

Spring 2013

Reviving Student Interest in Classic Literature: A Field-Experimental Study of New Edition and Shelf Display as Promoting Strategies

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31979/etd.hru2-cgv4>
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REVIVING STUDENT INTEREST IN CLASSIC LITERATURE: A FIELD-
EXPERIMENTAL STUDY OF NEW EDITION AND SHELF DISPLAY AS
PROMOTING STRATEGIES

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Library and Information Science

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Library and Information Science

by

Margaret E. Huff

May 2013

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The Designated Thesis Committee Approved the Thesis Titled

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APPROVED FOR THE SCHOOL OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE

SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY

May 2013

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ABSTRACT

REVIVING STUDENT INTEREST IN CLASSIC LITERATURE: A FIELD- EXPERIMENTAL STUDY OF NEW EDITION AND SHELF DISPLAY AS PROMOTING STRATEGIES

by Margaret E. Huff

Librarians often keep classic books in school libraries because the books have educational merits, yet they are rarely checked out for recreational reading. Current research on low circulation of classic literature in school libraries is limited to anecdotal evidence from school and young adult librarians suggesting that lack of promotion and especially the inferior condition of old editions contribute to low circulation. This research fills the gap by examining the effect of new editions and display on circulation in a field experimental study at a middle school library in 2011.

Set up as 2 X 2 factorial design, the field experiment had four experimental groups: old edition shelved, old edition displayed, new edition shelved, and new edition displayed. Twenty books -- ten new editions, ten old editions, and all of different titles -- were used for the study, with half in each category randomly chosen for displaying on bookstands at the end of a shelf. Circulation statistics were collected for these books over a period of three months. Although statistical analysis revealed no significant impact, further examination of the experimental data seemed to suggest that new edition and display in combination may increase circulation of classic titles and that books with quality cover art and informative summaries are most likely to circulate.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people helped through the stages of this thesis. I would first like to thank Dr. Geoffrey Liu for guiding me throughout the entire process, from brainstorming a topic to reviewing the final draft. I want to thank Dr. Debra Hansen for serving on my committee and for her suggestions that have added clarity and scope to my writing.

I would like to thank another committee member, Mrs. Julie Harder of Heights Middle School, for her flexibility and assistance with the experiment. Thanks are also due to Dr. David Miller and the Pattonville School District for supporting the experiment.

I would like to thank my great teacher, Mella Baxter, who edited this thesis despite no longer being obligated to read my homework; Kelly, who cheered me on; and my parents, who are great listeners and encouragers.

My Aunt Angie, my friend Pat Koch Lee and my grandmothers recommended their favorite classic novels years ago, and I belatedly express my gratitude here.

Thanks to Yacy, Indy, Tigger, Eight, Baby, Ally, Sonny, Louise, Buppy, Cocoa and Happy, I wrote and revised this thesis with warm legs and a warmer heart.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated with love to my cousin, Ms. Madeline Chieffo. By sharing her cherished books with me, she has shaped my reading interests and, consequently, my character.

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Introduction

The ideal middle school library media center is geared toward the modern student. It features bright posters, good lighting, computer workstations, laptops, tablets, subscriptions to online databases, and helpful staff. Its shelves are lined with reference materials, magazines, graphic novels, Playaways, DVDs, nonfiction books, and novels that range from centuries-old classics to recent bestsellers. Students have thousands of reading choices.

In school libraries such as the Pattonville Heights Middle School Library in Maryland Heights, Missouri, some books are checked out often, some regularly, some infrequently, and others never checked out in catalog memory. New books and popular series tend to circulate much more than older novels (Julie Harder, personal communication, April 11, 2011). Older books, many of which are considered classic literature, are rarely selected by students.

These books are infrequently deselected from the library because of their status as classics, and they are not replaced with newer editions because classic titles are not in demand. It has been theorized that these old books are not checked out because they are unappealing to the reader population. This creates a situation in which old books languish on the shelf year after year as they are not noticed by library users and an environment in which the classics are little-read recreationally by students.

Several practitioners have speculated why the circulation of old books, including classics, is so low in school libraries. Some suggested reasons are unappealing cover art and worn appearance that the potential reader finds unlikable. Another reason is lack of summaries that inform a potential reader of plot and other literary elements.

Changing to a new edition with more modern cover art may encourage student use. Reuter (2007) has found that cover art plays an important role in circulation.

Maughan (1998) asserts that the classics, like all books, are judged by their covers, quoting Harcourt Brace editor Michael Stearns:

If a cover has been out there long enough, the eye passes over it as something known. With classics you need to jog people's attention now and then. If you can change the look and give books bright new packaging, people will look at them anew. (p. 128)

This has proven true in school libraries. Practitioners, such as school librarian Jones, (2009) note that poorly circulating books, including classics, often receive more student interest after being replaced with repackaged editions.

Many older books lack summaries that provide enough information about the plot and characters to know whether the book might be of interest to a prospective reader. Middle school readers use summaries to predict whether they will like a book (Rinehart & Gerlach, 1998). Without the clues that summaries provide, young adults are very unlikely to select old editions, especially when contemporary books all have summaries.

A dirtied cover and torn or defaced pages typically accompany decades-old editions (Koelling, 2004). This completes an unappealing package. From the unattractive front cover, through the yellowed text, finishing with a back with no summary, old editions cannot grab the attention deserved by classics.

The Research

Is it valid to keep classics in the library just because they are in the literary canon and the librarian feels uncomfortable withdrawing books that are so widely respected? If so, are there marketing techniques that might improve their appeal to students? This thesis research – a field experimental study – was designed to investigate whether or not

new editions and appealing book displays influence the circulation of classic books, as suggested by Maughan (2008) and Reuter (2007), respectively. The study was conducted in Fall 2011 at Pattonville Heights Middle School in Maryland Heights, Missouri. The experiment sought to determine how classic books circulate under various conditions. By comparing circulation statistics of old and new editions and non-displayed and displayed classics, this study sought to determine these factors' influence on students reading choices.

Research Questions

The thesis aims to answer the following two research questions:

1. What effect does updating with new editions have on the circulation of classic novels? Specifically, does the replacement of old editions of classic novels with updated editions affect their circulation in a middle school library?
2. What effect does display have on circulation of classic novels? Specifically, does display of classic novels affect their circulation in a middle school library?

Hypotheses

Two hypotheses will be tested in this research via a field experiment: (1) the circulation frequency/count of updated classic novels will be significantly greater than that of not-updated novels, and (2) the circulation count of displayed classic novels will be significantly greater than that of not-displayed classic novels. The first hypothesis corresponds to the treatment of making available editions of classics that are new and should encourage circulation amongst modern young adult readers while keeping some old editions in the collection for the sake of comparison. The second hypothesis parallels the treatment of displaying old and new books to seek a greater circulation with students.

Hypothesis development will be further discussed in the literature review chapter and addressed again in the results chapter.

Definition of Terms

Classic literature is a general term applied to literary works of different genres that come to be highly regarded over time. In the context of this study, it refers to novels that are suitable for young adults, that were first published in 1961 or earlier, and that are respected as important works of literature by professionals in the fields of literature or education. A more detailed definition of classic literature will be provided in the literature review chapter.

Circulation is the initial loan transaction of a book to a user in a school library.

Marketing is the variety of techniques that librarians implement to encourage users to check out items.

An *outlier* is a title that differs from others of a similar age and state; it is not included in sampling because it might skew circulation data.

An *overdue* title is one that is kept longer than the 14-day checkout period and that is not renewed by the user.

A *renewal* is an extension of the loan period by 14 days and occurs at the request of the user if the item has not been reserved by another user.

Thesis Organization

The content of this thesis is organized as follows. After the introduction, the second chapter reviews relevant literature to establish a background framework for the study and glean related research findings to develop hypotheses. The third chapter documents the experimental design and process. The fourth chapter analyzes findings

through review of the results of the experiment and discussion of the hypotheses' testing. The fifth chapter discusses the limitations of the research and the implications of the findings, including future research directions.

This research investigated the effectiveness of strategies for promoting classic literature identified from anecdotal observations and scholarly publications through a field experiment. The findings suggest solutions to the problem of low circulation of classics in school libraries, contributing to the body of knowledge of young adult librarianship.

Literature Review

The lack of circulation of classic titles in school libraries, the problem explored in this thesis, is observed by practitioners in the field. Anecdotal findings seem to suggest that outdated editions, worn copies, and lack of promotion might contribute to this problem. Two interventions – ordering new editions for replacement and putting classic books on display – have been proposed in the literature to address this problem. This study aims to determine the effectiveness of these two approaches by conducting a field experiment.

Although frequently noted in the professional literature, the poor circulation of classic literature amongst middle school students has not received much attention in the research literature. As a result of this dearth of scholarly study, the literature reviewed in this chapter consists of a combination of scholarly and practitioner literature on the topics related to the circulation of classic books. While all publications addressed make observations relevant to the research problem, the practitioner literature is to be viewed as anecdotal and specific to individual cases, as it lacks the statistical significance of scholarly research in scope and scale.

This chapter is organized as follows. First is a discussion of the poor circulation of classic books in school libraries. Following this is a discourse on factors affecting student choice, such as cover art, jacket summary, new appearance, and display. The final section makes the case for this thesis' potential contributions to the literature.

Classic Books and Young Adults

The literature reviewed in this section is almost entirely from practitioners. One scholarly work (Senkevitch & Sweetland, 1998) deals with classics in library collections.

Two books, *Classic Connections: Turning Teens on to Great Literature* by Koelling (2004) and *Invitation to the Classics* edited by Cowan and Guinness (1998), provide much of the background on what classics are and why they should be read. The rest are non-scholarly articles by librarians and educators on the topics of defining a classic and the relevance of classics to young adults.

What exactly is a classic? Koelling (2004) makes a case for the promotion of classic literature in school and public libraries for recreational young adult reading.

Koelling defines a classic as:

Any work of literature... from times long past to the recent past that is acknowledged with some consensus—through the test of time, through literary and/or social review, or through the award-winning status of the work or its author—to be exemplary merit for its form or style, its original or unique expression of enduring or universal concepts, or its unique reflection of the conditions of its people and times. (p. 9)

More insight is provided in Cowan and Guinness' (1998) book, which is a collection of essays that introduce what the editors considered to be the greatest works in the history of the Western world. More than 50 essays cover works by authors ranging from Homer to Shakespeare to Flaubert. Cowan and Guinness list qualities shared by these classics:

1. The classics not only exhibit distinguished style, fine artistry, and keen intellect but create whole universes of imagination and thought.
2. They portray life as complex and many-sided depicting both negative and positive aspects of human character in the process of discovering and testing virtues.
3. They have a transforming effect on the reader's self-understanding.
4. They invite and survive frequent rereadings.
5. They adapt themselves to various times and places and provide a sense of the shared life of humanity.
6. They are considered classics by a sufficiently large number of people, establishing themselves with common readers as well as qualified authorities.
7. And, finally, their appeal endures over wide reaches of time. (p. 21-22)

Summing it up best, perhaps, is Manley (2007) in his *Booklist* column. Manley explains that the word “classic” as a noun means “something of timeless value or enduring worth,” but as an adjective it means “first rate, superior, or exemplary.” Manley writes, “Books referred to as classics are, therefore, thought of as books that are extraordinarily well written and carry an important and timeless message. In short, classic books are a triumph of style and substance” (p. 7).

A case will be made briefly for the relevance classic books may or may not have to teenagers. The place of classics in the school library is debated among teachers and librarians. Though classic literature is taught in the upper grades in many school districts across the United States, some practitioners believe that curricular focus should be on more contemporary novels instead. Others believe that classic literature should remain in the classroom and in libraries because students can connect with and enjoy the novels.

