



The Achievement Gap Initiative at Harvard University *Toward Excellence with Equity*

The “Love-to-Read” Survey

First Round Findings

May 5, 2009

The “Love-to-Read” survey is a project of the Achievement Gap Initiative at Harvard University (AGI). It was inspired by a participant in the AGI Parent Leadership Network, seeking reading suggestions for his children. Using survey responses, the AGI will compile booklists from which teachers, parents, and children can select books that respondents report helped inspire their passion for reading. A particular emphasis is to identify works that help adolescents better understand issues of racial, gender, and social class identity.

This report summarizes findings from the initial version of the survey. Students at Harvard completed the survey online from October through December, 2008. The survey opened with a brief series of questions on race/ethnicity, gender, and educational background. Next, respondents identified one to four books that helped cultivate their love of reading. They explained what it was about each book that made it so influential. Some items on the survey asked respondents to name books that played important roles in helping them understand issues of racial, gender, or social class identity. The final item invited respondents to offer suggestions for ways that parents can help their children learn to love reading.

Fifty-three students responded to the initial survey. Thirty-four were Black or African-American, 9 Asian, 5 White, and 5 self-identified with other groups. There were 37 females and 16 males. Thirty-five were Harvard University undergraduate students. Most others came from Harvard graduate schools and a few from other universities. Thirty-five had parents or grandparents born outside the U.S.

Following the successful inauguration of the survey, the AGI will soon launch the second generation, inviting a much broader range of people to respond. The latter will include middle and high school students and college students outside of Harvard.

Findings

Respondents identified more than 140 books. Most named individual books, but some also listed whole book series. The Harry Potter series was by far the most popular. The most popular reasons for listing a book title were that the story was particularly enjoyable, that the book dealt effectively with issues of racial identity, that the student got “hooked” on the book series, or that the book discussed life purpose and other meaningful issues.

Some patterns emerged concerning reasons respondents listed particular books that they read at particular ages. A cluster of reasons that we label “Life Meaning” was the most popular for books read at the age of 9 or older. Respondents who listed books they read while younger than sixteen were more likely to cite series than those who listed books they read while sixteen or older . A significant number of respondents who listed books they read at the age of 5 or older reported that the reason included that the books helped them understand issues of identity. A few respondents reported that particular books were important mainly because it felt good to read them with their parents. Exhibits 1A through 1E at the back of the report show the patterns.

There were few gender disparities, but females were more likely than males to report enjoyment and slightly more likely to list identity as their reasons for listing a book. (See Exhibit 2A at the back of the report). Compared to other racial and ethnic groups, black respondents were more likely to identify books that deal with identity issues, had life meaning, or were particularly enjoyable. (See Exhibit 2B at the back of the report.)

The survey invited respondents to advise parents on ways of helping their children develop a love of reading. Respondents suggested that parents should supply a variety of reading materials, both enjoyable and educational. They emphasized that children are more likely to develop a habit of reading if parents do not discourage them from reading books for fun—books that may seem to lack education value. Respondents also suggested that parents should read to their children frequently. The fact that respondents read a book with their parents was sometimes the sole reason a title was memorable.

A few conclusions stand out in these initial results from the “Love-to-Read” survey. First, book series can help hook children on reading, as the reader looks forward to learning what happens next. Second, books can help children understand issues of identity and build their confidence in being whatever race, ethnicity, gender, or social class background they happen to be. Third, young people learn to feel a sense of accomplishment when they read and master challenging texts, and they remember some books because they generated such feelings. These findings highlight the developmentally positive impacts that books can have even beyond the development of basic reading fluency and comprehension skills.

Next Steps

The next generation of the “Love-to-Read” survey will build upon the initial version. It will use responses from the initial version to formulate forced-choice options for reasons books were special. New questions will ask about other reading materials such as magazines, newspapers, and on-line materials. Students of all age levels will be invited to respond. The AGI will periodically disseminate reports through its website and other outlets.

See the Appendix to this report for the initial *Love-to-Read Booklist*.

What Made Books Special

Students identified 17 types of reasons that books were special to them. The following categories collapse the list of 17 reasons under six headings for use as labels on Exhibits 1 and 2.

