just thrown in such as some independent films that make no sense, don't go anywhere. It's not very good. But if it's really good such as "Dead Poets' Society" for example then it's really good literature.

Anita did not ascribe to Professor Rose's fallacy about texts worthy of the canon (Rose in Manguel, 1996, p. 313). She was able to describe texts that were literature to her. Joe also spoke of the effect of literature on him, the reader. He spoke of how literature required an extra effort from the reader.

> Literature is something that I'd call... Literature is something that indirectly says something such as the short stories that we read. Like one called *The Hanging* by Orwell that we read yesterday or the other day. It gives you an indirect saying, in his time it was wrong for him to be against the hanging of people. But he indirectly says this is not right.

In order for Joe to make a deeper meaning from Orwell's text, he understood that he needed to read the text at more than a literal level. It required more than a single reading for him to be able to find Orwell's indirect message in this text.

5.6.3 Literature titles

In order to help me understand what the students believed to be literature, I asked them to share some examples of texts that they considered "literature". For the most part, these readers discussed texts studied in school. In some instances, the young adults made a distinction between what they called "big L Literature" and "small l literature". The former referred to texts studied in school and the latter referred to texts that they valued from their own voluntary reading.

Literature titles that the students named from school reading or from another recommended canon included *The Raven*, Edgar Allan Poe, Shakespeare, *The Wars, The Enchanted Doll, Anne of Green Gables, The Art of War* and *The Edible Woman*. These titles notably all belonged to print texts. Joe expressed how an aesthetic transaction with literature changes the reader. "Also another thing that I consider literature is that you feel like you've accomplished something. You're better because you've read it." Joe was openly receptive to

the possibilities of what literature could offer him. He did not express negative feelings of exchanges with literary texts. Anya, of all the students, expressed most clearly the belief that literature must be print texts.

> I don't know. *Original Sin* is not really a piece of literature. Literature, I think of in a book. Like a story that we would read in English [class]. We just read one… It's called… I have it written down. *The Enchanted Doll*, I don't remember who it's by. I have it written down in my book. [It's a piece of literature because] it makes you think and it's a book. *Original Sin* is different from a piece of literature because, I don't know, it's more obvious. The film is more obvious.

From this example it was clear that she shared the belief of Jonathan Rose's fifth fallacy whereby an elite is responsible for identifying literature for the common person (Rose in Manguel, 1996, p. 313). She also made an indirect connection to Joe's earlier observation about how literature creates indirect messages. Anya's choice to reread *Original Sin* connected her to a more obvious story than the texts studied in English class. I wonder if Anya's discussion of *Original Sin* being obvious might be due to it being a visual text and thus, the reader need not work as hard to make meaning from its images.

I had a conversation with Denny who made a distinction between his own literature and school-identified literature. He articulated this thinking with

> big L Literature is Shakespeare and all the important texts that they make you read at school and college. Little l literature is the stuff that you pick yourself like Dick Francis novels, fantasy and science fiction.

A few individuals named texts that would not usually belong to a literary canon. In a sense they were describing their own small l literature titles. These illustrations were opened up to include movies, music and television. Steve continued along an earlier pattern where he shared why he felt so strongly about musical texts, especially a rationale for why he was a musician. He expressed that literature could be

> any music, any type of music 'cause it's all written and it comes from someone's inner thoughts and emotions and they put it down and they give it out to you to interpret how you want.

Charlie did not feel compelled to name literature as classic books. He explained that for him, "I guess that anything could be literature. Like even a script for a show". Erica

expressed a similar sentiment with her statement of "for a movie, *The Breakfast Club*".

Ronny's literature titles also included the airing of shows not just a script.

> *Boiler Room, Wall Street ... The Sopranos*. They are one because every piece of
> literature has a little meaning in it. I guess that those ones are... they appeal to the
> senses like my likes and dislikes.

Anita also spoke of her own personal likes from popular culture as literature titles

> "If it's really good such as "Dead Poets' Society" for example then it's really good
> literature.... I read magazines such as *Seventeen*. I'm not really that into movies. I
> like that one which the guy from *Gladiator* [Russell Crowe in *A Beautiful Mind*] just
> did.

> These students' literature titles covered a broad range of valued texts, the literary

print canon, films, television and movies. Despite the fact that many of the respondents spoke
to the fact that they did not like literature, I was interested to see that others of the students
were able to speak of texts that they selected for themselves and as a consequence valued
with judgment and passion.

> *5.6.4 Definitions of " children's literature"*

> Since my reason for completing this research was as a requirement for a graduate

degree in children's literature, I was very interested in how these young adults would define
and exemplify children's literature. As a general rule, the respondents differentiated between
literature and children's literature. In contrast to the naming of literature as texts identified as
valuable by experts, the students named popular culture titles as examples of children's
literature.

> All of the other respondents except Anya and Lori identified children as the audience

for children's literature. Anya's short response gave examples of text formats, "Children's
literature is stories, cartoons." Lori gave no definition. Tanya gave the most direct definition
when she said, "Texts relating to a child's mind." Steve explained that children's literature
was "the same as any other literature just on a slightly lower level so that children can
understand it". For Stuart, children's literature was "something that has little bumps and
quirks in it, stuff like that, that'll catch kids' attention, you know make them pay attention to
the story and they catch onto those things and they understand it." Anita felt that children's
literature connected to children as an audience because "it's fun. It's sort of a way into the

state of life that they're in now." Appropriateness of text for the developmental stage of the child audience was not part of the definition for any of the other participants.

Among these readers, Steve, Stuart, Anita, Charlie, Ronny and Joe, felt that there was a difference in the level of sophistication between texts for children and texts for adults. They suggested that children's literature was "less complicated, immature, easier to understand, uncomplicated, not deep in meaning and superficial". Erica felt that in order for a text to belong to children's literature, it would be a text that children could read without adult mediation, "[It is] something that isn't really complicated. Something that a kid can understand without help from an adult and enjoy."

Vicky connected children's literature to an author who writes for this audience. "Children's literature. I can't remember his name but... Robert Munsch. Robert Munsch is more aiming at younger children. But I don't think that Edgar Allan Poe would be for young children." Charlie clearly distinguished children's literature. "Literature that's made for children. Like I said that can make them feel a certain way. Immature literature." From this statement, it appeared to me that Charlie felt that children were immature in comparison to adults. He spoke of how children might need to respond on an emotional level in order to connect with a text.

Entertainment value seemed to be a necessary requirement that Ronny and Joe felt was important in order to connect with children audiences. For Ronny, entertaining children's literature was a means to "hooking" children with literature.

> I guess basically that it is something that is fun and entertaining for a child. They're not looking for something that has a deep meaning but they're looking for something that can make them laugh. I guess that that's the most important thing about it is to get 'em hooked on literature.

Joe proposed a different point of view than Ronny's as the purpose of children's literature.

> Something that helps kids understand something that they wouldn't normally learn about from their parents, maybe. And entertains kids. It's got to be entertaining, it's got to have good pictures. Pictures are really important to help kids understand words. If they see a picture of it, they'll have words for it.

For him, the entertainment value of children's literature was a means to children learning something new. The importance of the literature was in its educative value.

Denny, however, differed from the other young adults because he saw how some texts enjoyed by both adults and children as literature and not children's literature. "Children's literature, it's not as in depth as adult literature. It's more superficial. They don't go into detail that much. *Harry Potter* is literature because adults read it. It's the way it was written. It appeals to all audiences."

Lori, alone of all the young adults gave a negative response to the question by connecting with her own reading history, "I didn't really read a book that early. Not really [television shows either]." Her first instinct was to connect children's literature to books. It was only after my probing that she expressed that she had no memory of watching TV shows.

5.6.5 Children's literature titles

After explaining what children's literature was for them, I asked each young adult to give examples of what they believed to be children's literature. Everyone but Lori named titles that they felt belonged to children's literature. Of the other students, Vicky, Ronny and Tanya only named print texts as children's literature: Robert Munsch texts, Richard Scarry stories, Matt Christopher sport novels, *Clifford, Franklin, The Cat in the Hat, Green Eggs and Ham*. Tanya explained why her examples, *Clifford, Franklin, The Cat in the Hat, Green Eggs and Ham,* belonged to children's literature.

> They are for children because they are relating to a child's mind. They are relating to
> a child's life. It serves them. It's not tangible to have something so out of reach for
> them. So I think it's children's literature to me because it's relating to a child's mind.

Tanya was giving an explanation of how fantasy and lack of sophistication are suitable for children's minds. Her examples echoed the beliefs of many of the young adults who also felt that children's texts were less complex than literature for adults.

Denny named texts that belong to oral literature, *Three Little Pigs, Little Red Riding Hood, Cinderella* because he explained that in these texts "there's something optimistic". Charlie named childhood songs and nursery rhymes as his examples of children's literature, *Humpty Dumpty, Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star*, also texts that belong to oral literature.

All of the other readers named titles for children's literature from both print and moving image texts. Steve liked cartoon forms in print and on TV.

Anything by Dr. Seuss 'cause he's crazy. He's good children's literature. I like him

'cause he's got an amazing imagination and crazy stuff in there. Children's TV shows

from back when I was a child "Ninja Turtles", "Inspector Gadget" and stuff like that.

For him the imaginative element of Seuss might have been as enjoyable to him, a current

reader of fantasy, because it offered fanciful resolutions to problems which would be similar

to how they would be solved in animated television programs. Stuart, the visual reader,

named *Barney, Sesame Street,* Robert Munsch and *Harry Potter* as his examples of

children's literature. I liked how he tapped into a possible reason for the popularity of *Harry*

Potter. He explained how its fantasy elements may connect with children.

Harry Potter has kind of that mystical thing. I think that some kids are into that

mystical thing. They want to hear about things that are unexplainable in some ways

and learn about it and try to explain it in their own terms.

This explanation was somewhat surprising to me because up until this point, Stuart's

description of valuable texts belonged to the world of the visual and the more "realistic"

stories of action adventure films.

Joe named Robert Munsch, *Sesame Street* and *Mr. Dressup.* His response is

interesting to me because this was the first time that a Canadian television series entered into

my discussions with the students.

Anya spoke of *Charlotte's Web, Annie* and *The Little Mermaid.* For Erica, children's

literature titles included the *Anne* books, *The Berenstain Bears, Sesame Street,* Disney

movies, *The Dirty Feet* because she noted that "Well, they're targeted towards children and

kids enjoy them. I don't see any kids picking up *Hamlet* and asking their parents to read it to

them." Anita told me, "I watched a lot of *Pollyanna, Alice in Wonderland, Sesame Street.* I

read a lot of *Berenstain Bears.*" To a person, these respondents gave examples of texts that

might not have the critical acclaim of professional readers. By speaking of titles that had

touched them in their childhoods, the students did not fall prey to Professor Rose's fifth

fallacy about what has literary merit. "The canon of "great books" is solely by social elites.

Common readers either do not recognize that canon or else they accept it only out of

deference to elite opinion" (Rose in Manguel, 1996, p. 313). However, the resounding

repetitions of Dr. Seuss, Berenstain Bears, *Sesame Street* and Disney could be seen as

proving his second and third statements about popular culture and influence of text.

- The influence of a given text is directly proportional to its circulation.
- "Popular' culture has a much larger following than "high" culture, and therefore it more accurately reflects the attitudes of the masses (Rose in Manguel, 1996, p. 313).

Seuss, Disney, Berenstain Bears and *Sesame Street's* popularity could largely be due to their ubiquity in children's homes. These texts have become part of the shared vocabulary of North American childhood experience.

5.6.6 Definitions of "text"

Despite the fact that I had given the students my definition and examples of text, I wanted to understand if they, too, had a similar sense of text. At this point, I asked them to define text in their own words. Again, based on twelve years of schooling where text up till our interview was seen to imply print, many of their definitions alluded to this frame of reference. Steve, Denny, Anya, Erica, Vicky, Tanya and Lori felt that texts were printed. Steve expressed that text was "written literature" which was similar to Denny's "something put down in writing". Writing also figured in Vicky's "written words" and Erica's "texts as books, writing". Erica's reference to books was echoed by Anya's and Tanya's belief that text was "a book. A large book like a Social Studies book. That's what I think." Size of the book was also a factor in Lori's understanding that text was "a textbook, information". As a teacher, I can see my own practice in Tanya's and Anya's definition. Throughout my career, I have used the word text as short form for textbook. For the most part, I have also limited text to suggest informational messages.