Only one research-based publication deals with classic books in library collections. Senkevitch and Sweetland (1998) studied the OCLC records of over 4,000 public libraries to determine the most commonly held titles. Their research questions were:

Does the emphasis in public libraries on providing current popular reading appear to lead to relatively rapid changes in the titles held by those libraries? If not, could a core list of such titles be developed to assist librarians in collection evaluation?

They found that of the 409 most commonly held titles in public libraries:

Most of the 41 widely held works now designated “young adult” were well-known older titles, such as Jack London's *Call of the Wild* and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, originally published for adults but now frequently on school reading lists. The removal of those titles classified as “juvenile” from the list of most-held adult fiction effectively eliminated most older works frequently regarded as classics.

Gallo (2001), a former English teacher, argues that classics are about adult matters and are not about the problems of adolescents; they were written for educated adults to read in their leisure time and not for students to analyze. As a result, Gallo concludes that some young adults simply may not be ready for the classics (p. 34).

Some professionals involved with education and libraries believe that classics very much belong in school libraries. Koelling (2004) offers librarians and teachers reasons why teens should come into contact with classic literature. Koelling has found that classics can provide teens with:

A good read, an appreciation for quality, an expansion of thought and experience, an introduction to life's possibilities, an ethical guidepost, a trip through history, a cultural initiation, a common point of reference, a change of pace, an intellectual challenge, an educational foundation. (p. 10)

Cowan and Guinness (1998) explain why anyone, including students, should read the classics today.

It is precisely because these works are intended for *all* that they have become classics. They have been tried and tested and deemed valuable for the general culture—the way in which people live their lives. They have been found to enhance and elevate the consciousness of all sorts and conditions of people who study them, to lift the readers out of narrowness or provincialism into a wider vision of humanity. (p. 23)

Practitioner Boon (2009) of the Kent State University School of Library and Information Science briefly makes a case for classics in her article on deselection. Boon argues that copies of classics like *A Tale of Two Cities* have a place in the library, even if usage statistics suggest they do not interest a majority of users, unless other factors for low circulation are evident (p. 332).

Another practitioner with an opinion on the place of classic literature in school libraries is Porteus (2009). As a former English teacher and librarian, Porteus

recommends that professionals tie classics to contemporary novels that will compliment them, such as novels with modern settings and different points of view, and explains that prequels and sequels can all enhance enjoyment and understanding of classics (p. 16).

It is not safe to assume that students either enjoy or dislike classics, even when classics are assigned by teachers. Koelling (2004) surveyed high schoolers and discovered that some students thought that it depended on the book in question; others thought that the books were long and boring; and some felt the classics were beautiful but underappreciated by peers (p. 93).

Whether or not classics belong in middle school libraries is debated, but they are present at least in some libraries. Though most of the classics to which the authors refer are older than those currently held in school libraries, the term “classic” applies to what these books and any good books have to offer. The presence of the books in some school libraries shows that adults do believe it is important for students to read the classics, and there is no way to know what impact a novel may have on an individual young adult. The potential inappropriateness of classic literature for young adults may be causing its low circulation in school libraries, besides other factors that prevent students from checking out classics.

Factors Affecting Student Choice

Students walking into a school library with an assignment or intention to select a book to read recreationally have hundreds or thousands of choices. They may leave empty-handed or with one or more books. Multiple factors may affect book selection in young adult populations. Two publications have addressed this topic: a dissertation by Reuter (2007) and a practitioner publication by Jones (2007). Though each author

studied a different age group, both found that children and young adults look at the same things when selecting books.

Reuter's (2007) dissertation investigated book-selection practices in second- and third-grade readers. Two of Reuter's research questions are particularly relevant to this thesis research: 1) "How do primary-age children select books in a public library for recreational reading?" and 2) "What aspects of books influence these children's selection decisions?" The research took place over multiple individual sessions during one summer with 20 second- and third- grade students, with data gathered through questionnaires, interviews, observations of children's behavior, and diaries (p. 20).

Reuter (2007) found that students look at the book's title, cover illustration (p. 133), and jacket summary (p. 136) to determine whether to read it. Eight children said that the summary was a factor in selection (p. 83), and almost all of the readers mentioned the front cover as important (p. 79).

In a practitioner undertaking, Jones (2007) surveyed 250 students to identify their book selection criteria. Jones, a school district library coordinator, also found that students' choices were most affected by the book's cover, title, and summary. Of less importance were teacher and friend recommendations, whether or not the book was part of a series, its length, and its author.

Of the above-mentioned selection criteria, cover art, jacket summary, and new appearance are further discussed below.

Cover art. The cover is typically a reader's first encounter with a book. A cover can repel that reader or entice him or her to continue examining the book. The literature reviewed on the subject of cover art is largely from practitioners who have experienced

failure and success with connecting teens to books through interesting cover art. One piece of literature reviewed is scholarly and the other 12 are from practitioners.

Reuter (2007) investigated procedures children use to select books and found that covers were central to selection. She finds that attractive covers that inaccurately portray the book content sometimes cause readers to choose a book they will dislike (p. 150).

Lohmiller (2008), a middle school librarian, makes purchases based on the book covers' appeal:

Covers are important to library patrons, but no more so than with middle school students, who are acutely conscious of appearances and how they determine one's place in a delicate social hierarchy. Library books are not just read; they are seen. Bad covers stand out like a student at an empty table in the cafeteria... a book's clothing can be belittled, ignored, or emulated. (p. 14)

Lohmiller (2008) has noted student reactions to book covers over the years. She says that a good cover represents its genre, appeals to a wide audience, and is not dated by popular hairstyles and fashions. Moreover, according to Lohmiller, covers should not reveal too much of the text because readers like to visualize it themselves.

A good book cover is like a good book. It accurately represents its genre, it has wide appeal, and it stands the test of time. It never alienates the reader with dated cultural references, nor underestimates the reader's intelligence by hammering home the book's theme. It should be as artistic a representation of the author's creative vision as the book itself. (p. 14-15)

Lohmiller (2008) has experienced positive results in switching old copies with fresh new editions that appeal to modern readers. The goal was to improve the library's collection of classic books by ordering new editions with better cover art, replacing ignored books with covers that would be noticed by students. In ordering books for replacement, the cover art was scrutinized to ensure that the books look current and accurately represent the story as Reuter (2007) recommended.

One problem with the covers of some young adult books is that the contents are sometimes inaccurately represented. Caywood (1993), a librarian, asked teens to react to the covers of books that do not circulate and was given explicit explanations of why individual books do not appeal. She asserted that young adult books are given general covers and are not presented as being works of separate genres, such as adventure, romance, or humor; classics are marketed as required reading. She wrote that this is a mistake: one teen is not interested in all stories featuring teenagers and is not impressed by books because they are deemed important.

Jones (2009) had two copies of one book—a new copy and an older edition with a different cover. Jones booktalked the title and several students were eager to read it. But all preferred to wait for the newer, more attractive copy to become available rather than getting the library's original and now-dated copy immediately. This happened despite the librarian's assurances that the texts were identical, which exemplifies the pickiness of teen consumers. Jones had success in boosting circulation of classic titles in her school library collection by replacing outdated copies with new editions having simpler, more modern covers.

Librarian Caywood (1993) states that adolescents feel that the packaging of a product accurately represents its contents. Young adults do not want to read books with covers showing characters with outdated hairstyles and clothing. Students may even think that books published decades ago are modern novels about nerdy characters. On covers and dust jackets, students desire a straightforward, realistic depiction of the book that tells them enough to determine whether they will enjoy it.

Sullivan (1998), Senior Librarian with the New York Public Library's Connecting Libraries and Schools Project and a member of the Young Adult Library Services Association committee, states that covers lure readers and that readers are disappointed when novels do not live up to the cover's appeal. He did an experiment in which 21 young adult readers (aged 11 to 17) evaluated 15 brand-new, first edition covers of the 1997 Best Books for Young Adults, rating their cover appeal on the scale¹ of 1 through 5. Readers also commented on why they rated covers as they did.

The book that received more low ratings than any other had a cover that did not tell readers what the plot was about and its image consisted of several neon colors. Readers identified other negative aspects such as not showing feelings or emotions and bland as well as colorless covers as factors in low ratings. Readers were drawn to covers they believe to be unique and that make them want to read the book. They noted the presence of attractive images and emotions. The teens scrutinized the characters on the cover and had positive reactions to certain depictions, such as a polar bear on the cover of *The Golden Compass*.

All reviewers stated that the quality of a cover determined whether they would read a book. Sullivan (1998) asserts that the cover of a book builds up the reader's expectations. Students know what they like, and they are upfront about whether they find it appealing. Teens are unlikely to grant a book a second chance: a book will never be checked out unless its cover lures the reader.

¹ Definition of Sullivan's (1998) rating scale: 5 -- "Most appealing--The cover is so good, it makes me want to read the book"; 4 -- "Appealing--Good, but not great"; 3 -- "Somewhat Appealing--Average, okay, nothing special"; 2 -- "Less Appealing--Not good, but not totally awful"; and 1 -- "Least Appealing--Awful cover, completely turns me off to the book".

As the literature discussed above shows, a good cover sells a book to librarians and to students. And publishers seem to understand that covers are essential, though not all covers end up successfully selling their novels. Several articles in the professional literature discuss publishers' attentiveness to teens' selectivity.

Rosen (2010) notes that a publisher might spend upwards of \$20,000 on photo shoots for a book cover. She writes about how Josh Bank, president of Alloy Entertainment, pursues a good book cover for young adults, in a *Publisher's Weekly* article.

His criteria for a good cover are deceptively simple: a strong central image that communicates the feeling of the editorial, something that stands out on crowded shelves, and a title large enough to be read from outer space. Clearly easier said than [sic] done. (p.16)

November (1998), a senior editor at Puffin Children's Books, frequently visits a middle school to get feedback from teens before and after her company's books are published. She writes, "The cover is almost our only form of consumer advertising, and a bad cover can kill a book stone dead." The honest responses of the students include drawing conclusions about plot based on the appearance of the cover, illustrations, and font used.

Jacket summary. A summary on the jacket or back of book is a standard attribute of today's novels, and for a good reason—summaries are vital. Two scholarly studies have found that summaries are also important to young adults in book selection.

Reuter (2007) used questionnaires, multi-stage interviews, and observations to determine influences on book selection by children aged 7 to 9 (p. 24). In the background interview, 13 children brought up book summaries; during library visits, 16 out of 20 read the back covers of books (p. 127).

Rinehart and Gerlach (1998) studied the book choice and subsequent reading experience of middle school students. The researchers bought 25 contemporary young adult paperback novels at a bookstore and took the books to an 8th grade classroom. Each student was randomly given a different book by the classroom teacher and instructed to preview the book by looking at the book, including its summary. Students read the novel and kept a reading log over 8 weeks. Students were interviewed several times, the first time after receiving their books but before reading. Questions asked included: (1) Did the student expect to enjoy the book and why or why not? (2) What did he or she look at first, second, and so on? (3) Whether looking at these features was how he or she normally selected a book? (4) How many books had he or she read in a typical period of 6 months? (5) And what did the students need from a book in order to want to read it? Post-reading, each student was asked to indicate whether he or she read this book and why or why not, how accurate the summary was, and what information contained in the summary was helpful.

Rinehart and Gerlach (1998) found that all of the middle school students relied upon jacket summaries to predict the plot of the book. Readers largely felt that summaries would accurately represent what happens in the text. Eighty percent of students who had predicted that they would enjoy the book did enjoy it. Two students referenced the book summaries to clarify as they read. They found information regarding the setting and characters helpful. In short, Rinehart and Gerlach found that summaries enhance self-selection of literature.

New appearance. Books may arrive at the library with pristine pages and sound binding, but a couple of years of alternating between a place on the bookshelf and travels

with readers at the bottom of a backpack—under any assortment of other books, papers, physical education uniforms and lunch bags—will leave even the best copy with a rough appearance. Three practitioners comment on books in poor physical condition: Lohmiller (2008), Koelling (2004), and Boon (2009).