Identity:	The book was about race, gender or peer relationships;
Life Meaning:	The book was about inspiration, history, integrity, etc.;
Enjoyment:	The book was about love, was beautifully written, was intense, or generally engaging;
It was a Series:	The student mentioned that the book was one of a series;
Read with Parent:	The book was special because the student read it with a parent;
Fostered Self-Confidence:	The book gave the reader a sense of accomplishment after completing a challenging text.

Exhibit 1A
Percentages who listed each respective reason,
if respondents read the book at age 4 years or younger.
n=10 reasons

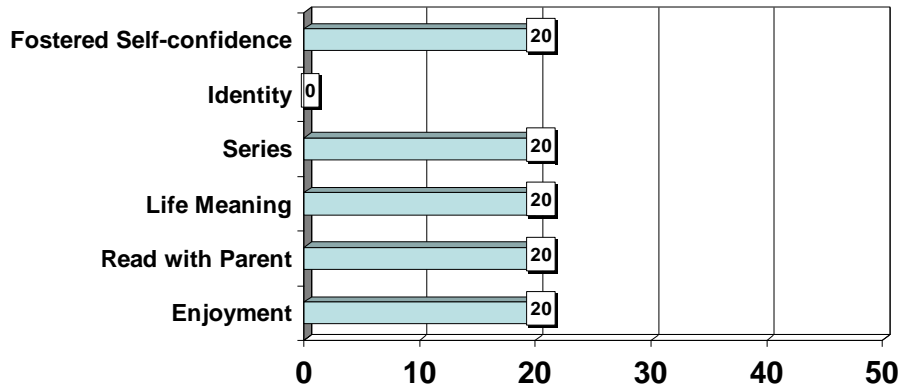


Exhibit 1B
Percentages who listed each respective reason,
If respondents read the book from ages 5 to 8.
n=50 reasons

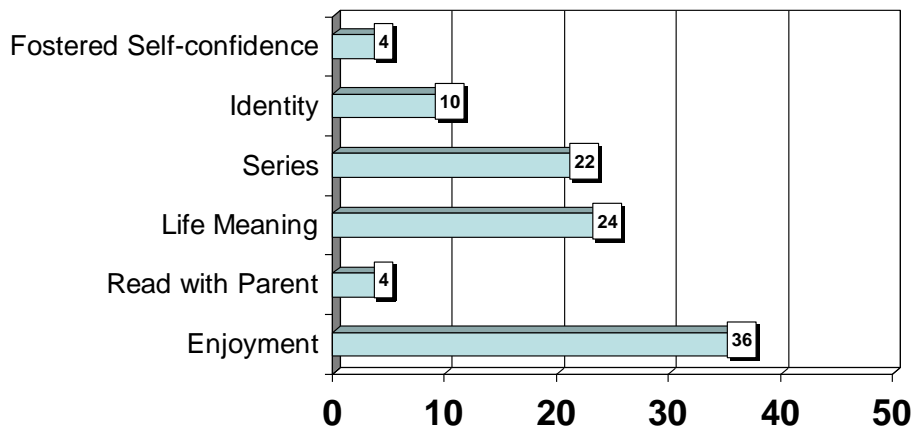


Exhibit 1C
Percentages who listed each respective reason,
if respondents read the book from ages 9 to 12.
n=68 reasons