Anita's definition of text was also driven by context, with a much shorter history be that as it may. "I just came out of computer class so right now my definition of text would be anything that you can type in that has bits and bytes." This meaning reminded me that every reader's response to a text, even a conversation about word meanings, is connected to that person's unique past life experience as well as the current reading transaction (Rosenblatt, 1985).

Stuart, Charlie, Joe and Ronny shared less bounded definitions of text, possibly influenced by my definition and subsequent questions. Stuart expressed how text might be perceived through various senses in order to spark the intellect or the emotions. For him, text was "anything that gives you information or intrigues you or just you know, makes you want

to stay there… hear more and read more and see more". Joe defined text as a message also perceived through the various senses, "Piece of information that we read, write, listen to, watch and we can gather information from it". This definition was similar to how Charlie defined text in terms of messages in a variety of media "anything that you can interpret. Noises can be texts. Movies, books, street signs". Charlie did not speak of which sense was affected by a particular message. His definition was simply one of exemplifying different types of messages.

I would like to end this discussion with a high point for me as a teacher. By engaging with these young adults in conversation, I learned much of what they valued and understood as text. Ronny was one individual who expressed his learning about text from our engagement. Ever the teacher, his revelation excited me.

> Actually, I never thought of text as in here, it's being something more than just a
> novel. But I like that idea where it can be absolutely anything like I said before; a
> message is trying to be put through.

Ronny's definition was close to how I described text to all of the respondents. However, like all of his eleven counterparts, his definition helped me to see how unique a reader he was. I was the beneficiary of much learning from my conversations with these twelve articulate and perceptive young adults.

5.6.7   Definitions of literacy and literate, ambiguous responses

Amid the range of terms, that I asked the students to define, "literacy" and "literate" were terms that some of the students chose not to define. For those that chose to define these terms, several of the interviewees expressed that these two terms could be seen as synonyms for literature. Because none of the twelve interviewees were able to share a nuanced meaning for these two terms, I feel that these were two questions that did not work very well in the otherwise rich fodder from the interviews that I shared with them. Should I do this interview again, I might simply choose to omit them since responses to these questions are not essential to my general research question, what texts do young adults value? Another option would be to ask to define these terms earlier so that the meanings would not be coloured by the earlier discussion around "literature" and valued texts.

5.7 Concluding Remarks

As has been evidenced, few patterns of reading beyond genre selections by gender could be made from my interviews with the twelve individuals. As a group, they presented a broad array of valued texts from a broad array of media and formats. Although their current likes and dislikes were largely dissimilar, there was greater convergence in their mention of valued childhood texts. I wonder if this is because there is a much smaller pool of childhood texts to draw from as opposed to the vast availability of adult texts [despite the burgeoning number of children's literature texts that have been published in the last fifteen years]. Strong similarities could be found in the students' definitions of literature. Many of them deferred to Rose's fallacy of literature as being identified by a social elite (Rose in Manguel, 1996, p. 313) because it is taught at school despite their personal distaste or lack of connection therewith. However, when I asked them to name a text that they would like to revisit along with their reasons for rereading, all of them were able to discuss at some length why they valued [a] particular text[s]. When it came to children's literature, the students were again able to define this phrase with some degree of similarity, that of a lack of sophistication of text. In terms of their means of reading for information, the Internet had the greatest attractors, both among the girls and the boys. They projected that they will continue to use the Internet in their future career aspirations.

5.7.1 Summary of student responses and definitions about favourite texts by gender, genres and media

What were my respondents' favourite texts of all time and why did they continue to value them? These students shared an interest in a broad range of text genres and media formats. Beginning with the boys' discussions, for Steve, it was *The Lord of the Rings* in both print and film because his parents recommended this text to him. Denny spoke of his admiration for Star Trek as both film and television series because of the series' ideal representation of a world where humanity creates harmonious community. Stuart's favourite text was the movie *Top Gun* which he first watched as a young child and admittedly had seen about fifty times. Joe shared his enjoyment for the print autobiography, *99: Wayne Gretzky,* his inspiration to continue playing hockey as the means to his eventually becoming a lawyer. Ronny felt passionate about Frank Sinatra singing *Fly Me to the Moon* because of its

message of romantic and endless possibilities. Charlie admitted to enjoying *The Simpsons* after originally sharing that he had no favourite text, "I just read whatever, see whatever".

The girls' discussions of their favourite valued texts were equally broad. Vicky's favourite text form was music, "just music in general". Lori also enjoyed a musical text, *Angel* by singer-songwriter Sarah McLachlan because she felt that it evoked a connection with her. Anita spoke of *Dead Poets Society* as her favourite text, both in film and print because of its straightforward plot and coming-of-age theme. Anya and Erica shared their enjoyment of children's literature classics, *Charlotte's Web* and *Anne of Green Gables*, respectively. Anya experienced her favourite text when her Grade 2 teacher read the text aloud to her class and she became involved with the fantasy. Erica's first exposure to the *Anne* series was as television film in early childhood. This later induced her to read the books at approximately age twelve. Tanya's favourite, *Oh the Places You'll Go,* also a print children's literature classic because of its inspirational, and endless possibilities to create one's own future.

As for the students' favourite childhood and young adult texts, they spoke of what they valued from preschool experiences, elementary schooling and finally secondary schooling. Preschool favourite texts were exclusively from experiences in the home: Denny's father's stories told to him in Nigeria, Charlie's *Little Critter* print series by Mercer Mayer, Steve's and Stuart's favourite cartoons, Joe's *Sesame Street* on television and Ronny's *Addams Family* and *Bewitched* television series. Unlike the boys' general taste in television texts, the girls' preschool favourites included more print texts: Anita's *Ten Apples on Top,* Tanya's *Peter Rabbit*, and Erica's *Berenstain Bears.* This did not mean that television texts did not figure in the girls' early reading histories. Anya's favourite preschool text was *The Smurfs* viewed in her first language, Polish. Vicky's was *The Ghostbusters* and Erica also expressed a taste for television as well as print, with her liking for *Sesame Street.* Lori, unlike her peers expressed no memory of a favourite preschool text.

Memories of elementary school favourite texts eluded three of the twelve young adults: Charlie, Erica, and Vicky. Stuart spoke of a continued interest in cartoons with a new interest in informational television programs. Like Stuart, Denny also spoke of a favourite animated television program, *The Real Adventures of Johnny Quest,* viewed in his native Nigeria. Ronny and Lori also spoke of moving image texts as their favourites from this stage

of their lives. Ronny's were *The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* movie and television's *Family Matters.* Lori's was *Full House* on television. Joe's, Anita's, Anya's and Tanya's favourites were books from this time of their lives. Joe read R. L. Stine and Roald Dahl especially, *Matilda.* Anita read *The Narnia Chronicles* and *The Little House* series. Anya and Tanya read *Charlotte's Web.* Steve's favourite popular music text, any Beatles' song, does not belong to the traditional realm of children's literature.

From the ages of 12 to 16, a greater mix of popular and literary texts was reported as being these young adults' favourite texts. Steve's favourite adolescent texts included "metal" music. Erica expressed that she too enjoyed music with reference to no one particular text. Stuart continued to enjoy moving image texts as his favourite medium for stories. Television was also Charlie's favourite medium. He continued to watch *The Simpsons.* Lori and Anita did not identify favourite texts from this same period of their lives as readers. Denny, Joe, Ronny, Anya, Vicky and Tanya all spoke of novels as some of their favourite texts. These novels included both literary classics as well as what the students, themselves described as being their own identified "small l literature". Popular fiction titles included: Denny's *The Wayfarer Redemption,* Anya's *The Journal* [unable to locate author] and Vicky's *Crosses.* Joe, Ronny and Tanya spoke of the following "literary classics" that they encountered in school: *The Old Man and the Sea, To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Lord of the Flies.* Erica spoke of her liking of Montgomery's *Anne* series in addition to her general taste for music. Ronny expanded his discussion of his favourites by sharing that he also enjoyed the film *Wall Street* and the song *Fly Me to the Moon.*

Despite their having spoken about what texts were their favourites during various stages of their lives, not all of these young men and women shared thoughts around whether or not they considered themselves to be readers. Anya, Lori and Stuart did not currently consider themselves to be readers. All three of these individuals did speak of memories of having been readers. Tanya and Charlie did not ever consider themselves to be readers. Steve, Denny, Joe, Ronny, Erica, Vicky and Anita thought themselves readers. The texts that convinced them that they were readers for the first time included: *Goosebumps, Fantastic Mr. Fox, To Kill a Mockingbird, The Hardy Boys,* and *The Berenstain Bears; My Messy Bedroom.*

For these young adults, what made a text valuable to them, included reasons such as: being interesting, having some level of depth or complexity that required the reader to go back to the text in order to make full sense of the meaning of the text, some type of personal connection with the text, taste for a specific genre or theme, some level of humour, or a means of personal motivation. All of the previously mentioned favourite texts had some connection to the youths because of one these reasons.

The respondents' definitions of reading tended to be connected to making meaning from print text. Even Stuart, whose favourite texts all included moving images, defined reading as being connected to print. Ronny made a connection to my introductory comments about my operational definition of reading by alluding to how reading includes the taking of information from any source, not just print and that text could be any piece of information. In speaking about the difference between reading for pleasure and reading for work, the young adults spoke of how reading for information required media such as the Internet. Despite having varied career goals that included: the military, law, accounting, car detailing, investment banking, film production, dental hygiene, commercial baking, advertising, law enforcement, teaching, and no definite plans, most of the students shared similar ways of reading the information that they would need for their future careers today as well as in ten years time. Technology played a major role for most of these individuals. Television, Internet and as yet unforeseen information technologies were the non-personal means that they perceived that they would use in the future. On the other hand, many of the girls in particular, felt that actual experience and interactions with others were the important means for them being able to read what they would need to do their work.

When the students defined literature and named literature titles, there was some distinction between what they considered to be of the critically named literature and what they themselves would reread. When there was some disjunction between these two valuings of texts, the students most often named literature as being "boring" and what they "had" to read at school. Others, Joe in particular with his description of how he considered himself to be a reader since uncovering the meaning of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, learned to value a school identified literature texts as their own literature [as Denny described it to be small l literature]. Children's literature had a subtle difference for these individuals. For almost all of these readers, children's literature implied a lack of sophistication. Yet, when they were able

to name [a] text[s] that they considered to be children's literature, they felt that they would like to reread these texts because they continue to have enduring value for them. Sometimes, as Denny described in his discussion of *Harry Potter*, there was a difficulty in determining whether a text should be considered literature or children's literature because there could be a blurring of audience.

5.8 Preview of Upcoming Chapters

This chapter has been one in which I compared the responses of each individual against the backdrop of each of the other eleven interviewees' responses, one question at a time. In my mind, each of the twelve students became a single, unique case study even though this chapter may seem that I was trying to merge all of their responses into one story. Each of the twelve case studies may share some similarities with others: site, gender, genre preferences or media preferences. However, each student's transcript created a single story that has attached itself in my memory. Chapter 6 is where I configure and discuss narratives about six of the students' reading stories. After uncovering a repeated theme in the case-study transcripts of Steve, Denny, Ronny, Tanya, Anita and Lori, I wrote six narratives based on their valued texts. Their case stories *More Than Meets the Eye, Some Kind of Hero, Fly Me to the Moon, A Lighter Shade of Dark, Sound and Silence* and *I'll Just Do It!* make up the backbone of the next chapter.

Chapter 7 is where I share conclusions based on all of my research findings in the context of the significance of this study. I will also look at the limitations of this study as well as areas where future research is required. My case studies: Steve, Stuart, Charlie, Denny, Ronny, Joe, Anya, Erica, Anita, Vicky, Tanya and Lori's voices have contributed to my Chapter 7 conclusions based on the findings in this chapter, *Interviewing and Comparing Personal Understandings of What it Means to be a Reader*.