Lohmiller (2008) writes, “Old books languish on my shelf, their yellowed pages filled with tiny black print. I open them up, and close them again. My 46-year-old eyes have trouble reading this, but 13-year-old eyes refuse to even try” (p. 14). She has observed old books being rediscovered when they have a new appearance.

Books that look dilapidated do not help the collection. Koelling (2004) recommends removing classics that have:

Dirt and grit, identifiable and not so identifiable stains and chunks, torn and yellowed pages, battered covers and broken spines, puffy and wavy pages from an unfortunate meeting with a full bathtub, a generally bad smell... ugly, outdated, and just plain ridiculous cover art from yesteryear. (p. 161)

Boon (2009) reminds that space on library shelves is real estate. She recommends that all books in poor physical condition be weeded from the library. She further argues that librarians need to be familiar with the goals for the collection and deselect accordingly (p. 326).

After years of scanning the bookshelves for something to read for a school assignment or for pleasure, teens pass over many titles and authors. Practitioner Maughan’s (1998) article in *Publishers Weekly* claims that if readers associate the books with the reasons they were not selected, that becomes a reason for not looking at the books again. As middle school is likely the first place a student sees a copy of such books as *Oliver Twist* or *The Count of Monte Cristo*, replacing old books with new

editions that had interesting cover art, summaries, and brand-new appearance was essential to attracting student attention. Thus,

Hypothesis #1: *The circulation frequency/count of updated classic novels will be significantly greater than that of not-updated novels.*

Book Displaying as a Marketing Strategy

The promotion of materials through display is an additional effort that libraries can undertake to encourage circulation. The discussion below is based on one scholarly (Reuter, 2007) and two practitioner publications (Chapman, 2007; Koelling, 2004) in support of the profitability of displaying books.

Selecting a book from the many shelves in a school library is no easy task, as teens have hundreds or thousands of fiction choices in the library, and facing books out narrows the selection (Koelling, 2004, p. 165). Displaying books that students are likely to enjoy narrows down the choices and may expose them to a book they normally would not have come across.

When a book is shelved, readers can only see its top and its spine. As a result, potential readers can only be intrigued by the title and author along with the colors and font used. Reuter (2007) recommends that librarians display more books with covers facing out in order to attract the attention of users (p. 154). Similarly, Koelling (2004) suggests that classic books be faced covers-out on the shelves as a form of merchandising. This technique breaks up the appearance of a shelf that only shows spines and allows the reader to see the book without having to reach out. Further,

Chapman (2007), a library technician, points out that updating the edition, moving the book's location, and displaying it on a shelf help promoting titles that deserve to circulate (p. 33).

The findings from Reuter's (2007) study and observations by some librarians in the field, as outlined above, suggest that putting books on display may help improve circulation. It is reasonable to suspect that this tactic may be useful with classic titles as well. Thus,

Hypothesis #2: *The circulation frequency/count of displayed classic novels will be significantly greater than that of not-displayed classic novels.*

Conclusion

Though the worth of cover art and plot summary influencing student selection is known to professionals, books considered the most important works of literature in the English language are among those most physically unappealing and not marketed in school libraries. Copies may be much older than the students, have unattractive/poor/or nonexistent cover design and description, and be written by authors largely unknown to middle schoolers. If classics are worth reading, and thus worth keeping, it is logical that they are worth presenting in a way that will encourage students to read.

The literature review in this chapter identified (1) a gap in the current literature on the problem of low circulation of classic literature, (2) factors influencing student book choice: cover art, summary, and new appearance, and (3) book display as promotion strategy. The findings from previous research suggest two intervention tactics that may

increase circulation of classic titles. One is to replace outdated editions of classic books with new editions, and the other is to put books on display.

An exhaustive search of the literature found no study that empirically and systematically tested the effectiveness of these two intervention approaches, which is where the thesis research makes a unique contribution. The significance of this thesis research lies in producing empirical evidence of a feasible solution to the problem of low circulation of classic literature in school libraries. By experimentally evaluating the effect of edition replacement and display on classic novel circulation, this thesis research also provides insights on how students react to classics being presented alongside, and similar in appearance to, contemporary fiction in the library.

Methodology

Introduction

The research problem explored in this thesis is the lack of circulation of old books in a middle school library. In Spring 2011, the fiction collection of the school library at Pattonville Heights Middle School of Maryland Heights, Missouri, was about to undergo its annual deselection process. The library had many decades-old books, some of which were classics. The old copies looked worn and some lacked the cover art and summaries that contemporary young adult books have. It was noted by the library staff that older copies of classics rarely circulated. Was this because of their appearance, or because classics were difficult and students avoided them for recreational reading?

A field experiment was conducted to determine if there is a link between circulation and the factors of new edition and display. A field experiment is a study that takes place in a natural setting (in this case, the school library), rather than in an artificial setting where the researcher has greater control, such as a laboratory. In some field experiments, such as this one, the participants are unaware that research is taking place (Neuman, 2011).

It was hypothesized that the new editions of classic books and more prominent display would have a positive effect on their circulation. The research questions were (1) Does the replacement of old editions of classic novels with new editions affect their circulation in a middle school library? and (2) Does display of classic novels affect their circulation in a middle school library?

The process of the experiment was as follows. First, 20 old editions of classics were identified as being in need of replacement. After determining which characteristics

the replacements should have, 20 new editions of those books were ordered through a vendor. Ten old editions and 10 new editions were used in a pilot study, and the remaining items were used in the three-month study. Of the 20 items included in the main study, five old editions and five new editions remained on the shelf with the rest of the collection, and the others (again five old editions and five new editions) were displayed. Circulation data were gathered from catalog records approximately every 10 school days, and the complete data were statistically analyzed at the end of the semester, using the two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) procedure for hypothesis testing.

Background

The school. The field experiment was conducted in the Pattonville Heights Middle School library. The school, located about 20 miles from St. Louis and popularly known as “Heights” or “The Heights,” is in suburban Maryland Heights, Missouri. The Pattonville School District serves a student population from the areas of Bridgeton, Maryland Heights, St. Ann, and unincorporated St. Louis County, Missouri. Heights was dedicated on November 9, 1967 and has received National Blue Ribbon recognition (Pope, 1995).

The school is in a building of three floors, with the typical school facilities of classrooms, main office, counseling office, nurse’s office, cafeteria, and library as well as a planetarium and an observatory. In the 2011 academic year, the school had a total enrollment of 509 students. The racial demographics of the student population were 59.3% White, 29.3% Black, 6.7% Hispanic, and 4.7% Asian. The school has a free/reduced lunch program for students whose households struggle economically; 36.3%

of the students received this service in the 2011 school year (Missouri Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, 2012).

The library. The library is located on the third floor of the school building. The circulation desk is in the front along with three computers for staff use. The library can accommodate over a hundred students at a time. Teachers frequently bring classes in to work on projects at the 25 computer workstations. Besides the tables, the library also features couches and chairs so that students can comfortably study or read.

Hardback fiction is located along the western wall of the library. Twenty-one four-foot sections of 5 shelves hold novels arranged alphabetically by author. On one end of each shelf is a bookstand that displays a title in a face-front position in order to attract readers.

The entire collection, as of April 28, 2011, included 20,996 items, of which 5,225 were fiction titles and another 170 were short stories. Fiction had an average publication date of 1992 as opposed to the entire collection's average of 1995 (Pattonville Heights Middle School Library, 2011).

The library's budget for 2010-2011 was \$13,600. The district had a written collection development policy that followed the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's collection guidelines. It provided specifics on how to keep up with state standards for collection size (Julie Harder, personal communication, October 8, 2010).

Julie Harder had been librarian of Pattonville Heights Middle School for 10 years. Her mission was to have a collection relevant to today's middle school students. Harder ordered new books throughout the year. When considering books for her collection, she

asked herself if she could see a student sitting down and reading each title. In addition, she was open to recommendations from students and staff (Julie Harder, personal communication, October 8, 2010).

Selection factors in the library. With a decade of experience as librarian, Harder had made observations about what young adults desire from novels.

Today's adolescent readers want books with action and conflict. The average- and below-average performing early adolescents like newer looking and/or attractive covers. They tend to choose shorter books because they feel they don't like to read and they want to get it over with. When a student comes to the library to get a book, often times they choose something that has been recommended by a friend or a book that is made into a movie. They also choose books by authors that are familiar. Books included on our state award lists and book battle lists that are part of our school library reading incentive program have higher circulation than other titles in the collection. (Julie Harder, personal communication, August 10, 2012)

She believed that books that face forward receive more attention from browsing students. "Often bookstands sit empty until we can refill them with other titles, because the face-forward books go out quickly" (Julie Harder, personal communication, August 11, 2012). Students who do not like to read and are made to come in by their teachers particularly tend to gravitate to books on display. "We regularly have to fill empty book display stands, because those books circulate so often" (Julie Harder, personal communication, February 28, 2012).

Classics in the collection. The researcher's study deals with the old books in the school library collection, all of which were at least 50 years old. Most of these books were classics of adult, young adult or children's literature. The word "old" refers to the aged copies from the collection while "classic" refers to the title itself, whether the edition was old or new and when referring to the text in general.

The oldest books in the collection were hardbacks, some of which were in library binding. Most lacked cover art and summaries, and showed years of wear with cracked binding or yellowed pages. Others were more recent editions with cover art and summaries, but most of these were dated and almost as worn as the older books. Though the old books were new at one time, they looked like books from another decade. Further indicating the age of the books were stamps that indicated that some of the books were transferred from schools that were closed years ago, and others that bore the original name of the school, Pattonville Heights Junior High School (David Miller, personal communication, February 24, 2012). The librarian noted that older copies did not circulate as often as newer copies, though it was not clear whether this was for the reasons of exterior appearance or because students were not interested in classic books.

To better understand the circulation of older books in the collection, the librarian ran a report on the collection management software looking at books with publication years through 1951. The report showed that there were 131 items in the collection and 29 circulations of these items in the past 13 months. It was impossible to accurately determine total circulation of these items for two reasons outlined below.

The first problem in obtaining circulation statistics was that the data in certain fields were incomplete or incorrect. Numerous catalog entries for older books lacked the title and publication date, and many copyright dates were incorrect. Quite a few of the books in the report were too recently published to be included in the study. There were some errors in the migration of data from the old catalog to the new in Spring 2010. In Spring 2011, the district cataloger was in the process of cleaning up the catalog records to

make them accurate. This lack of complete catalog records made it impossible to determine how many old books were in the library's collection.

The second issue was that the "publication" dates recorded for certain books in the catalog were in fact copyright dates, which were more recent than true publication dates. Since the state's collection guidelines go by copyright date rather than publication date, district librarians focus more on the copyright date in their cataloging. Consequently, the field listed as "publication year" was usually the copyright year, but this was not consistent in the catalog either. For example, though the report was for items published through 1951, 25 items (out of 131 shown in the report) included ISBNs in their catalog records. ISBNs were introduced in the 1970s, so this indicates that only up to 106 copies may have been truly "old" copies that predated ISBNs ("Items in selected holdingscode(s) and call number range," 2011).

The report revealed that some old books had circulated in the past year. Six books used in the study had been checked out in the past 13 months, and they were: *Little Women*, *Peter Pan*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and *A Farewell to Arms*. *Alice in Wonderland* had five checkouts in 2010, which was not surprising since a movie version was released in the spring of that year. It was not possible to distinguish between staff and student checkouts, so it was noted that the circulations may reflect both student and staff selections.