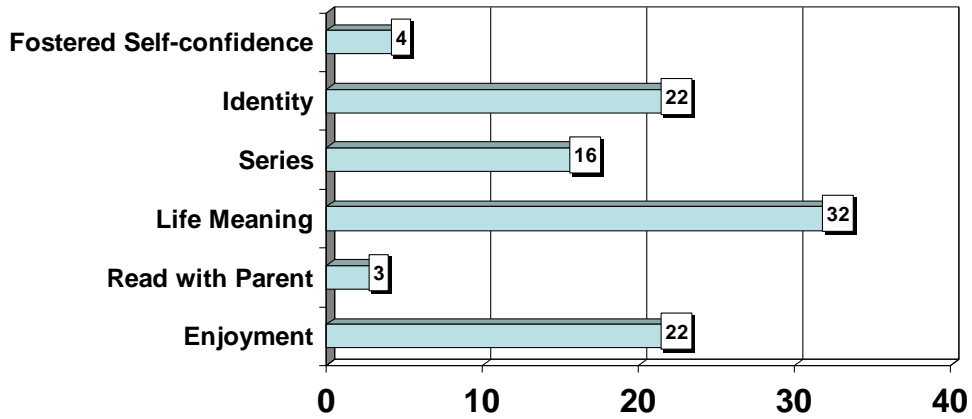


Exhibit 1D
Percentages who listed each respective reason,
if respondents read the book from ages 13 to
15.
n=47 reasons

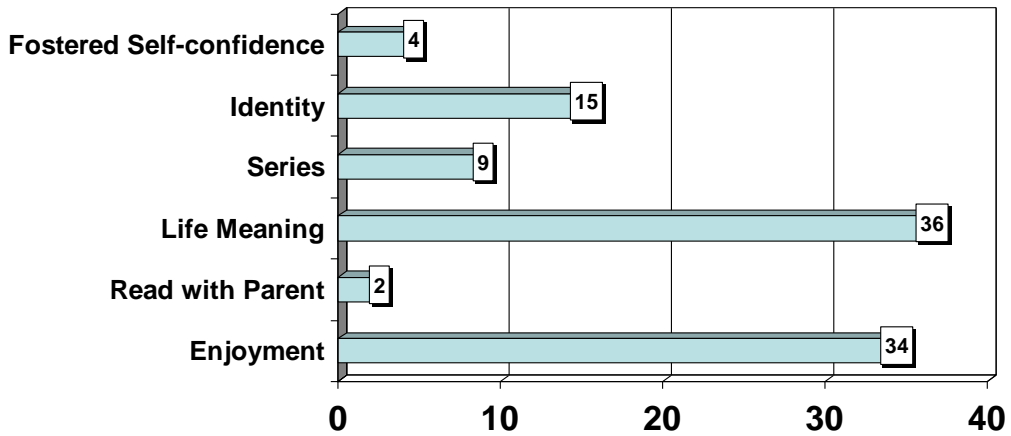


Exhibit 1E
Percentages who listed each respective reason,
if respondents read the book from age 16 or
older.
n=58 reasons

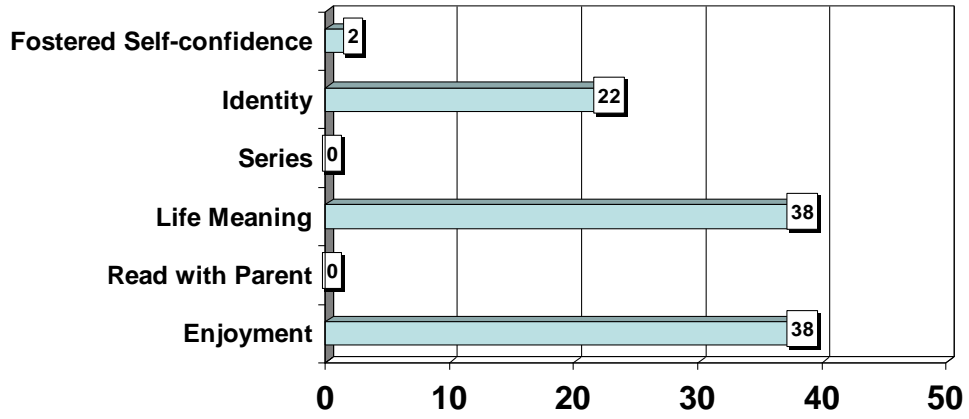


Exhibit 2A

Percentages of Students, by Gender, who Mentioned Each Type of Reason that a Particular Book Was a "Love-to-Read" Book