Chapter 6: Young Adult Reading Narratives

"Many writers have preconceived notions about what literature is supposed to be, and their ideas seem to exclude that which makes them charming in private conversation" (Ginsberg in *A Writer's Notebook,* 1984). Sharing some agreement with Ginsberg's sentiment about what makes a text literary, I embarked on this course of research to uncover what texts that young adults would consider to be literary or as I earlier defined literature, texts in which they would continue to find further meanings after rereading them several times. This chapter is where I have reconfigured six of the interviewees' discussions about their own reading into narratives that I felt best represented the readers. These narratives are my attempt at setting aside my preconceived notions of what literature should be in the general sense to really attend to what "literature" was for each individual in the specific sense. These narratives were written to include the speakers' ideas about literature and this made their ideas extremely charming in private conversation.

6.1 Celebrity Reader Story 1: Monica Hughes, Young Adult Author

Narratives about individual readers' childhood experiences with texts have been collected and published in various sources, both academic and texts for the mass market (i.e., *Something About the Author, Something about the Author Autobiography Series,* and *Everybody's Favourites).* I decided to include some of these stories to help add context to the stories that I wrote about my respondents' reading experiences. Children's authors are probably the largest group of individuals to have their early experiences with text recorded for publication. For this reason, I have chosen as my first published story, an excerpt from one written by Monica Hughes that I read while preparing a paper about her as coursework in my masters' of arts program.

> Story was a very important part of that school in Ealing. We were read aloud to every day, not from the kind of storybooks that we could read for ourselves, but from more difficult material: the myths and beliefs of Early Man, for instance, and the Norse Sagas…This is when I discovered the idea of Hero, a concept that has been very important in my writing life (Monica Hughes in Something about the Author Autobiography Series 11, 150).

Like Hughes, I too, have a strong connection to the sense of story. In my practice as a teacher, I read to my students daily in order to help them build a common myth [with heroic

archetypes and conflicts] for our classroom that can serve as currency for our later discussions and their own later written narratives. Myths and heroes continue to have a strong connection to our cultural context (Brozo & Schmelzer, 1997; Campbell, 1988 and Gilligan, 1982). Hero archetypes often form the basis of film, television, and multimedia texts such as video games. Denny, the first subject of my narratives seemed to have a strong affinity to the concept of a strong hero. For this reason, I begin the narrative interpretation of my data with Denny's experience with texts, *Some Kind of Hero*.

6.2 Some Kind of Hero

Of the twelve interviewees, Denny was the only African and person of colour in the group with whom I had the fortune to engage in dialogue. He was very large in stature, though extremely soft-spoken. His spoken English was impeccable as his previous schooling in Nigeria was based on the English school system. Three years since his immigration to Canada, Denny had quickly found his place in our society. He had a part-time job and had plans to begin a two-year accounting diploma at technical college in the following September. Later, he planned to transfer to a university in order to receive a business degree. In some ways, this seemed to be his fallback position. During our interview, he shared with me that he would like to be a pilot and would still like to join the military in order to fly. However, his immediate plans involved this fallback position of the safe, always employable accountant. Not knowing of the circumstances of Denny's leaving Nigeria, I wonder if Denny's choice of a safe career was a result of unsafe circumstances in his former home.

In speaking of his reading favourites, it seemed that Denny was able to take flight and to live adventurously. In particular, Denny's favourite text of all time was *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*. He shared its enduring message, "It holds the dream of what humanity can become. It's idealistic for them since the Federation is to exist without currency, without the need for money. I like their idealism and the decisions that they have to make."

Among Denny's other favourite texts, he spoke again of how he valued conflicted and sometimes imperfect heroes. "You can identify with them. I'll take for example, a British author, Dick Francis. In his books he doesn't make his main characters to be a [traditional] hero. You know that his main characters experience pain and they're afraid." Heroic adventure irrespective of genre seemed to be his favourite subject matter. From the ages of six to eleven, his favourite text in Nigeria was a show that he watched, *The Real Adventures*

of Johnny Quest, a program about adventure and exploration. His favourite print text since his having been introduced to it two years ago was *The Axis* fantasy/science fiction series by Australian, Sarah Douglass. It too, had a grand adventure and quest at its heart. The main character, Battle-Axe, is the fulfillment of a prophecy that would eventually bring about the reconciliation of two warring cultures. As his name implied, he was a more than competent warrior. As all mythic warriors, however, he engaged in battle only for a righteous cause. Denny spoke of his reasons for rereading all of the following texts: the Sarah Douglass *Axis* series, together with all three *Star Trek* television series, the *Star Trek* movies, and Dick Francis' spy adventures. Common to all of these texts is a fast-moving plot and a high sense of adventure. What I found interesting about Denny's description of what made these texts valued by him was not their action and adventure but the strength of their characters and their themes of the goodness of humanity. Despite Denny's liking for Dick Francis' unlikely heroes, Denny seemed to fit right into the mold of a reader who connected with the warrior hero archetype, an archetype which tied him to other male readers since the earliest of recorded narratives such as *Gilgamesh* (Brozo & Schmelzer, 1997).

Unique to my interviewees, Denny, spoke of his favourite early adolescent texts as being books. He considered himself to be a reader and spoke of the book which led him to consider himself a reader, *Fantastic Mr. Fox* by Roald Dahl. Denny was the type of reader that parents, teachers, and librarians and hope for in the young readers that they nurture. He enjoyed reading print. As he explained in his quiet, confident way, "I enjoy the experience of reading. Even the books that are movies. The books are usually more in depth." The texts that instilled this attitude in him as a preschooler in Nigeria were his father's oral recounts of *The Three Little Pigs* and *Red Riding Hood*.

His father was the first adult who greatly influenced his reading history. Since his arrival in Canada, the school library technician was the other. Although the school did not own *The Axis* series, she shared her own personal copy of the text. She was an individual who in her own quiet, heroic way entered into relationship with Denny and his life as a reader.

Denny's functional use of text had a broader application than just print. He gave literacy a simple synonym, "knowledge" and explained with an example that to be literate required that a person be able "to understand something. Let's say if you're computer literate,

you understand computers or their use." His favourite ways to get information were to watch television and to read a lot, too. In predicting his future methods of acquiring information in order to complete his work, he shared, "I don't think that I'll watch TV as much and I don't think that I'll still be reading as much because I think that I should go out and experience more instead of TV." This may be a connection to his earlier career aspirations of becoming a pilot.

In Denny's definitions of reading, print reading featured prominently. "A text is something put down in writing." For him reading meant, "To get meaning from texts by reading a book or something else in writing. Like when you watch a movie or read a book, they're two different ways of taking in something." He made a distinction between what he and I called Big L Literature and small l literature. He initially spoke of literature as, "When I think of literature, I think of what they make you read at school. Like Shakespeare, like *The Grapes of Wrath.*" Later he considered, "Sometimes I think of the things that I find on my own are literature. It's just when I think of the word 'literature' what we read in school is not very interesting. The literature that I find on my own is what is important to me." His named big L Literature titles were "Shakespeare and all the important texts that they make you read at school and college. Little l literature is the stuff that you pick yourself like Dick Francis' novels, fantasy, and science fiction."

For Denny, children's literature titles were: *The Three Little Pigs, Little Red Riding Hood,* and *Cinderella* because "usually there's something optimistic." After explaining that for him, children's literature "is more superficial and not as in depth as adult literature because it doesn't go into detail that much," Denny and I shared an interesting exchange about *Harry Potter.* He considered it literature [note the small l] because "adults read it. It's the way it was written. It appeals to all audiences." This may seem like it contradicted Denny's earlier description of children's literature versus big L Literature. However, it supported Denny's explanation that "little l literature is the stuff that you pick yourself." Essentially, *Harry Potter* further supported his illustration that little l literature could be fantasy.

There was a strong distinction between Denny's pragmatic goals and uses of text against his former dreams and readings of narratives. The pragmatic Denny planned to become an accountant and viewed literacy as the acquisition of knowledge. Denny, the

dreamer, had goals of becoming a pilot and read heroic adventures with strong moral outcomes. In many ways, Denny, a reader of other heroes was very much the contradictory ideal and unlikely hero of his own future.

6.3 Juxtapositions: Denny and Anita

If Denny seemed to read fairly conventional narratives for young male readers with their strong heroic figures, Anita, seemed to read against conventional gender expectations (Bird in Fasick, 1985) with her taste for dark narratives and texts with male protagonists. Her favourite text was the film, *Dead Poets' Society* which sets up viewers' expectations to follow a charismatic hero with admirable ideals. However, unlike Denny's heroes, reluctant as some of them may be, Anita's hero disappoints. One of the young men of this film mistakenly follows this charismatic teacher's inspiring behaviour to tragedy.

6.4 A Lighter Shade of Dark

Anita had definite plans for her future—a career in advertising after completing a two-year Visual Arts and Design course at a community college. Not prepared to begin this program immediately, she intended to work for a few years, perhaps as a bartender. To her mind, attaining a bartending license would enable her to "work and have fun at the same time." Since she was already of legal drinking age, she planned to complete a six-week bartending course shortly after she graduated from high school so that she could begin earning money as preparation for her post-secondary studies.

Comfortable with technology, Anita's favourite way to get information was through the Internet. Its multi-media nature appealed to her "because you have all the different media and sound and all that." In predicting her future, she felt that she would likely continue to get her information in this same way since "it will be more technological than getting say letters or anything that I get now." To this end, it was not surprising that Anita's favourite text of all time was a combination of sight and sight, the movie, *Dead Poets' Society*. The technology of the film was not the reason she gave for why she valued this text since she read the book after viewing the movie. She was impacted by its "deep" theme, "the instincts of boys who are growing up… finding themselves along the road."

It may seem unlikely that a young woman would choose a text with almost exclusively male characters, especially one with such a tragic ending—teen suicide and the subsequent loss of career of the charismatic teacher leader. However, Anita seemed to have a

dark aesthetic, in the choices of her favourite print texts as well, the series *His Dark Materials* by Phillip Pullman. She enjoyed going back to these texts because "they're kind of dark and they're kind of suspenseful and they're fun at the same time." Unknowingly, she tapped into a series that may be seen as belonging to the field of children's literature, a crossover. In some ways, Anita defied conventional thought again, by choosing texts with pre-adolescent and early adolescent protagonists among her current favourites. She clearly articulated why this was so, "Every time that I read them I find something that I didn't realize that I ran into the last time." In this way, she was transacting aesthetically with this text in a way as described by Louise Rosenblatt (1938). Anita's previous readings and life experience coloured and enhanced each subsequent reading of the Pullman series.

Fantasy played a part in her childhood reading as well. One of her favourite series of print texts was *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C. S. Lewis, arguably a series with contrasting visions of dark and light. Supporting her other connection to reading, believable characters, she also enjoyed the historical fiction series, *The Little House on the Prairies*. Considering herself to be a reader, she could not name a particular childhood text that was the text that started her on her journey as a reader of print. In her own words she admitted, "I don't know, it just happened. I never really read until Grade 2. Then within three months, I was able to read novels."

Able to illustrate what made a text valued by her, Anita was also able to name the characteristics as well as some illustrations of texts that she did not value. "I don't like books that are really flat. Some of them are like that by Margaret Atwood where you can't really follow the story line. You wonder, "What is she talking about? They're just too obscure. I like a story line that doesn't have too many plot twists. I have a hard time following those even in movies." On my reading of *The Edible Woman* by Margaret Atwood, subsequent to our dialogue, I wonder too, about "what Atwood is talking about". To my mind, this text was one that needed to be read on a symbolic level, that of a newly engaged woman being consumed by her subservience to her fiancé's needs and expectations. Written in the early stages of the feminist revolution, from my vaster reading and life experience, at this stage of my life, I am able to make some sense of what Atwood is trying to do. However, if I read it on a more literal level as I suspected that Anita was trying to do, the novel may seem to have unbelievable characters and coincidental plot twists. I must admit that I did not enjoy reading

many of Margaret Atwood's early novels, either as a younger woman. In some ways, I agree with Anita that Atwood's writing is often too obscure.

Our discussions around the meanings of reading and text in her life included a broad range of text modes and media. Her definition of text was highly context driven, "I just came out of computer class so right now my definition of text would be anything that you can type in bits and bytes." She articulately defined read in terms of print, "books. Magazines. Printed word. To read for meaning is to draw a conclusion from a set of given topics." She also described literate as having a connection with print, "being able to read printed word." Literature and literature titles applied to all types of text, "I find that that's really well put together. Subject matter. Not just thrown in such as some independent films that make no sense, don't go anywhere." She included the following texts in her list of literature titles: Margaret Atwood, magazines such as *Seventeen* and the movie, *A Beautiful Mind* with Russell Crowe.