Student interest in classics. About this poorly circulating part of the collection, Harder said:

In my 10 years as librarian at Pattonville Heights, classic literature has truly not been circulated very often. Before replacing books in this study, the appearance of the classics in our collection was very poor. Book covers were plain and very worn. The corners of the books were damaged and they appeared very old. Most

of the classics have no summaries available on the book covers or jackets, so students who might be interested in the title couldn't read to find out more. (Julie Harder, personal communication, August 11, 2012)

Harder also believed that the longer lengths and higher reading levels of classics may discourage readers from choosing them over other books in the collection. “Most contemporary fiction for this age is written at the fourth to sixth grade reading level which is where our students are most comfortable reading” (Julie Harder, personal communication, August 11, 2012). Reading levels of classic books used in the study will be discussed later in this chapter.

Experimental Design and Group Assignment

The field experiment had two treatment factors: purchasing new editions and putting books on display. With each of these treatment factors manipulated at two discrete levels, the experiment was essentially of 2 X 2 factorial design, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1

Experimental Design

| Treatments | Non-Displayed | Displayed |
|--------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Old Edition | Group A 5 books | Group B 5 books |
| New Edition | Group C 5 books | Group D 5 books |

Each of the selected titles was randomly assigned into one of the four experimental groups by the following process. First, twenty blank paper slips were made to represent the selected books, of which five were marked with letter A, and another five with letter B and so on, signifying the experimental groups. Then, the slips were folded

and placed into a bowl. Going down the list of titles alphabetically by author's name, for each title, a slip was drawn from the bowl, and the letter on the paper slip determined to which experimental group it should go.

Procedures

The three-month study tracked the circulation of 20 books in the collection that were included in the field experiment. There were four steps in the preparation for and implementation of the experiment: determining classic titles in the collection in need of replacement, ordering new editions of those titles to use in the pilot or main study, displaying those books assigned into the treatment groups, and gathering circulation statistics on the library's collection management software.

Locating classics. Classics in the collection were found using the report from the collection management software and by visually scanning the shelves for older-looking books. These books were pulled from the shelves and evaluated with nine criteria before replacement copies were ordered.

The selection criteria were based on several key attributes, as explained below. The first four essential criteria were that a candidate was fiction, was in print, was originally published in 1961 or earlier, and was hardcover. Since these criteria were based on physical/factual attributes, they were easy to apply in item evaluation.

Fiction. Each candidate was selected from the fiction section of the library. Short stories and plays were also candidates, though none were included. The school required independent reading of fiction, and there was a limited amount of older non-fiction titles in the collection.

In print. All candidates were compared with the new books available through the vendor, Children's Plus, Inc. A book that was out of print or unavailable from the vendor would have been impossible to order as a new edition and thus was disqualified from the experiment.

At least 50 years old. The books needed to be originally published at least 50 years before in order to be considered old enough for inclusion. Anything more recent would have been too contemporary to be considered a classic. *The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* was published in 1719, representing the oldest book used in the study. *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*, published in 1958, was the newest book used in the study. Its appearance, however, was typical of the "old" books used for the experiment.

Hardcover. Only hardcover books were used in the study, so no paperbacks were evaluated for inclusion in the experiment. This was because the library did not have many paperbacks, which are short-lived and therefore not a good investment. The durability of hardcovers was part of the reason why the old books survived so many years of collection evaluation. Another reason for not including paperbacks was that they were rarely displayed. Traditional hardbacks such as *The Good Earth* and books in library binding like *A Farewell to Arms* were both considered suitable, and both types were used in the study.

The other five criteria were old edition, desirability, lack of quality cover art, classic status, and inferior summary. Though not of less importance, these criteria involved some amount of flexibility because their underlying attributes were subjective concepts.

An old edition. Deciding if a book was old was a simple task. Many of the books flagged in the report were old enough to be used in the study. An examination of the shelves yielded additional copies.

Several telling features were sought in determining if a book was truly “old.” Books old enough to be included in the study had the qualities described by Koelling (2004) in the literature review. These books typically were beat up or had damaged bindings and faded colors. They may have featured cover art or illustrations that are old-fashioned by modern standards, and they had been defaced by student writing. No minimum age was stipulated as a selection criterion when selecting “old” books, and the “youngest” “old” book used in the study was 40 years old. The oldest was an edition of *Oliver Twist* from 1941, and the most recent were copies of *Lassie Come-Home* and *The Red Badge of Courage* from 1971, making a range of 30 years from oldest old edition to newest old edition.

Desired. In April 2011, the semester prior to the study, the fiction section of the Heights library underwent a large round of weeding, resulting in many non-circulating and undesired older books being deselected. Consequently, the number of books available for inclusion in the study was more limited. Most of those books were ineligible for the study because they were out of print or the librarian was not interested in obtaining new copies. As a result, the study worked with a limited number of old novels that were deemed “desirable.”

Some of the remaining old editions of classics were not replaced because they were not expected to enhance the collection. One example was *Eight Cousins* by Louisa May Alcott. It was not the author’s most popular work, and not crucial for the collection

like *Little Women* was, so it was not replaced. *Little Women*, however, was replaced, as it was Alcott's most famous work and having a new edition would enrich the collection.

Lack of quality cover art. Cover art was one of the best indicators of the need for replacement because cover art is a deciding factor in selection. Within this category, there were two main issues with the candidates' covers: the lack of any cover art and the lack of attractive cover art. Some old books in the collection, like *Wuthering Heights*, had nothing on the front cover. Others, such as *The Red Badge of Courage*, had faded and dreary-looking illustrations. The covers of these books might have discouraged their circulation. The covers of the selected books were unexciting or did not accurately indicate the plot of the book. They typified the idea of unattractive old editions.

Classic. A broad definition of "classic" was used due to the small number of classics in the collection that were available for use in the study. A book's being a classic increased the likelihood that it would not only be in print but also available through the vendor. Any book in the canon of children's, young adult, or adult fiction was considered a classic, from *The White Stag* by Kate Seredy (winner of the John Newbery Medal Award) to *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift.

Though *The Witch of Blackbird Pond* may not have been considered classic literature by some due to its first being published as recently as 1958 and its being young adult literature rather than a novel originally intended for adult reading, the book was respected as an early example of young adult historical fiction. The library's copy had no cover art or description, so it met the physical criteria for the study.

Inferior summary. Books lacking summaries on the back or inside jacket were high priority for inclusion because a summary is so important in book selection. Most

editions of old books had no summary, like *The Black Stallion*, *Little Women*, and *Oliver Twist*.

Some books included summaries that had long descriptions, relied heavily upon quotes, or pushed the point that a book was a classic without telling the reader much about the story. One example was the summary on the dust jacket of *Jane Eyre*. It provides a three-sentence plot summary and then goes on:

It was almost a century ago that Charlotte Brontë wrote the life history of Jane Eyre from the Brontë home, a grim parsonage in England's bleak and windswept North Country, this story of a great romance burst forth upon the world. Since the date of its first publication, the novel has never been out of print. The acclaim which it has received from generations of readers has assured it of that immortality which comes only to the very greatest books. (Brontë, 1946)

Following this background was a paragraph about how good the pictures were despite the fact that it was the artist's first time illustrating a book. Advertising the fact that the story was considerably older than the old copy and declaring the timelessness of the novel were thought to discourage recreational reading amongst a middle school audience.

Outliers. Some books were deemed inappropriate for the study for practical reasons, even though they met the criteria outline above. For example, *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville circulated at least once or twice a year due to students being amused by the title. The book had no cover art or description, but it was last checked out in September 2010, which was more recent than a majority of books of similar age and appearance. While the librarian probably would not withdraw the book from the collection as it was a classic, it was inappropriate for the study because of potential skewing of circulation data (Pattonville Heights Middle School Library, 2011).

Other outliers were *Little Men* and *Jo's Boys*, two sequels to *Little Women*. Students enjoy reading series and can be adamant about beginning with the first book.

Circulation data might be skewed if an old copy of *Little Women* were on the shelf, a new edition of *Little Men* were on the shelf, and an old edition of *Jo's Boys* were displayed, or any other variation of these circumstances. No sequels were included in the study.

Purchasing new editions. Classic titles in the collection were compared with available replacements from the vendor, Children's Plus, Inc. The researcher and the librarian came up with a list of 20 titles from the collection that had new editions available, as listed in Table 2.

Table 2*Classic Titles Used for Experimentation*

| Author | Title | Originally Published | Old Edition | New Edition |
|--------------------------|---|-----------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Alcott, Louisa May | <i>Little Women</i> | 1869 | 1947 | 2004 |
| Barrie, J. M. | <i>Peter Pan</i> | 1911 | 1950 | 2002 |
| Brontë, Charlotte | <i>Jane Eyre</i> | 1847 | 1946 | 2011 |
| Brontë, Emily | <i>Wuthering Heights</i> | 1847 | 1950 | 2009 |
| Buck, Pearl S. | <i>The Good Earth</i> | 1931 | 1965 | 2005 |
| Carroll, Lewis | <i>Alice's Adventures in Wonderland</i> | 1865 | 1946 | 1992 |
| Crane, Stephen | <i>The Red Badge of Courage</i> | 1895 | 1971 | 2009 |
| Defoe, Daniel | <i>The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe</i> | 1719 | 1946 | 1994 |
| Dickens, Charles | <i>Oliver Twist</i> | 1838 | 1941 | 1994 |
| Dickens, Charles | <i>A Tale of Two Cities</i> | 1859 | 1942 | 2009 |
| Dumas, Alexandre | <i>The Count of Monte Cristo</i> | 1845 | 1962 | 1996 |
| Farley, Walter | <i>The Black Stallion</i> | 1941 | 1968 | 2008 |
| Hemingway, Ernest | <i>A Farewell to Arms</i> | 1929 | 1969 | 1995 |
| Hemingway, Ernest | <i>For Whom the Bell Tolls</i> | 1940 | 1968 | 1996 |
| Knight, Eric | <i>Lassie Come-Home</i> | 1940 | 1971 | 2003 |
| Seredy, Kate | <i>The White Stag</i> | 1938 | 1960 | 1979 |
| Speare, Elizabeth George | <i>The Witch of Blackbird Pond</i> | 1958 | 1958 | 2011 |
| Steinbeck, John | <i>The Pearl</i> | 1947 | 1968 | 1994 |
| Swift, Jonathan | <i>Gulliver's Travels</i> | 1726 | 1947 | 2001 |
| Verne, Jules | <i>Around the World in Eighty Days</i> | 1873 | 1952 | 2004 |

During the ordering process, some covers were found more appealing than others, but each was an improvement over its counterpart in the collection. It was desired that the new editions be as teen-friendly as possible to encourage checkout in a middle school.

The criteria for selection of new books were as follows:

Hardcover. All books ordered were hardcover because almost all fiction in the library was hardcover. Because these books are classics, the librarian intended to keep the copies for years and needed them to endure. Some were published as hardbacks, such as *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Others had been published as paperbacks and rebound in library binding, like *The Good Earth*.

Interesting cover design. The right cover for a book geared towards middle school readers should look neither too juvenile nor too mature. Good cover art also provides some idea of genre and plot that should draw the attention of a reader who was interested in the subject matter, as Reuter (2007) recommends. The cover of the new edition of *The Red Badge of Courage* had a red cover with a yellow background and shows a young Civil War soldier looking at something the reader cannot see; *Wuthering Heights* portrays a forlorn-looking girl with disheveled hair traveling in the darkness of a storm; and the illustration on the cover of *Peter Pan* uses purple, pink and yellow to color its iconic image of children flying to Neverland. Each of the new editions ordered featured cover art that was an improvement over that of the analogous old copy, as recommended by Jones (2007) and Caywood (1993).

Summary. The plot summaries of the new books indicated who the characters are and what conflicts they face in the course of the novel. All new books ordered had summaries on the back or on the inside jacket, as recommended by Jones (2007). The back of the new edition of *Jane Eyre* first shared a quote from the novel that serves as an attention-getter, and then the summary begins.