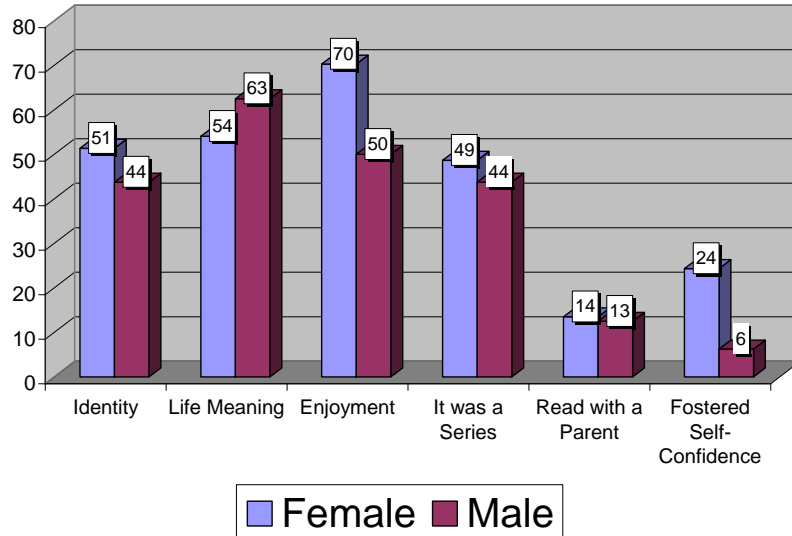
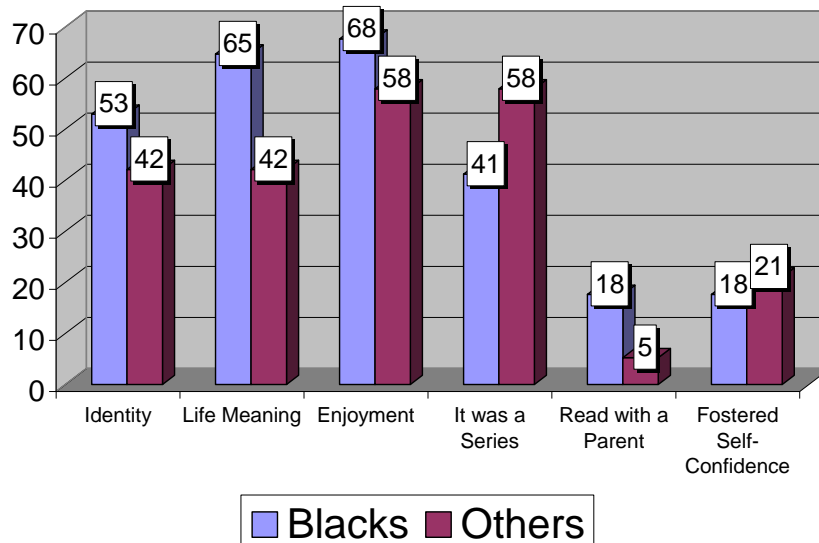


Exhibit 2B

Percentages of Students (Blacks and All Others) who Mentioned Each Type of Reason a Particular Book Was a "Love-to-Read" Book