She had some hesitancy in defining children's literature but finally came up with "it's fun. It's sort of a way in the state of life that they're in now." As a child, her literature titles included watching *Pollyanna, Alice in Wonderland* and *Sesame Street*. She also enjoyed reading the *Berenstain Bears* series. She reiterated that all of these texts could be considered children's literature "because they're just made for that state of life that you're in such as in *The Berenstain Bears Go to the Doctor* because they've never been to the doctor before. This will be fun."

Using her own relationship with her mother as an example, she talked about how her favourite text was mediated by an adult, *Ten Apples on Top*. Without explicitly sharing advice with parents on how to help their children become readers of print, she gave the context for this book becoming a favourite text, "my mom wouldn't let us watch movies or a tape. She read to us a lot and I liked it because it rhymed and had funny pictures." What made this text a wonderful experience for Anita as a listener and interpreter of the text was how her mom read to them, "she just had this great reading personality. She was always fun to listen to."

Her advice for teachers was to make the reading of print more interactive. Again, she illustrated her point with an example from her own reading history, "When I was in Grade 3 in French Immersion, we did this one thing where we had to pick out one book and we

different things: we had to make a book-mark, we had to make those slide shows, and stuff like that. It made it really fun to read the book so you could get to the next project." These interactive assignments helped to motivate reading which in turn led to greater enjoyment of reading.

In order that all readers might find some print texts that could encourage the enjoyment of reading, Anita advised librarians to take suggestions and include a broad range of material which encourages popular reading and the reading of the classics, as well. Anita, herself as a reader, was a person who encompasses this range of text readings. A young woman, she was unafraid to read dark, largely male characterizations in texts. At the same time, she enjoyed fun and was able to read lighter shades of humour in dark narratives. This sense of fun coloured her connections with texts, career goals, and her visual aesthetic.

6.5 Juxtapositions: Anita and Steve

If Anita seemingly enjoyed texts with dark themes, Steve may appear to some individuals as having similar tastes. His Gothic appearance certainly gave me the misapprehension that his favourite texts were dark ones. However, he had much more in common with Denny than Anita since his favourite texts included fantasy and science fiction, with their strong hero archetypes. His self-presentation was one of attracting another person's attention in order to be able to share his ideas and messages. To me, he was one unlikely hero.

6.6 Much More Than Meets the Eye

On first encountering Steve, someone may quickly get the wrong impression. 18 year-old Steve's appearance formed a visual text that can be off-putting to some people. Although soft-spoken and polite, I had to get past his Gothic appearance in order to feel comfortable in interviewing him. Sporting several deep facial piercings, black lacquered nails, heavy leather boots, and a studded black leather jacket with several what I perceived to be menacing heavy metal chains, Steve could serve as the stereotyped image of a youth worth fearing. Despite my misgivings about working with Steve, his teacher put me at ease by telling me about his high academic achievement, involvement in his church community, strong family support, and leadership in the class that I visited. As I began to know Steve better, I realized that his assumed persona was part of a larger staging. He fronted a punk, heavy metal band. In this

case, Steve's appearance was part of a much larger form of artistic self-expression—that of an artist who played against audience expectations.

Steve's current favourite texts were the songs that he had written about "being in society, looking different is one that I write a lot about." After listening to Steve talk about this theme, it seemed clear to me that Steve's appearance was deliberate. He used it as an invitation to confront people's expectations of whether a person's appearance should dictate a belief in how someone should behave.

As might be expected, Steve's future plans involved further artistic expression. After graduating, he planned to attend technical school in order to begin a two-year program in video production. Thereafter, he hoped to complete an arts degree at university before moving to Montreal in order to work in a film production company. In this way, he would be able to create lasting artistic forms that combined his sense of visual text [beyond his own appearance] with his sense of aural and kinetic texts [beyond his musical performances].

As a child, Steve's favourite texts were both visual and aural. In his early school years, he enjoyed any Beatles' song. Before school, he enjoyed *Inspector Gadget* because of a then fascination with machines. In my interview with Steve, I could see that he liked to keep moving. His body was in motion for much of the twenty-minute interview. Perhaps this stemmed back to his connection with *Inspector Gadget.* "I used to take apart stuff in my basement when it was broken. I took apart our TV once when I was four. I took apart our washing machine when I was five." Steve as a complete text involved not just the audience's eyes and ears but also appealed to the kinesthetic. Despite these early attempts to understand how machines work, Steve admitted that he "didn't get them back together" but his dad did. Lucky Steve, to have a parent who allowed him to connect *Inspector Gadget*, a visual text, to an active exploration of machines.

Parental sharing of texts was not limited to Steve's early childhood. His parents recommended his favourite text of all time, *The Lord of the Rings.* "They both liked it. They kinda gave it to me and said, 'hey look, you should read this.'" He explained that he enjoyed *The Lord of the Rings* as books and movie because "it's really different from anything else that I've ever read… seen."

Considering himself a reader, fantasy, science fiction, and poetry were genres that Steve currently favoured. A series of texts that he enjoyed endlessly were the *Star Wars*

movies. He explained that what made them and other texts worth rereading were the "little details that you wouldn't catch the first time." Texts that he would not reread were those that were built on suspense and excitement because they no longer worked if you already know what will happen next. " When you feel like you've got everything that you can out of it then it's not really worth reading again." As for a favourite piece of poetry, Steve explained that he read *Hamlet* four times. Implicitly linking reading to the interpretation of print, Steve spoke of the text that first convinced him that he was a reader. "Back before I was a reader, my mom was trying to get me to be one because both my parents read tons and so does my big sister and I didn't like to read and they bought me the *Goosebumps* books series and that's when I started reading."

Literature had a broader sense for him than classic print texts, "Anything that's written by anyone like a poem, a script, a song." Not naming any specific literature titles, he spoke of literature as "coming from someone's inner thoughts and emotions and they put it down and they give it out to you to interpret how you want." In Steve's own words, children's literature was the "same as any other literature just on a slightly lower level so that children can understand it." Steve named both print and television shows as children's literature titles: anything by Dr. Seuss, *Ninja Turtles*, and *Inspector Gadget*. All of these texts are highly visual and humourous. In terms of Dr. Seuss, he admitted, "I like him 'cause he's got an amazing imagination and crazy stuff in there."

Steve, the artist, could also be described in the same terms, "an amazing imagination and crazy stuff in there." Despite his current presentation of self, Steve was very similar to other adults who participate in the community in a more conventional manner. Much like his favourite theme for song writing of being in society and looking different, Steve was a contributing member to the community. His contribution to the community imparted all forms of visual, aural and representational language. Physical appearance was only part of Steve's message. He truly was much more than what meets the eye… and the ear… and the emotions.

6.7 Juxtapositions: Steve and Lori

Throughout his interview, Steve referred to musical texts as favourites from various stages of his life. Lori, too, spoke of her current favourite text as belonging to a musical medium. This was not the only point where Lori's and Steve's narratives intersected. Upon

meeting both of these individuals, I quickly had to reverse my expectations. Steve's appearance and his comfort with print played against my preconceptions of what he might like to read. Lori's hearing impairment and her connection with a musical text also played against my preconceptions of what she might be like as a reader. Both Steve and Lori served as reminders that there are no "types" of people, there are just individuals, none of whom fit comfortably into a type cast.

6.8 Sound and Silence

> … in the arms of an angel
>
> fly away from here
>
> from this dark cold hotel room
>
> and the endlessness that you fear
>
> you are pulled from the wreckage
>
> of your silent reverie
>
> you're in the arms of the angel
>
> may you find some comfort here
>
> (McLachlan, 1997)

Hearing-impaired Lori's favourite text of all time was the song "Angel" by Sarah McLachlin. She shared with me that "it really touches her in a way that nothing has ever touched her before." This might seem to be an unexpected response for someone who wore two hearing aids and whose speech was marked with a distinct impediment. This was not the only reversal of expectations that I experienced as I spoke with Lori. Her future career aspiration was to go into education, to become a teacher of disabilities and possibly English as a second language. The reversal of my expectations was that for most of the rest of our interview, she was silenced by her inability to name favourite texts. In particular, she named no favourite print title. This caused disjunction with me, a teacher, who understands how much print occupies a school day and as well has seen how narrative fiction has opened up opportunities for learning. Here, Lori a potential teacher seemed to be actively rejecting print.

Our shared discourse was filled with other silences. She could not remember a favourite text before school or from the ages of twelve to sixteen. Her favourite early school age text was a television *Full House* because "it showed how children have a family with everybody pulling together." Here was another clue about what Sarah valued. Being in

relationships and working to maintain or strengthen those relationships seemed to be part of her value system. She would go back to the song *Angel* because of she felt a connection with it. Unable to explain what makes a text worth a second, third, or fourth, etc. reading, she explained what she would not read again, "something not interesting, something not humourous or has no connection or interest to me at all. Such as… golf." A personal connection or a shared connection with others and text was what made it valuable to her.

Lori was silenced by many of the questions that dealt with reading and literacy. Not considering herself to be a reader at this point in time, she expressed that there was a time when she did believe herself to be one. Now it seemed to me, that the busy "ness" of life was an excuse that got in the way of her reading, "I started losing interest. I don't have a lot of time. I'm always on the go. I have two jobs." Reading and literature dealt with "understanding on the page" and she doesn't read literature " 'cause I don't comprehend it. I don't understand it." Children's literature sparked a negative response. She explained that "I didn't really read a book that early. Not really television shows either." Questions about children's literature titles, literacy, and literate evoked Lori to remain silent except for the addition of a nervous laugh. Unable to speak of the rewards of reading for pleasure as its own reward, she made reference to what she thought would make a difference in helping students become readers. "One reading program that I really liked that's out there is with the local professional hockey club's bookmark reading reward program. Kids really seem to enjoy that with the hockey team. Something to their interest kind of thing." I felt disappointment in Lori's expression that reading was not rewarding enough in itself to help Lori value print reading.

For Lori, text meant textbook or information. However, she even rejected print in the times that she required information. There was an irony in that one of her preferred ways to get information was through talking. It surprised me to find out that a hearing impaired individual would choose talking as a means of communication. She believed that this means of information would continue to meet her future needs as she explained, "You'll be talking to other teachers so the communication's there." She also spoke of the value of the Internet as an information-gathering medium both today and for the future. The last addition to her information-gathering list was movies. Notably absent was a reference to print as an information source, a consistent rejection of print that was a thread throughout our interview.

Lori was a complex source of reversed expectations. The loudest sound that I heard in our conversation was that hearing-impaired Lori's favourite mode of communication was aural—music and talk. The most profound silence in our conversation was that of future teacher Lori's rejection of print, a medium for communication that is usually privileged in classrooms. Her valued texts were those with which she shared a personal connection or in which she shared a connection with others. In the words of her favourite text, "In the arms of an angel…May we find some comfort here." Connection and comfort were themes about which Lori valued strongly enough to sound off and break her silence.

6.9 Celebrity Reader Story 2: Don Cherry, Media Hockey Analyst

I believe in the power of books. Books helped form my personality and definitely affected the way I am today. When we were little, my father would read to my brother and me every night. We would sit on the floor beside him…. He read several "rags to riches" books by Horatio Alger, Jr., and I loved them all. Books with titles like *Ragged Dick, Sink or Swim, Strong and Steady, Strive and Succeed* and *Risen from the Ranks.* Alger wrote about a hundred books. Though the stories were all different, they each, in a sense, promoted the same idea: hard work, courage and determination will continually pay off. The boy heroes start low but always move up in the world. They make their way by sticking things out through tough times. Their hard work, honesty and perseverance rise up over whatever gets in the way. They never give up (Cherry in Rae, 1997).

Set against Lori's rejection of books, this selection by Don Cherry is meaningful in the context of my young adult interview narratives because to some degree, it serves as an apt introduction to my story about Ronny. Ronny aspired to be a successful investment banker. Perhaps his story does not completely fit the "rags to riches", Horatio Alger storyline. However, Ronny certainly seemed to be aspiring to the hard work to riches storyline—hard work as a banker leading to his later financial success.