Born into a poor family and raised by an oppressive aunt, young Jane Eyre becomes the governess at Thornfield Manor to escape the confines of her life. There her fiery independence clashes with the brooding and mysterious nature of her employer, Mr. Rochester. But what begins as outright loathing slowly

evolves into a passionate romance. When a terrible secret from Rochester's past threatens to tear the two apart, Jane must make an impossible choice. Should she follow her heart or walk away and lose her love forever? (Brontë, 2011)

Only the next two sentences pushed the book: "Unabashedly romantic and utterly enthralling, *Jane Eyre* endures as one of the greatest love stories of all time. This must-have edition of a timeless classic is beautifully presented for a modern teen audience" (Brontë, 2011). Posing the question brought the prospective reader into the conflict, and though the book was called a classic, no hint was given as to how long ago it was written.

The objective was to choose new editions with book covers and summaries that made the book seem more approachable. Covers featuring portraits of men and women of the past that had been repurposed for selling a "classic" book were completely avoided in the reordering process. Though any new copies would have been an improvement over the old books in poor condition, new editions resembling the more modern fiction collection were sought out instead of copies that emphasized that the books are classics.

Though the old books in the collection represented a range of conditions, ages, original publication dates, etc., a suitable replacement for each was found through the vendor. The cost of the books ranged from \$9.95 to \$27.50 and totaled \$338.34. The books were a long-term investment because they were durable, they were guaranteed by Children's Plus, they fit in with the rest of the collection, and their standing as classics meant that they will survive years of collection evaluation (Julie Harder, personal communication, September 29, 2011). The books were ordered in Spring 2011, processed by the district's library services department over the summer, and arrived at the Heights Library before the start of the Fall 2011 semester. The new editions looked like other books in the collection instead of like leftovers of generations past.

Display. Those in the two display groups (B of old editions and D of new editions) were put on front-facing bookstands on the fiction shelves. Each of the books in Groups B and D was displayed for the entire 8 weeks of the study, with the exception of when the book was checked out. Books in the two non-display Groups (A of old editions and C of new editions) were present on the shelves with the rest of the collection, with only their spines visible. The display of the books as well as the placement of the non-displayed books on the shelves was completed on September 21, 2011, and the study continued through December 22, 2011.

As part of the methodology, the circulation data were collected every 10 days (see discussion below), and the bookstands were viewed to ensure that all of the books that had not been checked out were still on the shelves or on display as they should be. It was originally planned that titles would be rotated on data collection days, but this was found impossible during the pilot study (described in the next section).

Gathering circulation statistics. Data were gathered throughout the study and analyzed following its completion. Circulation data were taken approximately every 10 school days, on September 20, October 5, October 24, November 4, November 18, December 8, and December 22. The collection management software used by the district, LS2 Library Systems, was run by The Library Corporation (TLC). Using this system, the researcher ran reports on the 20 books under the supervision of library staff by doing a title search in the “Titles and Items” screen and checking the “Circulation Info” heading on the right side of the screen.

Recordings of all circulation transactions were entered into an Excel spreadsheet. Total circulation counts were tallied at the close of the semester for each of the four

groups. After the study ended, the data were exported into SPSS and analyzed to determine the effect of each treatment factor on circulation. Two-way ANOVA was used to statistically analyze the experimental data to test the hypotheses. Circulation of individual titles was examined for more insights as well.

Staff members also used the library, and it was not possible to isolate staff checkouts in the library management system. To address this limitation, a small neon sticker noting the experimental group was placed on the circulation card inside each book cover. Noticing the sticker prompted the librarian or the clerk to record on a form whether the book was checked out by a student or a staff member.

Participants. The only people having knowledge of the experiment were the researcher, library staff, principals, and several individuals at the district's central office. Books were not to be recommended to the students by librarians, and recommendations from peers were unlikely because most of the books had not been checked out in the last year or so. Thus, it was anticipated that the majority of circulation transactions would be self-motivated, making the presence of quality summaries vital to student choices as suggested by Rinehart and Gerlach (1998).

The decision to not inform teachers was made with careful consideration of potential distortion of research data. A teacher could have encouraged students to try the books in hopes of boosting circulation, but such action was undesired interference. Library employees were instructed not to encourage students towards any of the books in the study.

Pilot

To assess the feasibility of the experiment, a pilot study was conducted from September 13 to September 20, 2011. The pilot used the same methodology as the main study; the difference was that its duration was a week rather than three months.

Books that were not used in the pilot were kept in the library office and saved for the main study. Circulation statistics were gathered at the start and finish of the pilot period. The pilot indicated increased circulation for newer editions that were displayed, namely *Wuthering Heights* and *The Black Stallion*.

Two concerns arose in the pilot that required addressing. The first was that the previously planned rotation of titles was found to be impossible because the only area that could display all of the books was on the fiction shelves. A single book from a shelf was displayed, and each book was displayed on a bookstand on one end of the shelf to which it belonged. Rotation was therefore considered unwise as it would have placed some books out of the organizational scheme of the fiction section while some remained. It would be disadvantageous for books to be placed elsewhere when sought out by the name of the author. As a result, displayed books were not rotated in the main study.

The second issue discovered was that there were three copies of *Peter Pan* in the collection when the pilot began. One was old and all copies were considerably beat up. A replacement for the old copy had arrived, and having two other copies of the book on the shelf would have caused competition. To avoid this, the oldest copy was used in the pilot while the other copies were taken from the shelf. They were removed to the library office and remained there from the start of the pilot until the end of the main study.

Similarly, none of the editions that were used in the pilot were available to readers during the study. Availability of the pilot books would have caused undue competition between old and new copies, inviting questions from students and thus distracting them from browsing which the study sought to examine. Therefore, the editions used in the pilot were removed and kept in the library office until the conclusion of the study.

Conclusion

In Spring 2011, it was discovered that many of the most culturally significant books in the Heights Library were the least appealing. This problem was examined in depth through an examination of recent circulation statistics that verified that older books, many of them classics, have limited circulation. Specific criteria for replacement and reordering were developed by evaluating the old books and examining new editions.

An experiment examining the effect of new edition and front-facing display on the circulation of classic books was proposed and approved by the school district. The methodology was developed by examining the state of the old classic books in the collection, determining what could be done to improve and update them, and choosing an experimental design to measure the effect of newer edition and display.

The research sought to determine the role that edition age and display play in encouraging reading through comparison with untreated groups. Despite years of the fiction section being evaluated, some old books remained, quite likely because they were classics and thus worth keeping. This created a dilemma: students may not have wanted to check out old books, so there seemed to be little reason to spend money on new editions if it meant few circulations. The goal of the field experiment was to determine

whether or not new and/or displayed editions of classic books would improve their desirability and increase their circulation among young adult readers.

Results and Discussion

This chapter reports the results of the experimental study. First, an overview of all per-title circulation results and a general discussion of circulation distribution are given. Then the results of testing the hypotheses about the effects of the “edition” and “display” factors are briefly summarized. The chapter continues with more discussion of indicative patterns suggested by the experimental data, concluding with a discussion of what may have potentially encouraged a reader to select a certain title or discouraged him/her from doing so.

Overview

The experimental subjects were randomly selected titles of classic novels, and the dependent variable was the circulation counts of these books for the duration of the study. As defined in the experimental design, the novels were randomly divided into four experimental cells. Group A consisted of old editions of classic novels that were not displayed. Group B included old editions of classic novels that were displayed. Group C contained new editions of classic novels that were not displayed, and Group D was comprised of new editions of classic novel that were displayed. An old edition was a book that existed in the library’s collection prior to the beginning of the study and was deemed unattractive and/or uninformative by the librarian and researcher. A new edition was one that was purchased as an improvement over an old edition.

Of the 20 books used in the study, only seven titles circulated during the experimental period of three months, and the total of circulation counts was eight. Most of the books were not checked out. The circulation counts were mostly of titles from

Group D. Each of the other groups had only one circulation count. The per-title circulation counts, group totals, and means are given in Table 3.

Table 3

Circulation of Titles by Group

| Group | Title | Count | Total | Mean/SD |
|--------------|---|--------------|--------------|----------------|
| A | <i>The Count of Monte Cristo</i> | 0 | 1 | 0.2 0.4472 |
| | <i>The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe</i> | 0 | | |
| | <i>A Tale of Two Cities</i> | 1 | | |
| | <i>The White Stag</i> | 0 | | |
| | <i>Wuthering Heights</i> | 0 | | |
| B | <i>Around the World in 80 Days</i> | 0 | 1 | 0.2 0.4472 |
| | <i>The Black Stallion</i> | 0 | | |
| | <i>For Whom the Bell Tolls</i> | 1 | | |
| | <i>The Good Earth</i> | 0 | | |
| | <i>Gulliver's Travels</i> | 0 | | |
| C | <i>Alice's Adventures in Wonderland</i> | 1 | 1 | 0.2 0.4472 |
| | <i>A Farewell to Arms</i> | 0 | | |
| | <i>Little Women</i> | 0 | | |
| | <i>Oliver Twist</i> | 0 | | |
| | <i>Peter Pan</i> | 0 | | |
| D | <i>Jane Eyre</i> | 1 | 5 | 1.0 0.7071 |
| | <i>Lassie Come-Home</i> | 1 | | |
| | <i>The Pearl</i> | 0 | | |
| | <i>The Red Badge of Courage</i> | 1 | | |
| | <i>The Witch of Blackbird Pond</i> | 2 | | |

Hypothesis Testing

To test for the effects and potential interaction of the two manipulated factors (“edition” and “display”) on circulation, a factorial analysis (ANOVA) was conducted on the experimental data. Disappointingly, the analysis did not produce any statistically significant results ($F = 2.909$, $p=0.107$ in all cases); thus, the experiment failed to reject

any of the null hypotheses. For ease of reference, the hypotheses in null and alternative forms are restated below.

Hypothesis #1

H₀: There will be no significant difference in circulation frequency/count of classic novels between updated and not-updated novels.

H₁: The circulation frequency/count of updated classic novels will be significantly greater than that of not-updated novels.

Hypothesis #2

H₀: There will be no significant difference in circulation between displayed and not-displayed classic novels.

H₁: The circulation frequency/count of displayed classic novels will be significantly greater than that of not-displayed classic novels.

In other words, the experiment failed to produce significantly positive evidence in support of the conceptual hypotheses that (1) replacing older editions with new ones and (2) putting books on display would increase the circulation of classic titles. Nevertheless, the summary statistics do suggest some differential patterns about the impacts of replacing old editions of classic books with new editions and then displaying them (as shown in Table 3).

Table 3

Summary Statistics of Mean Comparison

| Factor | Levels | Sum | N | Mean | STD |
|---------------|---------------|------------|----------|-------------|------------|
| Edition | Old | 2 | 10 | 0.2 | 0.4216 |
| | New | 6 | 10 | 0.6 | 0.5164 |
| Display | No | 2 | 10 | 0.2 | 0.4216 |
| | Yes | 6 | 10 | 0.6 | 0.5164 |

Analysis and Discussion

The low circulation across the board and too small of a cell size might have compromised the testing power of the experiment. It was necessary to examine the circumstantial situation factor by factor and title by title to understand what happened during the experiment and reveal suggested patterns nevertheless.

Edition. The mean circulation count of new editions was 0.6, which was greater than that of old editions, 0.2. Though the difference was not statistically significant, it was directionally suggestive. Of the 10 new editions, five circulated once and one circulated twice, totaling six circulation counts. Of the 10 old editions, two circulations occurred. The new editions had three times as many circulations as that of the old editions.

Display. The mean circulation count of displayed titles was 0.6, which was greater than that of non-displayed titles, 0.2. Similar to the edition factor, the difference in circulation counts was directionally suggestive, though not statistically significant. Of the 10 books displayed on bookshelves, five circulated once, and one circulated twice, totaling six circulation counts. Of the 10 books not displayed, two books were checked out once. The displayed books had three times as many circulations as that of the books not put on display.