APPENDIX

The Initial *Love-to-Read Booklist*

Book List, with Authors, by Age Read, and Reasons for Listing

Book Title	Author		
Read by respondents at age 4 or younger			
<table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 55%; vertical-align: top;"> <p>I. Enjoyment</p> <p>1. Amazing Grace</p> <p>2. Hardy Boys (series)</p> <p>II. Read with a parent</p> <p>1. Are You My Mother</p> <p>2. Good Night Moon</p> <p>III. Life Meaning</p> <p>1. No Jumping on the Bed</p> <p>2. The Bible</p> <p>IV. Book was a part of a series</p> <p>1. Hardy Boys (series)</p> <p>2. The Cat in the Hat</p> <p>V. Book fostered self-confidence</p> <p>1. Green Eggs and Ham</p> <p>2. The Cat in the Hat</p> </td> <td style="width: 45%; vertical-align: top;"> <p>Mary Hoffman</p> <p>Various authors</p> <p>P.D. Eastman</p> <p>Margaret Wise Brown</p> <p>Tedd Arnold</p> <p>Various authors</p> <p>Various authors</p> <p>Dr. Seuss</p> <p>Dr. Seuss</p> <p>Dr. Seuss</p> </td> </tr> </table>		<p>I. Enjoyment</p> <p>1. Amazing Grace</p> <p>2. Hardy Boys (series)</p> <p>II. Read with a parent</p> <p>1. Are You My Mother</p> <p>2. Good Night Moon</p> <p>III. Life Meaning</p> <p>1. No Jumping on the Bed</p> <p>2. The Bible</p> <p>IV. Book was a part of a series</p> <p>1. Hardy Boys (series)</p> <p>2. The Cat in the Hat</p> <p>V. Book fostered self-confidence</p> <p>1. Green Eggs and Ham</p> <p>2. The Cat in the Hat</p>	<p>Mary Hoffman</p> <p>Various authors</p> <p>P.D. Eastman</p> <p>Margaret Wise Brown</p> <p>Tedd Arnold</p> <p>Various authors</p> <p>Various authors</p> <p>Dr. Seuss</p> <p>Dr. Seuss</p> <p>Dr. Seuss</p>
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5. Hardy Boys	Various authors
6. Mr. Popper's Penguins	Richard & Florence Atwater
7. Nancy Drew Series	Carolyn Keene
8. Stellaluna	Jannell Cannon
9. Superfudge	Judy Bloom
10. The BFG (Big Friendly Giant)	Roald Dahl
11. The Black Snowman	Phil Mendez
12. The Giving Tree	Shel Silverstein
13. The Little Princess	Frances Hodgson Burnett
14. The Napping House	Audrey Wood & Don Wood
15. The Sideways Stories from Wayside School	Louis Sachar
16. The Underground Railroad	Raymond Bial
17. Trixie Belden series	Julie Campbell
18. Where the Red Fern Grows	Wilson Rawls
II. Read with a parent	
1. All-of-a-Kind Family	Sydney Taylor
2. One fish two fish red fish blue fish	Dr. Seuss
III. Life Meaning	
1. Baby Sitters Club Series	Ann M. Martin
2. Christmas in the Big House, Christmas in the Quarters	Pat McKissack & Fredrick McKissack
3. Daniel's Story	Carol Matas
4. One Hundred Why's (Chinese book)	Faye Wong
5. Phantom Tollbooth	Norton Juster
6. Ramona the Pest	Beverley Cleary
7. Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry	Mildred Taylor
8. Superfudge	Judy Bloom
9. Sweet Valley twins series	Francine Pascal
10. The Bible	Various authors

11. The Skin I'm In	Sharon Flake
12. The Underground Railroad	Raymond Bial
IV. Book was a part of a series	
1. All-of-a-Kind Family	Sydney Taylor
2. Baby Sitters Club Series	Ann M. Martin
3. Ballet Shoes, Dancing Shoes, Theater Shoes (series)	Noel Streatfeild
4. Hardy Boys	Various authors
5. Henry & Mudge series	Cynthia Rylant
6. Little House in the Big Woods	Laura Ingals Wilder
7. Nancy Drew Series	Carolyn Keene
8. Redwall (series)	Brian Jacques
9. Superfudge	Judy Blume
10. Sweet Valley twins series	Francine Pascal
11. The BFG (Big Friendly Giant)	Roald Dahl
V. Identity	
1. Christmas in the Big House, Christmas in the Quarters	Pat McKissack & Fredrick McKissack
2. Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry	Mildred Taylor
3. Sweet Valley twins series	Francine Pascal
4. The Skin I'm In	Sharon Flake
5. The Underground Railroad	Raymond Bial
VI. Book fostered self-confidence	
1. See Spot Run	William S. Gray
2. Sweet Valley twins series	Francine Pascal
Read by respondents from the ages of 9 to 12	
I. Enjoyment	
1. Animorphs (the series)	K. A. Applegate
2. Anne of Green Gables	LM Montgomery
3. Bud Not Buddy	Christopher Paul Curtis

4. Ella Enchanted
5. Gone with the Wind
6. Goosebumps Series
7. Harry Potter Series
8. I Have Lived a Thousand Years
9. Lord of the Flies
10. Maus II
11. Mossflower
12. Princess Diaries
13. Roots
14. The Outsiders
15. Cat's Cradle