6.10 Fly Me to the Moon

Fly me to the moon
And let me play among the stars
Let me see what spring is like
On Jupiter and Mars   (Sinatra, 1964)

Future investment banker Ronny's favourite text *Fly Me to the Moon* as sung by
Frank Sinatra may seem to be a surprising choice for an eighteen-year-old young man. He
certainly caught my attention with his discussion around this song, "There's lots of little
messages in the song and whether it's sung fast or slow, I like it. It has a good tune to it. I've
loved this tune since I was a kid." This song along with the novel, *The Old Man and the Sea,*
were motivational texts that he often revisited. As regarded *The Old Man and the Sea,*
Ronnie explained, "It's good to go back to it once a year, it reminds me of the messages, the
roles that people have in life and fulfilling 'em and not giving in, working their hardest. I
guess reading it once a year helps motivate me to working towards what you want for
yourself."

Motivation, success, and meaningful learning from others were some themes that
often came through during our conversation together. In explaining how he would prepare for
a future career he shared, "I guess in finance, you get your schooling. It's basically in
learning it on the job. Hopefully, I can surround myself with people that can teach me how to
be successful." Hoping that he could learn success from others seemed to be a contradictory
idea for someone who wants to enter into the competitive world of finance. This belief
however, may be linked to the depiction of a mentor/protégé relationship in *Wall Street* a
movie that was one of his valued literary texts. In this narrative, a powerful business magnate
mentored an ambitious younger broker. However, there is an irony in this situation. The
mentor chooses the younger man because there is a direct benefit for him. It is a dog-eat-dog
relationship with both individuals looking out for themselves at any cost.

Success at any cost could also be considered a common theme in some texts that
Ronny considered to be literary, the novel, *The Art of War* by Sun Tse, *The Sopranos*
television series, and the movies: *Boiler Room* and *Wall Street*. However, my overall
impression of Ronny as a person was that he was not overly aggressive. He was an idealist.
He considered himself to be a reader of print because he shared, "I like reading the classics. I
guess that I enjoy reading what I like and I guess that reading's a good place to pick up
messages, basically philosophical thoughts." His favourite childhood texts reflected an
idealistic view of society—one that is simple and hopeful and where problems are solved in
thirty minutes. This optimistic view was similar to the lyrics of his favourite text of all time,
Fly Me to the Moon that originated in a time at least two decades before his birth. As a

preschooler, Ronny enjoyed *Bewitched* and *The Addams Family*. He readily admitted, "They're both older shows with the older humour that gets the younger audience a little better. It's not as complex in entertainment so younger ages can catch on easier."

His favourite texts from the ages of six to eleven were again moving image texts, *Family Matters* and *The Ninja Turtles Movie*. *Family Matters* was a shared family text since he, his brothers and sisters would watch it daily after school. *The Ninja Turtles* appealed to Ronny because of "its good blend of action and comedy and drama. It's a good movie for a kid that age." Ronny's selection of *The Ninja Turtles Movie* was just another example of him being an idealistic young person who wanted a just ending even though it was achieved through comic-aggressive means. *The Man Without a Face*, another movie, was Ronny's favourite text from the ages of twelve to sixteen. Although, quite different from any of his other selections, it did seem to fit Ronny's comments about reading enabling philosophical thought. He explained that this film "had a strong message and it was a really powerful movie". Arguably this could be the result that the text creators had in mind when they filmed this narrative of a self-ostracized outsider enabling the growth of a young boy and in the end his own re-entry into society.

Although most of Ronny's discussion about whether he considered himself to be a reader involved his own experiences with print, he had much broader definitions when speaking about texts, literature and literacy in the general sense. Again, he did not limit his illustrations in terms of the classics when he shared his feelings around literature, "Literature would be any source of... not just entertainment, any source of information so it could be a large variety. It can't be just a book. It can be anything with a story or anything like that. Anything with a message to be given out." He made a distinction with children's literature speaking of it as a diversion, "I guess basically that it is something that is fun and entertaining for a child. They're not looking for something that has a deep meaning but they're looking for something that can make them laugh." His diversionary children's literature texts all involved print, Richard Scarry's series and the Matt Christopher sports novels.

For Ronny, literacy however, implied something much more sophisticated than what is conventionally seen as basic understandings of texts. He defined literacy in this way; "being able to understand more complex degrees of literature and to dig a little deeper and

the more literature you take in, the better you are at reading literature." This was clearly a difference from his self-declared new understanding of text, "I never thought of text as being something more than just a novel. I like that idea where it can be absolutely anything, a message is trying to be put through." Looking at text in this way also led to Ronny's newly realized definition of reading, "taking in knowledge, to take in information from any kind of source whether it be a book, film, CD or anything." Throughout this discussion of Ronny's understandings around literacy and literature it was as if Ronny's favourite text *Fly Me to the Moon* served as a metaphor for the open-ended possibilities of multiple literacies.

Current connections could be made to Ronny's future career aspirations. In order to be a successful investment banker, the client needs to be motivated to trust in the banker. This may require an initial investment hook. The motivational hook was a repeated theme throughout our discussion. He spoke of *The Hardy Boys* as the initial motivating hook that caused him to continue reading print. In his advice to parents, teachers and librarians, he again used the word hook, this time in terms of making reading fun and entertaining as a means of motivating young readers. Ronny certainly hooked me into his reading story. His enthusiasm and *Fly Me to the Moon* idealism may indeed be the secret of his future career success.

6.11 Celebrity Reader Story 3: Mark Tewksbury, Olympic Swimming Gold Medalist

> When I was a child, I was fascinated by the Dr. Seuss collection of books… one in particular, *Oh, the Thinks You Can Think!* reminds me of my childhood. One of my aunts gave the book to me when I was five year old and it made a lasting impression on me… Dr. Seuss, perhaps better than any other children's author, creates not only fantastic stories that capture a child's imagination, he also illustrates his stories with characters and images that are colourful and original. Beginning a Dr. Seuss book for me as a child was like entering a far-away land of fantasy and excitement…. What did this teach me? The closing page of *Oh, the Thinks You Can Think!* best summarizes the lesson: 'Think left and think right and think low and think high. Oh, the THINKS you can think if you only try!' The last four words stuck with me for a long time. If you only try! Perhaps subconsciously I learned that anything is possible. But you have to think about it, try, create the impossible and make it possible (Tewksbury in Rae, 1997, p. 8).

In sharing his feelings about his favourite childhood text, Mark Tewksbury, Canadian Olympic swimming gold medalist shared a liking for Dr. Seuss' inspirational messages with Tanya, one of my young adult interviewees. Like Tanya's belief in action as a means to success, Tewksbury actually lived Seuss' inspiration to act out one's dreams. For these readers, childhood inspirational texts of believing in one's self may be the means to the attainment of their dreams.

6.12 I'll Just Do It!

Tanya, an aspiring police officer, knew how she learned best. She was well able to articulate her self-understanding. "I'm a very hands-on person but I can see myself doing what I need to do. I'm more stimulated through people talking to me… and need the communication aspect rather than sitting in a room for eight hours, reading, and reading, and reading.

Although she did not consider herself to be a reader, not now and not ever, she made astute observations about the necessity to read print in today's society. "People don't realize that students and people who work in offices, they read a lot. If you didn't read, you wouldn't be able to… you would be able to continue reading. It's just like communicating. It's just like talking. You don't forget."

Tanya's "I'll just do it," approach to life was connected to the texts that she values. She loved her current favourite, Oh, the Places You'll Go by Dr. Seuss for its inspirational message. It was a recent eighteenth birthday/high school graduation gift given to her from an extended family member as recognition of Tanya's "Just do it" potential and attitude. She, herself, valued this text for its cross-over possibilities—"I believe pretty much that it is something you can read as a child to something that you can read when you're older." Interestingly enough, Tanya, a self-declared non-reader has read the possibilities of this text very clearly. She picked a Dr. Seuss book, not for its humourous illustrations and nonsensical language, but for its open-ended possibilities. Possibilities not just for children but for adults, too.

Inspiration played a part in Tanya's current favourite texts. She continued to enjoy movies with inspirational messages. In terms of a text that she would like to revisit, she spoke of a positive experience with children's literature. The print text that she would like to revisit was *The Cay*, a novel read aloud to her class by her Grade 3 teacher. In this case, she

spoke of the intrigue of its being a real-life *Survivor* story. Not a particular fan of fantasy, Tanya spoke of "knowing that it happened intrigues me to wonder about it more and to learn about it more and put myself maybe into that situation and wonder if I could be a survivor of that."

Despite her belief that she had never felt that she was a successful reader of print, all of her named childhood texts were print-based: *Peter Rabbit, Charlotte's Web,* and as a teen from the ages of 12-16, *Lord of the Flies.* She explained that she liked each of these books for a sense of relationship or identification with the characters or a connection to the person who shared the text with her. With Beatrix Potter, she expressed how she enjoyed how her mother shared the texts with her. She "wanted to believe that animals and spiders were all important and they could talk" were her reasons for liking *Charlotte's Web. Lord of the Flies* elicited a deeper discussion of human nature and friendship. In her own words, she expressed, "it kinda made me think about how people change in different atmospheres and different settings. It really kinda scared me how people can be your friend and how something happens that turns them against you."

Others of Tanya's childhood experiences with print were not so positive. One particular story about her experience in struggling to belong to the "reading club" as described by Frank Smith (1988) was when she "tried reading in Grade 5, *Goosebumps* books by R.L. Stine because I have a whole collection. I don't even think I read half the books I bought. I tried, I really did." This disjunction with what her peers were reading caused her to conform by purchasing the popular series that she did not end up reading. Again, this is a story of a belief that reading print can help to strengthen or maintain relationships with others.

Most of Tanya's illustrations of terms associated with reading were limited to print references. She identified the following Children's Literature texts: *The Cat in the Hat, Green Eggs and Ham, Franklin,* and *Clifford.* To her, text meant, "book, a large book like a social studies book". She differentiated between adult-named literature and what she considered to have literary merit. For her, literature implied sophistication and "makes her think of something Shakespearean or thick novels." To her mind, she did not usually read literature, she read magazines and enjoyed movies that seemingly had a connection to print such as *The Joy Luck Club.* Although she did not believe herself to be a fan of fantasy, she

spoke at great length about the power of *Harry Potter* in print because of its ability to appeal to a reader's imagination as the individual took control of the narrative. In a sense, her named children's literature titles, all fell into the *Oh the Places You'll Go* category. They were imaginative, fanciful dreams which played with the reader's expectations.

Imagination, dreams, and inspiration were what she wished for future young readers, too. She encouraged parents, teachers, and librarians to let children "just do it." Just let them read what they love and enjoy. Perhaps if this had been the case in Tanya's earlier reading history, she too would feel that she was a successful reader—reader of print, that is. She would "just do it"—read.

6.13 Concluding Thoughts

"When I... discovered libraries, it was like having Christmas every day" (Fritz, 1982). One of my favourite memories of my visits to the Vancouver Public Library during my sabbatical year in Vancouver was the day I discovered the T-shirts that were sold in the bookstore. These T-shirts expressed a sentiment written by Jorge Luis Borges that immediately touched my heart and head, "I have always imagined that paradise will be a kind of library". A life-long reader of print, my discovery of the public library was much like Jean Fritz's "Christmas". As a child and continuing to this day, I have unwrapped the gifts of many of my personal literature titles, in the public library.

Although the celebrity readers' stories about their favourite childhood texts did not allude to their being found in a library. Monica Hughes, Don Cherry and Mark Tewksbury did all describe however, their favourite texts from print that they either read themselves or had read to them by an adult. All three of these examples also shared another common element—that of how a special person introduced these texts to them.