Interaction of Factors. The data seem to suggest potential interaction between the edition and display factors mutually amplifying their impact on circulation. The new displayed editions in Group D were more successful than all of the other groups combined, with five circulation counts altogether. A good example was *The Witch of*

Blackbird Pond, which was checked out twice. The interaction effect, along with the dates of checkout and return, are given in Table 4 below.

Table 4

Classic Novel Circulation Dates with Treatments

| Checkout | Return | Edition | Display |
|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|----------------|
| September 29 | October 20 | New | Yes |
| October 3 | October 4 | New | Yes |
| October 4 | October 21 | Old | No |
| October 4 | October 21 | New | No |
| October 7 | October 18 | New | Yes |
| October 20 | After the study | New | Yes |
| October 27 | After the study | New | Yes |
| November 4 | November 4 | Old | Yes |

During the period of the experiment, the first two items to circulate were new editions that were on display: *The Witch of Blackbird Pond* and *The Red Badge of Courage*. When a displayed item was checked out, it was not replaced with another copy, consequently leaving the bookstand empty. As a result, at least one bookstand remained empty from the second week to the end of the study, though not necessarily always the same bookstand. The two displayed old editions, *A Tale of Two Cities* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, circulated when at least two bookstands were left empty because their new editions had been checked out. This result suggested that when displayed, old editions of classic books were more likely to be selected when fewer new editions were displayed.

The circulation of the two non-displayed classic books was interesting to note because they were checked out together by the same user on the same day. These two books, *Alice in Wonderland* and *A Tale of Two Cities*, were within 10 feet of one another.

The books were close to the library door and were checked out in the morning shortly before the first class began, indicating that a student might have been hurrying.

Furthermore, the checkout occurred when two of the displayed books, *The Red Badge of Courage* and *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*, were out in circulation. The bookstand for *The Red Badge of Courage* was in the same area as of the two books the user selected, so he or she passed by the empty bookstand when browsing. This suggests that the selection pool was smaller when these two non-displayed books were checked out, and that the student who checked them out might have been in a rush to get to the first class of the day.

All checkouts were to student users. Though library staff had prepared for the possibility of circulation by teachers, none of the books used for the study was checked out by a teacher.

Attributes of Circulated Books

The circulated books were examined to determine whether they possessed similar qualities that might have appealed to students. Several common features were found, including edition age, interesting cover art, detailed summary, and shelf location, each of which is discussed below.

Edition Age. One of the common qualities of circulated books was the age of the editions. Of the total eight circulations of new editions, six were of editions published within the last 20 years, and five were of editions from 2001 or later. The other new edition that circulated was from 1992. The two old editions that circulated were from 1942 and 1968. Students preferred the more recently published editions.

Cover Art. Another attribute common among circulated books was the presence of interesting cover art, with only one exception—the old, non-displayed book that circulated, *A Tale of Two Cities*, did not have cover art. The cover artwork of each of the other six circulated books is described briefly below.

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. A golden border surrounds a recognizable illustration of Alice looking up at the Cheshire cat, who was resting on the branch of a tree. The cover was iconic and could be mistaken for no other. This identifiable image might have potentially attracted the student's initial attention.

For Whom the Bell Tolls. The old edition has a green cover. The faded cover shows a remote, snow-covered area of trees. The serene wooded scene possibly attracted the student's attention.

Jane Eyre. The new edition was mostly black and shows a pink flower with one wilted petal. It resembles the popular *Twilight* book series of which the library has multiple copies. While the flower image was not one that appears throughout the novel, the cover would be noticed by students familiar with the *Twilight* series.

The Red Badge of Courage. The new edition's cover shows a Union soldier of the United States Civil War. He looks to his right, the sun shining brightly and a bird flying behind him. This cover art makes it immediately apparent that this was among the war books that the librarian says are very much in-demand (Julie Harder, personal communication, September 10, 2012). The cover art makes the book's genre so obvious that this was likely what attracted a student's notice.

Lassie Come-Home. The new edition was a presentation of the original edition as it appeared in 1940, showing a collie standing on a cliff and gazing at the land below.

The librarian has commented that books about animals are popular, especially with sixth grade students (Julie Harder, personal communication, September 10, 2012). The collie on the cover was likely what attracted a student to the book.

The Witch of Blackbird Pond. The cover of the new edition was intriguing, making use of black, green, and blue shades to show a moonlit scene—a girl sits alone on a mossy log in the forest, looking away from the reader and into the distance. A potential reader was led to wonder why the girl was alone in the dark woods, and what would have happened to her there, which may be what initially attracted two readers to check out the book.

It was fair to say that all of these books have cover art that was intriguing in some way, either giving an idea of the genre or revealing more about the story's plot. As stated in the literature review, the first attribute of a book usually noticed by readers was its cover. Putting such books on display spotlighted their cover arts, which, in turn, aroused student interest in these books, as intended and expected.

Jacket Summary. The summaries of these circulated books, either on the back or inside cover of the jacket, varied noticeably in terms of length, content, and degree of advertising the title as a classic. For instance, the summary of *Lassie Come-Home* was one succinct paragraph:

Lassie is Joe's prize collie and constant companion. But when Joe's father loses his job, Lassie must be sold. Three times she escapes from her new owner, and three times she returns home to Joe, until finally she is taken to the remotest part of Scotland—too far a journey for any dog to make alone. But Lassie is not just any dog. First published in 1940, *Lassie Come-Home* is one of the best-loved dog stories in the world. (Knight, 2003)

Other summaries were longer but contained more information as to the plot, such as the description of *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*:

“There was something strange about this country of America, something that they all seemed to share and understand and she did not.” Kit has grown up on the island of Barbados, loved and pampered by her grandfather. But after his death, Kit must leave. It’s not proper for a sixteen-year-old girl to live by herself. She’s heard stories about her aunt and uncle who live in the colony of Connecticut. These are the only relatives Kit knows of. So, alone and desperate, she sets sail to live with them in New England.

When she arrives, Kit is shocked by the gray, damp landscape, but even more stunned by the Puritanical lifestyle of her uncle’s household. Fitting in is not easy—until she meets Hannah Tupper, an older woman who lives alone and is the only person who lets Kit be herself.

But the colonists believe Hannah is a witch. If they discover Kit is her friend, they will think the same of her. Kit must choose: should she abandon her only friend, or stand by her and risk losing everything? (Speare, 2011)

This summary was full of setting, character, and multiple conflicts, providing the reader with plenty of information as to what to expect from the book.

The summary for *The Red Badge of Courage* was similarly intriguing. It contains a heading, “Step into battle with Henry,” quickly sums up the conflict, and then poses a question:

Henry Fleming dreams of the thrill of battle and performing heroic deeds in the American Civil War. But his illusions are shattered when he comes face to face with the bloodshed and horrors of war. Now he’s a raw recruit, Henry experiences both fear and self-doubt. Will war make Henry a coward or a hero? (Crane, 2009)

Both the use of the word “classic” and listing of publication dates were observed in some of the book summaries. For example, the jacket summary of *Lassie Come-Home* mentions the date of 1940, and the back of the book states, “For six decades *Lassie Come-Home* has touched readers the world over” (Knight, 2003). The Puffin Classics

series, with editions including *The Red Badge of Courage*, indicates that the books are “Puffin Classics” on the front and back covers, but the publisher says nothing about these books being classics in their summaries. Original publication dates were not mentioned either. Puffin’s enticing summary of *Jane Eyre* was followed by a laudation of the book as a “timeless classic” (Brontë, 2011). However, pushing the “classics” point was minimal amongst the books that circulated.

There was one exception to the tendency of avoiding presenting the books as classics amongst new, circulating editions. *Alice in Wonderland* has no traditional summary but a line of brief text emphasizing the history of the book. The text refers to the book as a “deluxe gift edition” and describes the history of the novel’s illustrations over 100 years. Only a relevant quote precedes this history: “‘What is the use of a book,’ thought Alice, ‘without pictures?’” Phrases such as “19th century” and “for over 125 years” are used. Yet this book circulated, likely due to the iconic images on the front and back covers of the book, and possibly because a movie version was released in 2010.

In sum, the book jackets of most of the classic books that circulated did not advertise them as “classics,” instead focusing on plot and conflict. This was contrary to the extent to which uncirculated editions’ summaries stressed their history, as will be described in a later section.

Shelf Location. The height of the shelf on which a book rested was also examined. The fiction wall has 21 bookcases with five shelves per case, totaling 105 shelves. The height of a shelf might matter to individuals, as shorter students cannot as easily browse the higher shelf, and taller students may overlook the low shelf. Five circulations were from one of the three middle levels, two were from the lowest shelf,

and only one was from the highest shelf. This suggests that books on the highest shelves are less likely to be selected; but with only 20 books in the study, this observation may be inconclusive and needs to be confirmed in future research.

Attributes of Uncirculated Books

Uncirculated books were examined in order to determine whether they exhibited certain qualities that made them unattractive to students. The factors considered were edition age, cover art, and summary.

Edition Age. Uncirculated books were generally older than the ones that circulated, and there seemed to be an inverse correlation between the age of edition and the likelihood of it being checked out. Five old editions did not circulate, and the older a new edition was, the less likely it was to circulate. Old editions did not circulate as much as new editions. All old editions were uncirculated except the oldest (published 1942) and the newest (published 1968); students did not check out the other eight old editions.

Cover Art and Summaries. The presence or absence of cover art might be a factor in students' not selecting certain books. Eight uncirculated books had cover art: three old editions and five new editions. It was interesting to examine each new but uncirculated edition to see what was lacking in terms of cover art and summary.

Oliver Twist. The cover art shows a boy on the move, possibly running or hiding from some pursuer. The cover was dark red. Nothing on the cover draws attention. The back of the book summary begins with "A young boy seeks his fortune on the streets of London," and continues:

Until the age of nine, Oliver has spent his life in a workhouse orphanage. Frustrated and hungry, he runs away to London, where he falls into the company of a gang of clever pickpockets, including Fagin, Bill Sykes and the Artful Dodger. What will become of poor Oliver? (Dickens, 1994)

The summary may serve to alienate middle school students, who may not understand what a workhouse is. "The Artful Dodger" may seem like an odd nickname by today's

standards. The summary was short to the point of oversimplifying the story by not providing more information about these characters or the subplots.

A Farewell to Arms. This was another book with mediocre cover art. The blue and black illustration features a seated nurse with a soldier who was facing another direction in the background. The summary on the back of the novel tells what its themes are rather than shows them by describing its events:

The best American novel to emerge from World War I, *A Farewell to Arms* is the unforgettable story of an American ambulance driver on the Italian front and his passion for a beautiful English nurse. Hemingway's frank portrayal of the love between Lieutenant Henry and Catherine Barkley, caught in the inexorable sweep of war, glows with intensity unrivaled in modern literature, while his description of the German attack on Caporetto—of lines of tired men marching in the rain, hungry, weary, and demoralized—is one of the greatest moments in literary history. A story of love and pain, of loyalty and desertion, *A Farewell to Arms* written when he was 30 years old, represents a new romanticism for Hemingway. (Hemingway, 1995)

Though the summary does not call the book a “classic” or mention dates, the use of words that middle school students probably do not know—“inexorable,” “demoralized,” and “romanticism”—does not encourage its circulation amongst that population of readers. The book might appeal to a student interested in love stories or war stories, but if this book was taken off the shelf in the course of the three months of the study, it never left the library.