II. Read with a parent

1. Great Expectations
2. Harry Potter Series

III. Life Meaning

1. American Girl series
2. Anne of Green Gables
3. Gifted Hands
4. Harry Potter Series
5. I Have Lived a Thousand Years
6. I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings
7. Maus II
8. My Side of the Mountain
9. Princess Diaries
10. Ramona Quimbey
11. Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry
12. Roots

- Gail Carson Levine
Margaret Mitchell
R. L. Stine)
JK Rowling
Livia Bitton-Jackson
William Golding
Art Spigelman
Brian Jacques
Meg Cabot
Alex Haley
S.E. Hinton
Kurt Vonnegut

- Charles Dickens
JK Rowling

- Various authors
LM Montgomery
Ben Carson
JK Rowling
Livia Bitton-Jackson
Maya Angelou
Art Spigelman
Jean Craighead George
Meg Cabot
Beverly Cleary
Mildred Taylor
Alex Haley

13. Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants

14. Slam

15. Sweet Valley High

16. The Care & Keeping of You - The Body Book for Girls

17. The Giver

18. The Outsiders

19. The Secret Garden

20. The View from Saturday

21. The Witch of Blackbird Pond

22. To Kill a Mockingbird

IV. Book was a part of a series

1. Agony of Alice

2. Animorphs (the series)

3. Anne of Green Gables

4. Babysitters Club

5. Goosebumps Series

6. Harry Potter Series

7. Matilda

8. Mossflower

9. My Side of the Mountain

10. Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants

11. Sweet Valley High

V. Identity

1. Agony of Alice

2. American Girl series

3. Babysitters Club

4. Gifted Hands

5. I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

Ann Brashares

Walter Dean Myers

Francine Pascal

Valorie Schaefer

Lois Lowry

S.E. Hinton

Frances Hodgson Burnett

E.L. Konigsburg

Elizabeth George Speare

Harper Lee

Phyllis Reynolds Naylor

K. A. Applegate

LM Montgomery

Ann Martin

R. L. Stine)

JK Rowling

Roald Dahl

Brian Jacques

Jean Craighead George

Ann Brashares

Francine Pascal

Phyllis Reynolds Naylor

Various authors

Ann Martin

Ben Carson

Maya Angelou

6. Princess Diaries	Meg Cabot
7. Ramona Quimbey	Beverly Cleary
8. Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry	Mildred Taylor
9. Roots	Alex Haley
10. Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants	Ann Brashares
11. Slam	Walter Dean Myers
12. The Care & Keeping of You - The Body Book for Girls	Valorie Schaefer
13. The Outsiders	S.E. Hinton
14. The Secret Garden	Frances Hodgson Burnett
15. To Kill a Mockingbird	Harper Lee
VI. Book fostered self-confidence	
1. Anne of Green Gables	LM Montgomery
2. Rats of Nihm	Robert C. O'Brien
3. Roots	Alex Haley
Read by respondents from the ages of 13 to 15	
. I. Enjoyment	
1. A Walk to Remember	Nicholas Sparks
2. Books of Great Alta	Jane Yolen
3. Ender's Game	Orson Scott Card
4. Harry Potter series	JK Rowling
5. Hawksong	Amelia Atwater-Rhodes
6. Invisible Man	Ralph Ellison
7. Lord of the Rings series	JRR Tolkien
8. One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest	Ken Kesey
9. Prey	Michael Crichton
10. Pride and Prejudice	Jane Austen
11. Siddhartha	Herman Hess
12. Song of Solomon	Toni Morrison

13. The Great Gatsby	F Scott Fitzgerald
14. The Prince	Jerry Pournelle & S.M. Stirling
15. Their Eyes Were Watching God	Zora Neale Hurston
16. Truth about Forever	Sarah Dessen
II. Read with a parent	
1. Prey	Michael Crichton
III. Life Meaning	
1. A Walk to Remember	Nicholas Sparks
2. Alchemist	Paulo Coelho
3. Fahrenheit 451	Ray Bradbury
4. Grapes of Wrath	John Steinbeck
5. Harry Potter series	JK Rowling
6. Hawksong	Amelia Atwater-Rhodes
7. Left Behind	Tim LaHaye & Jerry B. Jenkins
8. Pushkin and the Queen of Spades	Alice Randall
9. Siddhartha	Herman Hess
10. Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants	Ann Brashares
11. Song of Solomon	Toni Morrison
12. The Good Earth	Chaim Potok
13. The House on Mango Street	Sandra Cisneros
14. The Joy Luck Club	Amy Tan
15. Their Eyes Were Watching God	Zora Neale Hurston
16. Truth about Forever	Sarah Dessen
17. V for Vendetta	V for Vendetta
IV. Book was a part of a series	
1. Books of Great Alta	Jane Yolen
2. Harry Potter series	JK Rowling
3. Lord of the Rings series	JRR Tolkien

4. Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants	Ann Brashares
V. Identity	
1. Books of Great Alta	Jane Yolen
2. Invisible Man	Ralph Ellison
3. Pushkin and the Queen of Spades	Alice Randall
4. Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants	Ann Brashares
5. The House on Mango Street	Sandra Cisneros
6. The Joy Luck Club	Amy Tan
7. Their Eyes Were Watching God	Zora Neale Hurston
VI. Book fostered self-confidence	
1. Their Eyes Were Watching God	Zora Neale Hurston
2. Truth about Forever	Sarah Dessen
Read by respondents at the age of 16 and older	
I. Enjoyment	
1. Atonement	Ian McEwan
2. Being Plumville	Savannah Frierson
3. Espejos	Eduardo Galeano
4. Everything is Illuminated	Jonathan Safran Foer
5. Freakanomics	Steven Levitt & Stephen J. Dubner
6. Hamlet	William Shakespeare
7. Malcolm X	Alex Haley
8. Night	Elie Wiesel
9. Racism 101	Nikki Giovanni
10. The Alchemist	Paulo Coelho
11. The Audacity of Hope	Barack Obama
12. The Count of Monte Cristo	Alexandre Dumas, père
13. The Da Vinci Code	Dan Brown
14. The Grapes of Wrath	John Steinbeck

15. The Importance of Being Earnest

16. The Kite Runner

17. The Life of Pi

18. The Namesake

19. The Souls of Black Folk

20. The Sun Also Rises

21. The Tipping Point

22. Twilight Series

II. Life Meaning

1. Being Plumville

2. Blindness

3. Blink

4. Drink Cultura

5. Hallelujah America!

6. Invisible Man

7. Lesson Before Dying

8. Malcolm X

9. Manchild in the Promised Land

10. Night

11. Tess of the D'Urbervilles

12. The 5 People you Meet in Heaven

13. The Alchemist

14. The Chosen

15. The Fountainhead

16. The Grapes of Wrath

17. The Joy Luck Club

18. The Kite Runner

19. The Life of Pi

Oscar Wilde

Khaled Hosseini

Yann Martel

Jhumpa Lahiri

WEB DuBois

Ernest Hemingway

Malcolm Gladwell

Stephanie Meyer

Savannah Frierson

Jose Saramago

Malcom Gladwell

Jose Antonio Burciaga

Carole Coleman

Ralph Ellison

Ernest J. Gaines

Alex Haley

Claude Brown

Elie Wiesel

Thomas Hardy

Mitch Albom

Paulo Coelho

Chaim Potok

Ayn Rand

John Steinbeck

Amy Tan

Khaled Hosseini

Yann Martel

20. The Souls of Black Folk	WEB DuBois
21. Theophilus North	Thorton Wilder
22. Things Fall Apart	Chinua Achebe
III. Identity	
1. Being Plumville	Savannah Frierson
2. Drink Cultura	Jose Antonio Burciaga
3. Espejos	Eduardo Galeano
4. Invisible Man	Ralph Ellison
5. Lesson Before Dying	Ernest J. Gaines
6. Manchild in the Promised Land	Claude Brown
7. Racism 101	Nikki Giovanni
8. The Chosen	Chaim Potok
9. The Color Complex	Kathy Russell
10. The Joy Luck Club	Amy Tan
11. The Souls of Black Folk	WEB DuBois
12. Things Fall Apart	Chinua Achebe
13. Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?	Beverly Tatum
IV. Book fostered self-confidence	
1. The Souls of Black Folk	WEB DuBois