For the six students of my narratives, the favourite texts in their reading histories were not all limited to print sources. Nor would all these texts be housed in a school or public library. Some of them resided in the respondents' family homes and were created by the vehicles of television, VCR, DVD, stereo and sometimes a person. More importantly, what these young adults found to be texts worthy to be called literature would not necessarily fit the mold of what text critics have labeled as literature. All six of the stories about an individual's valued texts certainly charmed me in our private conversations (Ginsberg). However, despite their not necessarily claiming their own valued texts to be literature, all six

of these individuals were able to articulate clearly why these texts were their favourites. All six stories, *Some Kind of a Hero, A Lighter Shade of Dark, More Than Meets the Eye, Sound and Silence, Fly Me to the Moon* and *I'll Just Do It!* focused on why these titles best described the meaning gleaned from the texts that all six of these readers found valuable in their own lives. The stories that the readers enjoyed together with the stories of how these stories fit into their lives ended up as narratives that I felt best represented who they were as readers—thought-full readers whose experiences with text helped shape who they were at the time of the interviews and who they aspired to be in the future. Their individual stories have helped me to create the much larger narrative of what I learned from young adults about what and why they read. My greatest finding was that by attending to the very specific details of one individual reader's story meant that it was impossible to generalize about them as a group of readers. Denny's, Anita's, Steve's, Lori's, Ronny's and Tanya's stories will always remain as separate and unique narratives in my memory. This sixth chapter has been my attempt to weave all six stories into part of the greater fabric of my understanding of what young adults read.

6.14 Preview of Chapter 7

Chapter 7: Conclusions is where I summarize the findings that I uncovered around my general research question, "What do young adults read?" as well as to my specific research questions:

1. What texts do some young adults value?
2. How are various texts valued?
3. What are their reading histories?
4. What texts have had an impact in making them readers?
5. Who shared these texts with them—currently and in their reading histories? Has the social reading of a shared text affected its enduring value for an individual?
6. What do youth name as literary texts versus what do they consider to be literary texts?
7. Does a person's chosen career path imply a specific type of literacy? Is there a correlation between career path and a person's recreational reading selections?

After summarizing my learnings around my general and specific research questions, I will situate the significance of my study in the context of other research. Finally, I will make

suggestions for future research into young adults' favourite texts as well as the meaning of these texts in young adult lives.

Chapter 7: Conclusions and Recommendations for Future Research

"A photograph whilst recording what has been seen, always and by its nature refers to what is seen" (Berger in Manguel, 2000, p.72). Unlike a photograph, the world is not framed: the eye wanders and can take in what lies beyond the margins" (Manguel, 2000, p. 72).

7.1 Findings from Research into "What do Young Adults Read?"

In a sense the data that I collected from the seventy surveyed young adults and the twelve transcribed interviews with students selected from the earlier written surveys fit Berger's description of what is seen. For the purposes of illustrating how this understanding of how recording a message fits the means of how I collected the data in my research, where I use "seen" to mean a means of recording a message. In this case, the means of recording data included print and audiotape. The data, like a photograph, is fixed in time—the moment that an individual respondent wrote responses to a survey, the moment that an interviewee's response was recorded on audiotape.

Once I decided to tell the story of the full range of the seventy survey responses as well as the comparisons between the twelve students' responses to the interviews and the six metaphoric narratives which arose from consistently thematic interview transcripts, I entered into Manguel's realm of how the world is framed, outside the margins. The findings from my study are my way of trying to extend the frame of what it means to be a young adult reader into the world of what I have found from the partial reading stories of seventy young adult readers. Because each response was idiosyncratic to a unique individual, I have collected many of these responses in order to create a slightly larger "world beyond the margins" of the meaning of reading texts in many forms for today's youth.

7.1.1 Research questions

In collecting and analyzing my data, I was able to get a sense of "What do young adults read?" by answering the following specific research questions.

1. What texts do some young adults value?

2. How are various texts valued?

3. What are their reading histories?

4. What texts have had an impact in making them readers?

5. Who shared these texts with them—currently and in their reading histories? Has the social reading of a shared text affected its enduring value for an individual?

6. What do youth name as literary texts versus what do they consider to be literary texts?

7. Does a person's chosen career path imply a specific type of literacy? Is there a correlation between career path and a person's recreational reading selections?

I was able to get a partial sense of the meaning of reading in young adults' lives from the surveys as the students shared responses to questions 1-3, 5 and 7. To get a closer look at what some young adults read, the twelve interviewees' responses contributed to my understanding of the meaning of reading in their lives with answers to all seven of my interview questions. The six narratives: *More Than Meets the Eye, Some Kind of Hero, Fly Me to the Moon, A Lighter Shade of Dark, Sound and Silence* and *I'll Just Do It!* configured from amongst the interview transcripts, helped to present a range of individual reading stories around responses to the seven research questions.

7.1.2 Survey findings

Question 7 was answered in part by Table 1: *Young Adult Favourite Texts by Career Plans and Gender* [p. 45]. Few if any clear patterns manifested themselves to suggest a correlation between a young adult's reading preferences for a particular medium for reading and one's ultimate career goals. Apart from the responses of three young men who consistently chose video games or on-line texts as both their current and childhood favourites, it is essentially difficult to predict what text medium a particular individual would prefer based on declared career aspirations. There was no clear designation of text medium preference for either gender. Both boys and girls reported similar preferences for a specific medium of text. What Table 1 [pp. 45-48] does point to however, are the breadth of media preferences and the place of print fiction for an individual in every category of career goals. It is noteworthy to me that a considerable number of young adults [38/70] aspiring to every category of career wrote of print as their favourite form of text. However, what is unclear from the written responses is if any of these youth interpreted read in its conventional sense as making meaning from print since further contextual clues about other types of text media followed after the discussion of the respondents' favourite text of all time. Because I was a teacher as well as a researcher, I also wonder if some of them may have wanted to present themselves as having more socially desirable values by expressing a preference for print, the text form that has the greatest currency in school.

Some answers to how some texts are valued can be found in Table 2: *How Often Young Adults Read Favourite Texts* [p. 50]. By all appearances, it seems that visual texts acquire the greatest number of reading hours. However, this does not mean that these texts were valued more than another type of text because the nature of the moving image text format may suggest that the reader would engage with it more readily than with others. It may be an over-simplification to say that television reading may require less effort than print reading since it is often easier to access in a social setting, the living room or family room. For other texts, going to the movies, there is likely cost involved—both financial and effort which may prohibit the same level of engagement as television. Because print reading is often a solitary activity, it may require a more sustained effort since it likely asks the reader to separate oneself from a group in order to engage in the text.

Another glimpse at how young adults valued some of their favourite texts appears in the findings in Table 3: *Young Adults' Favourite Genres, Current and Past* [p. 54]. This table points to the differences in text genres valued by the two genders. Many of the young men expressed a preference for fantasy as their favourite genre, no matter the medium. As earlier discussed in the male archetypes presented by Brozo and Schmelzer (1997) many of the boys seemed to prefer texts with strong heroes in a plot-driven text. As discussed by Fasick (1985) the girls appeared to prefer texts which featured character development over a driving plot structure. Gender did not figure so prominently in why the boys and girls reported that they enjoyed their favourite childhood texts. During their childhood engagements with texts both boys and girls reported that they enjoyed favourite childhood texts because they were humourous. Besides humour, an appeal to the imagination was the second reason for appreciating early fantasy texts.

Table 5: *Young Adult Valued Texts* [p. 61] also helped to explain question 2, how young adults valued their favourite texts. In this table, I reported findings around the question as to why they would like to revisit a particular text—both current and childhood texts. It was difficult to report why the respondents valued the texts that they did because their answers did not fall into cleanly organized categories. In this instance, I chose to report more than one response if a youth offered more than one. For this reason, the number of responses sometimes surpassed the seventy students who participated in the survey. If I were to

generalize why the students valued their favourite texts, I would be able to say the students found them entertaining or because they enjoyed them.

Table 4: *Young Adult Readings in Relationship* [p. 58] helped me to share some of the responses to question 5 from the student surveys of reading histories. In this table, I reported on how most of these young adults sharing a preference for a favourite text with another individual. Their current favourites were most often shared with friends. However, many of the students shared a liking for texts with their family members. Almost to a person, the students reported that a parent or other family member had shared their childhood favourites with them. Those who continued to value childhood favourites reported that these texts are worth rereading with children in their lives—both today and in their futures. The journey to becoming a reader began in most of these young adults' homes. However, there were some students whose childhood favourite text had been introduced to them in a classroom or school library.

7.1.3 Interview Findings

All seven research questions were clearly answered by the twelve interviews I had with six of the boys and six of the girls that I had surveyed earlier at the three different schools. Because each of the students responded in a manner that reflected the uniqueness of each person's reading history, few patterns of reading were uncovered from the interviews. Together, the students presented a broad range of valued texts in many media formats. These young adults shared more childhood-valued texts than their current favourites. Perhaps this is due to the fact that fewer children's texts are produced yearly than those produced for an adult audience. The strong influence of Disney's marketing to and for children may be another factor.

The students defined "literature" in similar ways. Many of them spoke of literature as the texts that they encountered at school and for which they largely felt no connection and often found to be boring. However, the students were able to define what some of us described as "small l literature", the texts that they valued rereading. All of the students were well able to articulate why they valued [a] particular text[s]. For the students, they described children's literature as texts lacking sophistication. Their current means of reading for information came largely from the Internet—a means reported by both the young men and

young women. Many of these young people predicted that the Internet would play a major role in their information-seeking reading as they entered into adulthood.

The favourite texts of all time valued by these young adults pointed to an interest in a broad range of text genres and media formats. *The Lord of the Rings* as novel and film, *Star Trek* as film and television series, the film *Top Gun*, *The Simpsons* on television, a printed autobiography, *99: Wayne Gretzky*, and Frank Sinatra singing *Fly Me to the Moon* were the young men's favourite texts. The girls' valued texts were equally broad: music, singer-songwriter, Sarah McLachlan's *Angel*, *Dead Poets Society* as movie and novel, *Charlotte's Web* and *Anne of Green Gables* as novel and film, *Oh the Places You'll Go* by Dr. Seuss.

These young people spoke of their valued texts experienced as preschoolers, elementary school-aged and secondary school-aged individuals. The boys' preschool favourite texts had been experienced in their homes: oral stories told by a parent, *Little Critter* by Mercer Mayer, television cartoons, *Sesame Street* and television reruns of *The Addams Family* and *Bewitched.* The girls' preschool favourites included more books: *Ten Apples on Top, Peter Rabbit, The Berenstain Bears.* Some of the girls spoke of television texts as their preschool favourites: *The Smurfs, The Ghostbuster* and *Sesame Street.* One girl spoke of not having a memory of any favourite preschool text.

Three of the twelve young adults could not speak of a memory of an elementary school valued text. Three of the boys spoke of their interest in television and movie cartoons. Some of these young men also told me of their having developed an interest for informational television programs at about this age. One boy spoke of a situation comedy as his favourite text, *Family Matters.* Another expressed his preference for the novels of R. L. Stine and Roald Dahl's *Matilda.* One other boy's favourite text at this time was any Beatles' song. At this time, the young woman who was unable to remember a preschool favourite text spoke of her connection with the television situation comedy, *Full House.* Three of the girls told me that their favourite elementary school texts were the novels: *The Narnia Chronicles, The Little House* series, and *Charlotte's Web.*

The young adults reported a mix of popular and literary texts as their favourites from the time that they were between the ages of 12 to 16. In this instance, there was not such a clear delineation between the answers given by the boys from those given by the girls. One girl enjoyed music as her favourite teen-aged text as did a boy who played "metal" music in a

band. Another boy responded consistently that his favourite texts were moving images as a preschooler and as the young adult that he was at the time of the interview. *The Simpsons* on television was one young man's favourite text as a ten-year-old and later as a young adult. Two of the young women were unable to identify a favourite text as adolescent readers. Novels were the favourite texts of three of the young men and three of the girls. These novels were: popular fiction titles such as *The Wayfarer Redemption, The Journal,* and *Crosses* and texts that the young adults studied in school such as *The Old Man and the Sea, To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Lord of the Flies. Anne of Green Gables* as well as many types of music was one girl's favourite texts. The young who valued the song, *Fly Me to the Moon* also included a valued film, *Wall Street.*

When asked if they considered themselves to be readers, the young adults' responses fit into one of the three following categories: always non-readers, current non-readers, and current readers. Two of the young adults felt that they had never considered themselves to be readers. Three individuals had memories of having been readers but currently felt that they did not have the time to read. Seven of the students considered themselves to be readers. These individuals named the following texts as the books that first convinced them that they were readers: *Goosebumps, Fantastic Mr. Fox, To Kill a Mockingbird, The Hardy Boys,* and *The Berenstain Bears,* and *My Messy Bedroom.*

What made a text valuable to these young adults included: being interesting, having a level of depth or complexity, a personal connection with a text, liking for a specific genre or theme, humour, and message of personal motivation.