Little Women. This book was not displayed, but before the study began, it was believed that its proximity to one of the library's entrances might encourage its circulation. The cover shows four girls happily ice skating—the camaraderie of four sisters rather than the many challenges they face together and alone. The spine was light blue, and a gray color tints the illustration, changing a pleasant picture to one that was

somewhat gloomy. The cover of this book probably appeals more to an audience already acquainted with the story, the familiar scene triggering the memory and the impulse to pick up the copy. On the front cover, the book was called “a timeless classic to be read over and over,” and the book-back summary continues:

Originally published in 1868 to instant success, Louisa May Alcott’s story of four sisters coming of age against the backdrop of the Civil War will be met today with the same delight that has thrilled generations of readers. Follow the adventures of Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy, four of the most endearing and enduring characters in American literature, as they grow up in a small New England town and learn about life, friendship, and the power of love along the way. This attractive edition of the treasured classic is sure to be cherished by your own family for years to come. (Alcott, 2004)

The inside of the jacket offers a more detailed description of the plot, focusing on the characters and the conflicts they face. Perhaps *Little Women*, thick at 520 pages, was never picked up from the shelf. It could be that “less is more”—the length of the summaries could have turned readers away. The summary quoted above provides information on its publication, themes, and setting, but was still rather general. No distinction was made between the four sisters. Again, its intended customer appears to be an adult buying for an adolescent rather than a young woman herself.

Peter Pan. The cover was mostly purple and shows the silhouettes of children in flight over a city, in front of the moon. Though it does not show any of the many adventures that the characters have, it shows an iconic image from the novel and its multiple movie adaptations. The book-back summary reads, “Do you believe in fairies? One night Peter Pan flies into the home of the Darling children, and so begins a magical adventure with Peter, the fairy Tinker Bell, the lovely Wendy, and the evil Captain Hook” (Barrie, 2002). This description, laden with character names, implies that the

reader may have a familiarity with the tale of *Peter Pan*. Its cover and description may not be intriguing enough to inspire the reading of a story that was already known.

The Pearl. This book was, in fact, expected to circulate during the experimental period. It was displayed, and its length was a mere 128 pages. Based on this information alone, it was surprising that this book was the only one in Group D that was not checked out. Its bright cover shows a man kneeling on a beach. His face was not visible as he examines a pearl that shines in his hand. Its jacket summary was similar to that of *A Farewell to Arms*. From its first words, it was obvious that it was not geared towards a middle school audience. The summary describes the book as “a classic novella from Nobel Prize-winner John Steinbeck—a stirring work that examines the fallacy of the American dream,” continuing:

For the diver Kino, finding a magnificent pearl means the promise of a better life for his impoverished family. His dream blinds him to the greed and suspicions the pearl arouses in him and his neighbors, and even his loving wife cannot temper his obsession or stem the events leading to the tragedy. For Steinbeck, as Linda Wagner-Martin writes in her introduction, Kino and his wife illustrate the fall from innocence experienced by people who believe that wealth erases all problems. (Steinbeck, 1994)

This description combines plot summary and assessment of theme. The first two sentences alone might have sold the novel to students interested in reading about diving for pearls or the conflict that a married couple has over money, but its lauding the book as a classic and an award-winner and the snippet of literary criticism could have alienated them.

Other books. There were three old editions that had cover art but did not circulate. These were *The Good Earth*, *Gulliver’s Travels*, and *The White Stag*. *The Good Earth*’s dust jacket had a design rather than an illustration informative of the plot.

The colors of *Gulliver's Travels* were still bright despite their 64 years, but the cover was very busy-looking and the copy itself was worn. *The White Stag's* yellow cover had an image of a white deer and a red bird over a black background. None of these books had a summary.

Other uncirculated books were old editions that had neither a jacket summary nor cover art. These books were: *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Around the World in Eighty Days*, and *The Black Stallion*. It appears that they were not checked out because they had none of the qualities that attract young adult readers.

Factors of Potential Interference

The following factors that possibly interfered with the experiment and compromised its testing power were not anticipated in the planning of the study: the effect of group size on circulation, the influence of Accelerated Reader Book levels on student book selections, the lack of rotation among the displayed books, and the failure to replace circulating display copies. These factors were not incorporated into the experimental design, nor were any measures taken to diffuse their impact on the experimental process and/or data quality. Their potential influence is discussed below.

Small Groups. The experimental groups A-D consisted of only five books each. As a result of this small group size, the full effect of the treatments on circulation may not have fully materialized. The circulation statistics for three of the four groups were based on checkouts of one book each. Having such small groups may have minimized circulation, thus limiting the experiment's testing power. Had larger groups with 10 to 20 books in each group been used, there might have been different results.

Accelerated Reader Book Levels. The Accelerated Reader Book Levels (ARBL) was a system that prescribes numerical values to books, helping students find titles that are most suitable to their reading abilities. The levels are based on the difficulty of the text as seen in a book's average number of words per sentence, the average number of characters per word, and the average grade level of individual words (Renaissance Learning, 2011). ARBLs are explained to students in every communication arts class as a way to find books at the most appropriate levels. In the library, all incoming fiction books have book levels written on the inside of the front cover. Colored stickers on the spine of each book also indicate book levels, and an explanation of the stickers appears on bookshelves throughout the fiction section (Julie Harder, personal communication, March 12, 2012).

According to remedial reading teacher Dawn Osman, some teachers require that their students read books at or near their grade levels (Personal communication, March 12, 2012). For example, seventh grade communication arts students are encouraged to read books ranging in reading level from 7.0-7.9. Students then demonstrate their understanding of the novels by taking Accelerated Reader quizzes online. As the librarian says:

Our library circulation increases when teachers require reading for a grade. One way teachers verify that students actually read what they check out is through the use of Accelerated Reader quizzes... more AR quizzes are [now] available for older books and classics, so students have a wider range of choices of books that qualify for the AR program. With this increase in choices, students are more likely to choose classics. (Julie Harder, personal communication, August 11, 2012)

The majority of the older fiction titles used in the study had book levels listed. However, a new edition typically did not have the same book level as the old edition did. In explanation of this difference, Accelerated Reader states:

Some of the books came down because their previous level was partially based on a subjective assessment. . . . Other books came down because our research showed that the textual factors that had resulted in their previous high level were not so important. (Renaissance Learning, Inc., 2011)

Of the 18 titles used in the study for which a comparison could be made, five newer editions had a lower reading level than the old edition, eight had a higher reading level, and five had the same reading level. Seven of the books were different by one level or more, which was a substantial gap that could lead to a student being directed to a book with which he or she will more likely not be challenged by or have to struggle through. As a result of these varying AR levels, the teachers' ARBL requirements may have affected circulation. If a student was attracted to a certain book but then saw that its book level was much higher or lower than his or her current grade level, he or she might have rejected it.

The research data suggest that probably some students took note of the AR numbers provided inside of the novels. The book levels of editions used in the study ranged from 5.1 to 11.3. The seven circulated books ranged from 5.4 to 9.2, which correlate with middle school reading levels. The average book level for all editions used in the study, with the exception of *The Count of Monte Cristo* for which a level was not available, was 7.8. The average book level per circulation was lower at 6.9. Students could have been dissuaded from checking out books that have appealing covers and summaries if the Accelerated Reader Book Level (ARBL) was lower or higher than he or

she was accustomed to reading. If so, this factor would have impacted circulation and the experiment's capacity to obtain reliable results.

No Rotation of Displayed Books. The lack of rotation of the displayed books might have discouraged their circulation as months passed. The overall circulation decreased over time, with the majority of checkouts taking place in the first few weeks. Five of the displayed books had circulated by the end of the first week of October. In the third grading period, which started on November 7th, 2011, the only circulation activities were renewals. By then, students might have become tired of seeing the same books on display since late September. Lack of variety in the shelves and change in the arrangement of displayed books was possibly detrimental in interesting users, thus contributing to low circulation and a possibly less-than-accurate experimental outcome.

Lack of Replacements. Also contributing to lower circulation figures was that books were out of the library for lengthy periods and replacement copies were not available. For example, *The Witch of Blackbird Pond* spent only 12 days in the library during the period of study. Had an additional copy been placed in the spot of each of the checked out books, the per-edition circulation might have been greater. As this was not the case, potentially additional circulation of the book while it was checked out had no chance to materialize and be observed, and the reduced number of books available at various points over the course of the study contributed to low circulation captured in the experimental data.

Summary

The experiment's general results showed a difference in circulation based on the combination of edition and display factors. This experimental study revealed that the

circulation of classic books was higher for new editions that were displayed. Results were equally low for books that were old and on the shelf, old and displayed, and new and on the shelf. This suggests that the combined treatments of new edition and display may encourage circulation. However, the experiment failed to reject either of the null hypotheses—circulation may or may not be affected by new editions and displaying.

An in-depth analysis of book attributes revealed contributing factors to circulation and lack of circulation for certain books. Students were drawn to books with interesting cover art and informative summaries. However, the uncirculated books had no cover art or unattractive cover art and no summaries or poor summaries. In terms of placement being a factor, most books that circulated came from the three middle-level bookshelves. Uncirculated books tended to be located on the highest of the bookshelves, where they were not as easy to see or to reach.

Despite efforts to avoid interferential factors, the testing power of the experiment was potentially compromised. Accelerated Reader book level, lack of rotation, and lack of replacement copies for checked-out books might have distorted the circulation data. Small experimental group size might have further contributed to this distortion.

These results call for further study to determine the role that edition age and display play in the circulation of classic books in a middle school library. The experimental design could be improved by including a larger number of classics, rotating the books, setting up a separate display area, and replacing checked-out books with a backup copy. These suggestions will be explored further in the next chapter.

Conclusion

This experiment sought to identify effective intervention measures for increasing the circulation of classic literature in a modern middle school library. For three months, 10 old editions and 10 new editions of classics were distributed into non-displayed or displayed groups to determine if the treatments led to increased circulation. The main finding was that the combined factors of display and new edition appeared to have a positive effect on circulation. Although the experiment did not yield statistically significant supporting evidence by rejecting the null hypotheses, the data did show an evidently positive pattern.

This concluding chapter first revisits the research questions in light of the findings. Then, it discusses practical implications of this study, offering advice for school librarians on how to boost the circulation of classics in their library collection. Finally, it reflects on the limitations of the study and outlines future research directions.

Key Research Findings

This study found that updated editions of classic books on display are more likely to circulate in a middle school library than old editions of classics or new editions that are not displayed. In other words, the combination of replacing used classic books with new editions and putting these new editions on display may increase their circulation. Though the findings of this study were not statistically significant, the results of the study suggest that the combined treatments had a positive effect on circulation. The research questions asked in Chapter 1 were:

Research Question #1. What effect does updating with new editions have on the circulation of classic novels? Specifically, does the replacement of old editions of classic novels with updated editions affect their circulation in a middle school library?

Old editions of classic books were replaced with new editions to determine if circulation would be boosted. This had a positive effect upon circulation when the new editions were displayed. New editions not put on display had the same circulation count (a single book) as did old editions on the shelf and old editions on display. New editions on display were much more popular, with five times as many circulation counts as that of any other group. Overall, the circulation of updated editions of classic books was three times that of old editions. These results are consistent with Reuter's (2007) finding that cover art was central to patrons' selection of books. They also support similar observations reported by various practitioners. However, the new editions that circulated had also been put on display.

Research Question #2. What effect does display have on circulation of classic novels? Specifically, does display affect the circulation of classic novels in a middle school library?

Novels were displayed on bookstands to see if this would lead to increased circulation. Circulation was increased when the novels displayed were new editions. Old editions that were displayed had the same circulation as both old and new editions not put on display. Overall, the circulation of updated editions of classic books was three times that of old editions. Still, the heightened circulation occurred in the group with two treatments combined, so the display factor alone cannot be credited for the circulation of Group D being five times greater than that of any other group.

Overall, the circulation of displayed editions of classic books (new and old editions altogether) was three times as many as that of those not displayed. This finding agrees with Koelling's (2004) advice to display classics with the covers facing out. But as the higher circulation occurred in the group with both treatment factors, the treatment factor of new edition may have played a role.