The respondents tended to define "reading" as making meaning from print text. One of the young men connected reading to my operational definition of reading by explaining how reading includes the taking in of information from any source, not just print. The young adults were able to speak of the difference in purpose when reading for pleasure or when reading for work. For these young adults, reading for information required media such as the Internet. These young people had very varied career goals: the military, law, accounting, car detailing, investment banking, film production, dental hygiene, commercial baking, advertising, law enforcement, teaching, and no definite plans. Yet they shared similar ways of reading for information today, as well as how they projected that they would find information in ten years time. Television, the Internet and possible not as yet invented newer

information technologies were the non-personal means that the young adults predicted that they would use to glean information in the future. Many of the girls valued a personal contact with others as the primary means in helping them read what they would need to do their work.

I felt some dissatisfaction with the response to two terms that I asked the twelve interviewees to define—literate and literacy. It seems to me that the interviewees connected these terms to literature since all of the earlier questions were based on this concept of what makes a valued text. I found that their responses when they gave them were often ambiguous and contradictory to their earlier definitions. Literacy was given a contextual marker by two individuals—computer literacy. If I were to ask these questions again, I would place them in another place in the interview protocol to see if clearer responses would arise from this context.

7.1.4 Narrative findings

Some Kind of a Hero, A Lighter Shade of Dark, More Than Meets the Eye, Sound and Silence, Fly Me to the Moon and *I'll Just Do It!* the narratives about Denny's, Anita's, Lori's, Steve's, Ronny's, and Tanya's valued texts expressed who these young people were to me as readers. These narratives of young adult favourite texts were not all limited to print sources such as one would find in schools or public libraries. Some of their favourite texts were housed in the respondents' homes and were comprised of television, VCR, DVD, stereo and told texts. What these young adults considered valuable did not always fit the standard-held view of what critics have named as literature. All six of these individuals were able to articulate clearly why their favourite texts were worthy of being valued. In these narratives, I tried to share my learnings from these individuals—narratives that revealed how these young people were thought-full readers. By attending to the unique details of one individual reader's story at a time, it became impossible to generalize about them as a group of readers. These six stories will always remain as distinct narratives for me. Denny's, Anita's, Lori's, Steve's, Ronny's, and Tanya's stories gave me more complete responses to my seven specific research questions—responses that helped to create the larger narrative of my thesis journey.

Like a photograph, my thesis findings in the form of each individual's survey responses, interview transcript and reading narrative have helped to create an image of what

it means to be a young adult reader. However, unlike a photograph, by analyzing many students' understandings of themselves as readers, I have also been able to look at the margins outside the image to present a world of a group of readers who are idiosyncratic (Manguel, 2000, p. 72), authentic and responding articulately to texts that often are neglected as resource materials for schools or libraries.

7.2 Significance of Study "What do young adults read?

> …To assume that literacy involves only the ability to produce and interpret (write and read) print or other permanently encoded texts is to capture only a small part of what is involved in literate practice. In addition to permanent codes, a number or symbol systems, signs and even or unintentional movements contribute to making and representing meaning in addition to and in conjunction with written language. (Eisner in Moje, 2002, p. 108).

My study into what young adults read is an important research into the meaning of the plethora of texts that students actively choose as their favourites. As Eisner describes above, literacy requires much more than the traditional 3Rs of reading, writing and arithmetic. It requires readers to critically examine what they read in conjunction with why they choose to read a particular text. Because the breadth of texts to be read and interpreted in school and society are exploding in pace with the rapidly evolving information technologies, schools and libraries are struggling to make choices about what texts to select for intensive examination against those for extensive individual reading. However, before these institutions add texts to their collections or syllabi that may add to children's and young adults' engagement and analysis of these texts, it is necessary to have a better idea of what types of texts these individuals choose as meaningful. I have tried to get some type of idea about these texts by surveying seventy young adults in three Alberta high schools in a major urban school district and later interviewing twelve of their number in these same three research sites. The range of their responses, as well as why they value readings that they feel will have lasting meaning for them in their adult careers, helps teachers and librarians to understand how and why young adults select texts to revisit in meaningful ways.

From where did my research question originate? In my role as a language arts curriculum leader at the time that a new curriculum was phased in my province, I became aware of the new responsibility of teachers in preparing students "to respond personally and

critically to print and other media texts" (Alberta Learning, 2000) and that I myself, did not have a background in analysis of the breadth of media texts such as film, television, multimedia and so on. I felt that I needed to learn how to respond critically to these same texts against the backdrop of the standards of each medium. To this end, during my sabbatical year studying for a Master of Arts in Children's Literature at the University of British Columbia, I participated in an independent study of film technique and created a rubric to assess many Canadian moving image texts. I admittedly do not have a full understanding of video games against the medium's standard but feel some comfort in applying a rubric to a website in terms of its utility for a specific educational purpose. Knowing that many young adults have a much better grounding in the use of computers and video game applications, I also trusted that they would have some knowledge about why the value the texts that they continue to value over time. If I could find out what they consider to be their favourite texts, this information may be of use to other educators and library professionals.

Aside from schooling, there is a real-life need for children and young adults to be more critical of the texts that they choose to read for themselves.

Today, an entire children's culture has developed that is (often for marketing reasons) very attentive to the needs and interests of the younger generation. Whether through targeted literature, music, drama, movies, TV, sports, fashion or the ever-expanding world of cyberspace (computers, video games, the Net, the Web and so on), the highly significant child/consumer is anything but ignored (Rae, 1997, pp. xiii-xiv).

Rae, a journalist and literary critic, has long been involved in reading the variety of texts with which children become engaged. Again, knowing what these youth are reading can help teachers and librarians assist children and young adults navigate through the turbulent waters of text.

As far as I have been able to find, not many adults have asked students about what it means for them to be literate and which texts that they continue to value. Allington and Guice (1997) expressed an idea similar to this belief of mine, "[W]e know less than we could about how different literature curriculum schemes effect the learners who might experience them" (pp.729-730). In this study, I set out to ask students about their transactions with text because I believe as Louise Rosenblatt did that "every reading act is an event, a transaction

involving a particular reader and a particular configuration of marks on a page, and occurring at a particular time in a particular context" (Rosenblatt, 1985). My research with Grade 12 students helped me to understand "their relationships with, and continuing awareness of, the text" (Rosenblatt, 1978). Now that I have reported on my findings from this research, I believe that other teachers and librarians can use my survey questions and interview questions as springboards for interacting with youth about their valued texts. From others' interactions with young adults about their favourite texts, educators and librarians can help build collections that will appeal to other young adult readers. Beyond this, teachers can bring student favourite texts into the English language arts classroom as fodder for critical analysis and response.

Schools, libraries and universities have traditionally valued and honoured texts that critics have named "literature" or "children's literature". Before embarking on this study, I believed that it was possible for students to experience deeply texts that may not belong to what schools, libraries and universities have called literature. After concluding my research, I feel this belief even more strongly. The seventy students in my inquiry were able to articulate what they called their own "small l literature"; the texts that they felt had enduring value for them. It seems to me that if they were to become more critical viewers of popular culture, they might be able to influence which texts could later become the enduring "large L Literature" for future readers.

"What does it mean to be literate? We have to draw our own maps, trace our own histories, acknowledge our own debts and consider ways not taken. Our literacy autobiographies reveal riches and gaps, but these narratives are not solitary journeys. We [are] always in dialogue with others…"(Meek, 1991) Even now, after completing this thesis, I am not quite sure what it means to be literate. I know that literacy is something much broader than being able to function in our society with enough knowledge of the 3Rs in order to get by in our day-to-day life. To my mind, a literate person is able to read texts that feed the soul as well as the intellect. Before beginning this research, I wondered about students' understanding of their own literacies. Now after spending time looking for patterns in the answers that they shared with me, I see clearly that the seventy young individuals were able to talk about their own literacies. These literacies were multiple and fluidly interchangeable in order to fit the text, the purpose and the end result for reading a particular text.

Did they speak of their dialogues in order to make meaning from texts? Yes, it turns out that the young adults that I surveyed and interviewed did recognize the importance of readings in relationship (Bruner, 1986) and how dialogue with the text (Rosenblatt, 1938, 1989) as well as other readers (Bruner, 1986) helped them to find value in reading and rereading a text. This uncovering is significant in that it suggests that students require more opportunities to engage with texts deeply. To my mind, there is a need for students to live deeply in a text and cover fewer texts superficially. Likewise, the students shared how they would like more opportunities to share their feelings about these texts with others in order for to determine an enduring value for a particular text's essential message.

Not only did they young adults of their currently valued texts, they were well able to share feelings about the value of a cherished childhood text. Is this significant? I think so, since understanding how one's life experience and vicarious experience with texts help to shape a reader's engagement with future texts [even if that text is one that is being revisited in another age and stage of one's life]. These students spoke of how knowing how to activate one's background knowledge about a text helped these readers make predictions about the meaning of text which is in turn an essential strategy for engaged reading.

During childhood and beyond, we, as human beings are all products of our engagements with all types of texts—conversations, participation in athletic events, our parents' gestures, the books that we read or are read to us, as well as the plethora of visual, aural and media messages. My decision to weave in the celebrity readers' stories from *Everybody's Favourites* by Arlene Perly Rae (1999) came from a realization that learning what texts our youth are reading and moreover value from various stages of their childhood is significant. What we experience as children, helps to build the basis for the readers who we will be as adults. For this reason, I feel strongly that it is important to find out what children and young adults read. Their past and present reading experiences and beliefs will affect them in their adult lives.

I wanted to learn from the expertise of the seventy young adults in my study about their own literacy stories. This expertise is so significant that now that I have learned from them, I feel it essential to share with other readers. This thesis is built on the expertise of seventy young adults of what it meant to be a young adult reader in 2002.

7.3 Limitations of the Study

As a qualitative study with a relatively homogeneous student population, [most of the students are of European descent and are native English speakers], it could be difficult to replicate this study and get similar results. For instance, a school district with a greater number of English Second Language [ESL] students may have findings that would be even broader than I received with my seventy students. Another limiting factor to this study is that although the school district is publicly funded, it is a Catholic school district. This means that few if any non-Christian students attend school in these research sites and this also limits the possibility for a broader range of texts.

Another limitation to this study is that there is a sense of time dependency. Popular culture texts are by nature fickle. What is popular today may well be passé tomorrow. Since many of the student responses were based on the popular culture texts that they themselves have experienced and subsequently valued, I suspect that if I were to replicate this study in five years time the popular culture texts mentioned may be those created in the intervening five years. However, some of the texts may have gathered more support for becoming part of the "large L Literature" canon if they are mentioned by another group of teens. Unwittingly, some of my respondents may have identified some of the literature for tomorrow. However, this does create a problem for comparing responses today to tomorrow's responses.

A final limitation to this study is that the young adults were asked these questions in one moment of their reading history. However, if I were to go back and ask these same individuals the same questions in a year's time, it is possible that these young adult readers would have selected other texts as some of their valued texts. Just as time moves on, so does the reader. These individuals will have matured in other directions and their tastes may change over time.

7.4 Recommendations

Now that I have shared my conclusions about what young adults read and the significance of these findings, I feel that I am able to make recommendations for future research into the study of what young adults read. It would be helpful for educators and educational researchers to look into what types of texts are being used for instruction and if there is a place for students to introduce their favourite texts no matter the medium for critical response into the English language arts classroom. There is also a place for

researchers to observe, compare and contrast currently popular texts on their enduring narrative values rather than their simple entertainment values—in other words to spend time looking deeply at current cartoons, Disney films, music videos or other texts from popular culture that may have a limited shelf-life. Research into observing how students help to develop and apply criteria to the enduring values of popular texts is another area that is worthy of educational study.

Together with this research, I would advocate that all education students planning a career as primary or middle-school teachers be required to take at least one course in children's literature so that when their students request support in selecting texts for voluntary reading [either at the school library, classroom library, or for purchase from book orders], these teachers may have a sense of what types of texts are worthy of an intensive read. This would only be the starting point. I also think that all secondary content area education students could benefit from a narrative reading and writing course in order to model the importance of reading print fiction in their own lives.

In terms of library research, it would be helpful to collect data about the types of text materials and media that encourage young adult patronage in the library, be it public or school library. Librarians can also collect longitudinal data on current young adult patrons' memories of their favourite childhood text selections to see if there is a correlation between young adult patrons' favourite childhood texts and continued library patronage for leisure reading into the adolescent years. In this sense, I defer to Mark Dresssman who wrote of how libraries are places where young adults can enact their true reading identities (1997). It would also be helpful for professional librarians to collect data about privately owned and operated text lending repositories such as video stores to determine the amount of young adult patronage. I suggest this question because I wonder if more young adult "readers" as defined by my study visit the video store more often than the public library in order to select their leisure reading materials. This comparison may result in the collection of texts that would create a point of entry for more young adult patrons.

In terms of school libraries, it would also be worthwhile surveying how many secondary schools provide students with regularly scheduled library visits in order to allow them to select their own leisure reading materials. [I make this statement from informal conversations with some of my colleagues who are secondary school teachers. In some of the

Junior High and High schools in my district, secondary students are not given a scheduled time to spend in the library as part of their regular English language arts course load. It seems sensible to me that if we want students to be leisure readers at all grade levels and then later as adults, we need to give them opportunities to find books in their school libraries.] Again, comparisons between video store visits and school library visits would be a worthwhile study.

If professional librarians and educators want students to become fully literate individuals as described earlier by Eisner (In Moje, 2002) and Meek (1992), I believe that we have to start paying closer attention to providing opportunities and collections that allow for children and young adults to respond personally and later critically to the texts that these youth would select for themselves. There is a place for libraries and classrooms to connect (Asselin, 2001, 2000) so that students may become literate by reading and responding critically to popular culture.

7.4.1 *Student recommendations*

Alongside my recommendations for further research, I would like to close the chapter on this stage of my research with some recommendations to parents, teachers and librarians given to me by some of my interviewees about how to inculcate reading in our youth. As Denny suggested to parents, "Find what they want, what they want to read what appeals to them." Anita spoke of the responsibility of parents' sharing texts with their children.

> The television is not a babysitter. And it's really good if you try to take time and get involved. Not just get involved like, "Sit down here while I sit in the same room and do something else." If they make the story believable and do activities relating to them.

For Anita, sharing texts meant actively engaging with the text and the child at the same time. This is a strong admonition for the busy parents of today.

Self-selection and interest in a text is the greatest motivator for reading. Denny expressed a belief in the power of regular library visits in encouraging leisure reading when he recommended to teachers and librarians to "Have just one class for library where the kids pick books and they read them." However, Tanya wanted to make clear the need for teachers to pay attention to the children as readers in a social context, a difference from the earlier

implication that reading is encouraged when one reader is able to withdraw one book from the library.

> I think that teachers should understand that books are great but I think a lot of kids can hide behind books. If they can't communicate to another person, they're probably not going to make it in the world. So I think by teachers stressing that books are important, social talking about the book, going further is important.

Most of the interviewees believed that librarians too, have an important role in assisting young people in their reading journey. An echo to my earlier comment about building a broader collection came from Anita when she said. "Just take suggestions. Get a more broad range of material not just *Fear Street* type novels or classic type literature, too."

I would like to finish this discussion with the following advice to librarians shared by Tanya, a young woman, who did not consider herself to ever have been a reader.

> I think knowing what a person's looking for would make you a good librarian. Suggesting what's good for them, not what you think [is good] would make a good librarian. Of course you need to know what the books are.

Like Tanya, I agree that it is important for teachers and librarians to know the children and young adults with whom they interact as readers—not just the readers of print but of film, television, audio recording, video, video game, multimedia and any other important texts which the patrons value reading.

"Think left and think right and think low and think high. Oh, the THINKS you can think up if only you try" (Seuss, 1975). Throughout my thesis research I have had to think low and think high about my beliefs about what it means to be a young adult reader. I have had to think hard about the texts that my respondents' valued and why they valued them. I now leave it up to my readers now to consider attending to young adult readers, "Oh, the THINKS you can think up if only you try."

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Appendix 1

Data Collection Instrument, Part 1.

Written survey: What do young adults read?

Code number: _____   Name: _____   Gender: _____

Class: _____   School:_____

Date:_____

Favourite Childhood and Young Adult Texts

This survey is being used to identify graduating students' favourite texts for children and young adults. Your input will help the researcher for the Calgary Catholic School District make recommendations to teachers and parents about what texts have lasting meaning in students' lives. You have been selected to complete this survey because soon you will be leaving high school and joining the adult community. Later, you may be asked to participate in an interview with the researcher so that you can tell her more about your general feelings about texts in your adult life.

This is your opportunity to share your interests and values with a broader audience that will not benefit monetarily from your responses. For the purposes of this survey, texts are messages that may be: **printed** such as picture books, novels, comic books, magazines, informational books, newspapers; **viewed** such as television programs, videos, movies (including animated films); **listened to** such as family stories, taped stories, music; **multimedia texts** such as you might access via the computer or interactive video games.

Thank-you for your contributions to concerned adults' understanding of the texts that has lasting value for youth.

Written survey: What do young adults read?

Please answer the survey with "I" and "My" statements.

1. When I graduate from high school, I plan to _____

_____

(Please be specific. Identify a job, apprenticeship program, or area of study in further education. Please specify where to pursue these goals.)

For the following questions, please consider current likes and practices.

2. My favourite text is _____ .

   It is a _____ (family story, book, video, movie, television show, song, game, multimedia text, _____.) I first came across this text when

   I _____ (and

   with)_____

   I would like to go back to this text in the following situation

   _____ .

3. I go to the movies (weekly, monthly, bi-monthly, a few times per year, yearly.) I *generally* watch movies with my (mom, dad, older sibling/s, grandparent, other family member, caregiver, friend, by myself.) My favourite movie is

   _____because_____

   _____ .

   I might like to watch this movie again in the following

   situation_____

   _____ .

4. I watch videos (daily, many times in a week, weekly, more than once a month, monthly, a few times a year, a few times per year, yearly.) I *generally* watch videos with my (mom, dad, older sibling/s, grandparent, other family member, caregiver, friend-s) or by myself. My favourite video

   is_____because_____ .

I might like to watch this video again in the following situation

_____

_____.

5. In one week, I watch television (0-10 hours, 10-20 hours, 20-30 hours, 30-40 hours, 40-50 hours, more than 50 hours, don't know.) I *generally* watch TV with my (mom, dad, older sibling/s, grandparent, other family member, caregiver, friend-s) or by myself. My favourite television show is _____

because_____

_____.

I might like to watch this program again in the following

situation_____

_____.

6. I read something of my own choice (daily, many times in a week, weekly, more than once a month, monthly, a few times a year, yearly, never.) My favourite book or reading material is _____

because _____.

I might like to reread this print material in the following

situation_____

_____.

Since I read something of my own choice (a few times a year, yearly, or never) I would like to explain why this is

so_____

_____.

Please think back to your early childhood (before beginning school) to answer the following prompts.

7. As a preschooler, my favourite text was _____.

It was _____(family story, book, video, movie, television show, song, game, other.) I first came across this text when _____ shared it with me. I still like this text/I dislike this text because _____

_____.

A situation where I might like to go back to this text is _____

_____.

8. As a preschooler, I went to the movies (weekly, monthly, bi-monthly, a few times per year, yearly). I *generally* watched these movies with my (mom, dad, siblings, grandparent-s, other family member, caregiver, friend, by myself). My favourite children's movie was/ is _____

_____ because

_____.

A situation where I might like to watch this movie again is _____

_____.

9. As a preschooler, my family watched children's videos (daily, many times in a week, weekly, more than once a month, monthly, a few times a year, so seldom that I cannot remember, don't know.) I *generally* watched these videos with my (mom, dad, older sibling/s, grandparent, other family member, caregiver, friend-s) or by myself. My favourite children's movie was/is _____ because_____.

A situation where I might like to watch this video again is

_____.

10. As a preschooler, in one week I watched television (0-10 hours, 10-20 hours, 20-30 hours, 30-40 hours, 40-50 hours, more than 50 hours, don't know.) I *generally* watched these programs with my (mom, dad, older sibling/s, grandparent, other family member, caregiver, friend-s) or by myself. My favourite children's television program was/is _____ because _____

_____.

A situation where I might like to watch this program again is _____

_____.

11. As a preschooler my (mom, dad, grandparent, caregiver, older sibling/s read to me)
(daily, many times in a week, weekly, more than once a month, monthly, a few times
a year, yearly, don't know.) My favourite children's book
was/is_____ because _____

_____.

A situation where I might like to reread this book is _____

_____

Appendix 2

Data Collection Instrument, Part 2.

Interview protocol: What do young adults read?

Hello _____, my name is Donna Steffes and I am a researcher interested in how experiences with texts from early childhood through to young adulthood affect what a person chooses to "read" in adulthood. I have chosen to interview you based on your earlier responses to the survey that you completed for me in _____. This interview is being recorded so that later I can accurately capture what you say. I would like to thank you again for agreeing to participate in this research.

Before we begin, I would like to remind of you of some ground rules as well as some of the definitions that I would like to use in this interview. First of all, please remember that if you ever feel that you do not wish to answer a question or continue the interview, we can stop at any time. There will be no penalty for deciding not to respond. I am here to learn from you and in this instance, you are the teacher and I am the student. You choose how to respond and in what depth.

Secondly, I want to clarify some terms that I plan to use in this interview. The first word that I would like to use is "text". For our purposes, the word text can be something listened to like a family story, spoken like a prepared speech, printed like a novel or newspaper article, viewed like a movie or television program, or something that mixes formats like hypertext or pop-up music videos that also include some print. The second definition that needs clarifying is the word "read." Just like the word text, the word read usually is associated with print documents. When I use the word read, I am not limiting reading to eyes and brains working together to make meaning from writing. For our purposes, the word read means when our brains receive a message and make meaning from the message, no matter how the message is received. So, you can "read" a movie, "read" a set of instructions spoken by your teacher, "read" a photograph. Please keep these terms in mind as we continue our discussion.

Is everything OK so far? Let's begin.

1. Tell me about your favourite text of all time explaining why it is your favourite. How did you come to know this text? Who, if anyone, introduced it to you? What are his/her feelings about the text? Has _____'s liking for this text affected your own feelings about it? Why or why not?

2. Tell me about your favourite text from before starting school explaining why it is your favourite. How did you come to know this text? Who, if anyone, introduced it to you? What are his/her feelings about the text? Has _____'s liking for this text affected your own feelings about it? Why or why not? Please tell me about your favourite text in the years that you were: 6-11; 12-16 and explain why it is your favourite. How did you come to know this text? Who, if anyone, introduced it to you? What are his/her feelings about the text? Has _____'s liking for this text affected your own feelings about it? Why or why not?

3. Tell me about your favourite way to get information. Put yourself in the future; let's say in 10 years. Do you think that you will continue to get your information in this way? Please explain.

4. Tell me about your career goals. How will you learn what you need to do your new job?

5. Do you have a text that you would consider going back to? If so, please tell me about it: why you value "reading" it again and when you might do so.

6. Please give me your list of characteristics of what makes a text worth a second, third, fourth, etc. read. What makes such a text different from a text that you only want to read once?

7. Do you consider yourself a reader? Please explain your answer. If **no**, was there ever a time that you considered yourself to be a reader? Can you tell me about what happened to change your enjoyment of reading? If **yes**, please tell me about the text

that first convinced you that you were a reader as well as any other important texts that you have "read" in your life.

Finally, I would like to ask you to define some terms that people like to use when they talk about reading. Please give me your idea of what the words mean and not what you think might be a dictionary definition.

8. read
9. literature
10. Please name some literature titles and why you believe them to be so.
11. Please define children's literature.
12. Please name some children's literature titles and why you believe them to be so.
13. Please define literacy.
14. literate
15. text

16. Thank you _____. If there was one piece of advice that you would like to share with parents to help make their children become readers what would it be? How about for teachers or librarians?