Implications for Practice

The retention of classic literature in school libraries was an interesting dilemma. Some of the renowned books in the Pattonville Heights Middle School Library have been overlooked by many students. This study sought to determine if replacing old editions of classic titles with new editions and putting them on display effectively increase their circulation among middle school students. Although the experimental results were inconclusive, they suggest that the tactics of replacing classic titles with new editions combined with putting them on display may improve their circulation.

Most of the classic titles used in this study were first published before the staff members were born, and the outdated editions were older in age than the students. Ordering new editions of these classic titles for replacement not only allowed for this experiment to take place, but also modernized a long-neglected part of the fiction collection.

This study found that students are attracted to books of classic titles that look like contemporary novels. Therefore, updating classics may be an effective strategy for increasing their circulation. Librarians should assess the condition of classic books and replace damaged, worn, and unattractive editions. When examining each low-circulating classic title closely, they should focus on the quality of cover art and summary. First of

all, is there any cover art? If not, the book should almost certainly be replaced. Does the cover art give an idea as to the book's genre, plot, character, setting, or other literary elements that will form a connection with the right reader? If not, a replacement that has some of these attributes should be ordered. Similarly, does the book have a summary, and does the summary focus on the plot instead of it being a "classic"? The preferred new edition should not only have a summary, but also a good one. A summary emphasizing that the book was a classic or timeless and going on about how it was one of the best books of a particular literary movement ever written or by a particular author may turn away a potential young reader.

In sum, when ordering replacement editions, librarians should select a new edition based on the appeal of its cover art and the quality of its summary. Classic books, particularly those in the public domain, typically have several editions available. While not all classic titles currently have an edition as appealing as 2011's *Jane Eyre* published by HarperTeen or *The Witch of Blackbird Pond* by Houghton Mifflin, this may change in the future as publishers continue to design their books with today's young adults in mind. Young adults should not be given handed-down editions from their parents' and grandparents' time. They deserve new editions that will catch their attention and inspire reading. If each generation receives its own edition, then each copy will have its own readers.

Limitations

The research design was chosen with careful consideration of rigor and practical feasibility, and the experiment was carried out with the highest attention to detail. However, in retrospect, it becomes evident that the study suffered from three major

limitations, namely, having too few books in the experimental groups, overlooking the impact of checkout duration, and failing to rotate books on display.

Due to the rather restrictive criteria for selecting older editions (outlined in Chapter 3) that were both in need of replacement and desired as new editions, only 20 titles were available for inclusion in the experiment. As a result, each experimental group could have only five books. Too small a sample size reduced the testing power of the experiment, and as a result made the experiment inadequate to detect for statistically significant effect of each treatment. This was evident in Groups A-C, of which each had only a single circulation count. Future studies should make the experimental groups as large as possible, probably at least 10 books per group, in order to reveal statistically significant differences between the old/new editions groups and shelved/displayed groups.

Another limitation of the study was that when a book on display was checked out, it was not replaced with a new copy, and consequently the bookstand was left empty until the book was returned. The potential for multiple circulations of each book during the same time window was decreased because only one copy of the book could be checked out at a time. A book that appealed to one student was likely to appeal to others, so having only one copy of each book available may have contributed to the low circulation counts of novels in the study. In future studies to determine the appeal of classic books to a middle school audience, at least two identical copies of each book should be secured, with one always remaining on display and the other one(s) for circulation. When all backup copies are checked out, care should be taken to record inquiries about a book as additional circulation counts.

The third limitation of the study is the lack of rotation of displayed books. The displayed books that failed to circulate did not leave their bookstands for three months, and those that returned to the library after a circulation went back to the same bookstand on the same bookshelf. This was necessary due to the fiction bookshelves being the chosen display area and the desirability to keep each book on the shelf where someone searching for the title might find it. The downside of this placement is that a student could have passed the same book that he or she was uninterested in many times. Future research endeavors might benefit from choosing a display area that would allow for the books to be rearranged every few weeks or month.

Future Research Directions

Evidently, more research is needed to determine the effectiveness of replacing old editions of classic titles with new editions and marketing classic titles by display. Furthermore, additional intervention tactics for increasing the circulation of classic literature in school libraries must be explored. One suggestion is to replicate this study with necessary adjustment in experimental design to address the identified limitations. A greater number of classic titles should be included in the study, allowing for larger experimental groups. In addition, books on display should be rotated to avoid bias due to potential “location” effect.

Another potential research project would be to compare the circulation of new editions of classic novels to the circulation of contemporary young adult books to determine the degree of popularity of classic titles. By comparing circulation statistics of the two groups, it would be possible to see how classics circulate when they are physically placed next to non-classics.

Finally, the placement of the displayed books could be changed. The books in this study competed with dozens of other books that were similarly displayed on book stands in the hardback fiction section. Having a different display area that is solely for classic books might bring different results. One option is to position the books in a location that is apart from the rest of the collection, such as on a table or at the end of an aisle. The books might attract more attention as a group than they did when arranged alphabetically by author within the hardback fiction section. Signage could advertise books in the section as “classics,” or the section could remain unlabeled like other book display areas.

Acquiring e-books of classic titles and making them available for reading on tablet devices (i.e., circulating by downloading) is another option worthy of investigation as an intervention tactic for increasing the circulation of classic titles. Many classics are in the public domain and thus available free to download. The novelty of access to the technology could lure users at least to try a classic novel.

In summary, many possibilities remain to be explored and questions to be answered. This experimental study brought up more questions than it answered, but it is a significant step in the right direction nevertheless.

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Appendix A: Bibliographic List of Books Used in the Study

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Appendix B: Circulation Log Form

To be completed by staff when a book from the experimental study is checked out while the collection management software is out of service.

| Date | Circle one | Book Title |
|------|------------------|------------|
| | Staff or Student | |
| | Staff or Student | |
| | Staff or Student | |
| | Staff or Student | |
| | Staff or Student | |
| | Staff or Student | |
| | Staff or Student | |
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| | Staff or Student | |

Appendix C: Exemplary Cover Art of Old and New Editions in Contrast

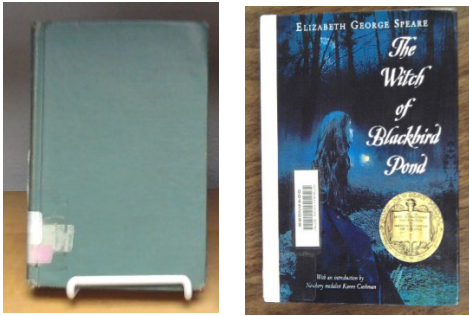


Figure 1. *The Witch of Blackbird Pond* (Left, old edition, 1958; Right, new edition, 2011)



Figure 2. *Lassie Come-Home* (Left, old edition, 1971; Right, new edition, 2003)

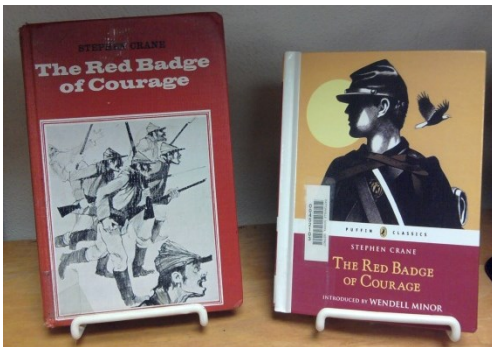
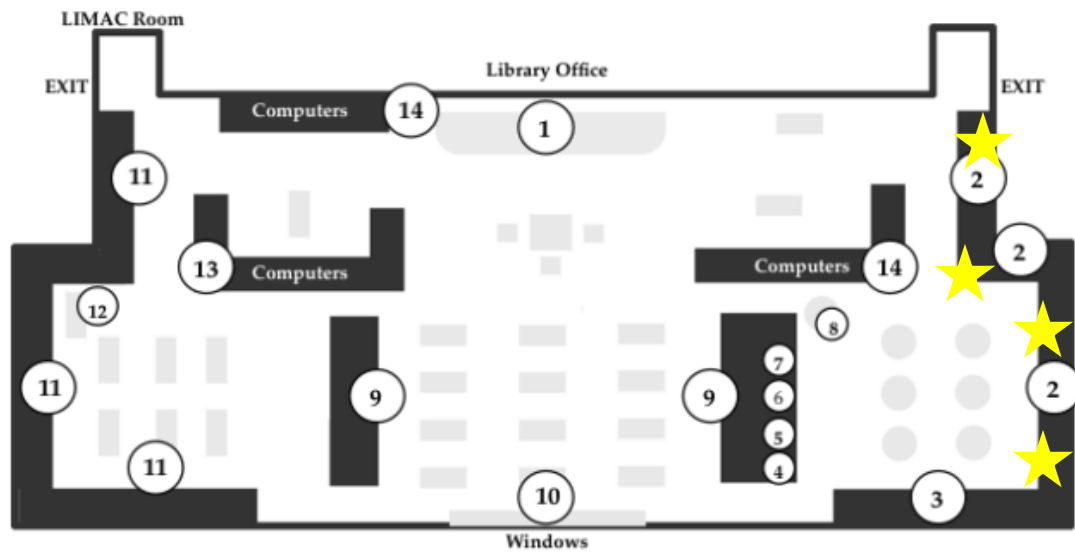


Figure 3. Old and new editions of *The Red Badge of Courage* (Left, old edition, 1971; Right, new edition, 2009)

Appendix D: Heights Library Floor Plan



- | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1) Circulation Desk | 8) Paperback Fiction |
| 2) Hardback Fiction | 9) Reference |
| 3) Biographies | 10) Magazines |
| 4) Collected Biographies | 11) Non-Fiction |
| 5) Story Collections | 12) Graphic Novels |
| 6) Audio Books | 13) Colored Printer |
| 7) Quick Readers | 14) Black and White Printers |

★ = Display area

Appendix E: Illustration of Bookshelf Display

Part of the Hardback Fiction wall with books on display stands circled.



Appendix F: Distribution of Title Editions into Experimental Groups

| Title | Edition | On Display | Cover Art | Jacket Summary | Checkout Count |
|--|----------------|-------------------|------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>Alice's Adventures in Wonderland</i> | New | No | Yes | No | 1 |
| <i>Around the World in Eighty Days</i> | Old | Yes | No | No | 0 |
| <i>Black Stallion, The</i> | Old | Yes | No | No | 0 |
| <i>Count of Monte Cristo, The</i> | Old | No | No | No | 0 |
| <i>Farewell to Arms, A</i> | New | No | Yes | Yes | 0 |
| <i>For Whom the Bell Tolls</i> | Old | Yes | Yes | No | 1 |
| <i>Good Earth, The</i> | Old | Yes | No | Yes | 0 |
| <i>Gulliver's Travels</i> | Old | Yes | Yes | No | 0 |
| <i>Jane Eyre</i> | New | Yes | Yes | Yes | 1 |
| <i>Lassie Come-Home</i> | New | Yes | Yes | Yes | 1 |
| <i>Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, The</i> | Old | No | No | No | 0 |
| <i>Little Women</i> | New | No | Yes | Yes | 0 |
| <i>Oliver Twist</i> | New | No | Yes | Yes | 0 |
| <i>Pearl, The</i> | New | Yes | Yes | Yes | 0 |
| <i>Peter Pan</i> | New | No | Yes | Yes | 0 |
| <i>Red Badge of Courage, The</i> | New | Yes | Yes | Yes | 1 |
| <i>Tale of Two Cities, A</i> | Old | No | No | No | 1 |
| <i>White Stag, The</i> | Old | No | No | No | 0 |
| <i>Witch of Blackbird Pond, The</i> | New | Yes | Yes | Yes | 2 |
| <i>Wuthering Heights</i> | Old | No | No | No | 0 |