

PREFERENCES OF  
MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS  
IN HUMOROUS LITERATURE,

by

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

The study of humorous literature and the adolescent is certainly worthwhile, but not often undertaken by researchers. There are many studies of all varieties centering around this particular age group, but few are devoted solely to adolescents and their literature preferences.

This proposed research project will investigate and discuss adolescent reading preferences. It will show that humorous literature is of high interest to adolescents and the comparisons between male and female literature preferences. This project will also describe humor not only as a recommended unit of study for language arts classes, but also as a requested one.

Most research dealing with humor in any form has been concerned with infants, pre-schoolers, and slightly older children. Adults and special interest groups (such as the handicapped) have also received research, while the adolescent group seems to be often overlooked. Damico and Purkey (1978) stressed this point in their study concerning adolescent "class clowns". A literature

search of their topic revealed no research or studies concerning this group. Martinneau, in 1972, reviewed the humor studies available and reported that there were only a few journal articles, books, and dissertations relating in some way to humor, with none thoroughly examining this topic.

Much humor research has been completed by psychologists or others who are not necessarily educators. Many of these studies are based on the various psychological or emotional factors involved with humor instead of identifying the certain humor preferences of any particular group.

Humor is of much interest to adolescents. Nevo and Nevo (1983) found all of their subjects knew what to do when asked to create a humorous answer or response for their survey.

Omwake (1937) found there was a tendency for students to rate themselves high on having a sense of humor. Brumbaugh (1940) discovered that almost every child attempted to draw a humorous picture in a survey, although many were unable to complete other sections of a questionnaire.

A recurring theme throughout adolescent humor studies indicated that those students possessing a positive sense of humor are socially and emotionally ahead of their peers who do not own such a marked sense of humor.

Adolescence is a critical time for students and there are many influences and pressures surrounding the student at this time which must somehow be dealt with. Humor, according to Brumbaugh (1940), is an important part of development and should therefore be included in an adolescent's course of study.

#### Statement of the Problem

This study is concerned with the literature preferences of middle school students and centers upon humorous literature. Although it is during this critical period of development that students are achieving new interests and ideas, few studies have increased our knowledge of humor at this or at a pre-adolescent level, according to Brumbaugh (1940).

Adolescents are often ignored because of their age; some researchers tend to place them with older



children in their research, or with a young adult group. They are not always used as a separate age group in research.

Much of the existing humor research has been completed by those outside the field of education. There are many humor studies that discuss the definition, theory, psychological or emotional aspects of humor without speaking of any specific group. When groups are studied, children are often the most likely candidates for research, beginning with infants and centering around those in the early grades. There is a definite need for educational research into this area, but educators also tend to avoid this research topic. Some educators might see adolescent humor as frivolous or unimportant and therefore ignore it. Humor is sometimes seen as belonging outside of the classroom door instead of inside. There are complaints of the difficulty of finding suitable materials for this age group or that the inclusion of humor into the classroom will provide only a breeding ground for class clowns and ultimately chaos. Educators are sometimes fearful of humor, feeling a loss of control or authority when it is used or studied. Some use humor incorrectly, becoming

comedians and failing to successfully teach the content of their lesson. However, studies (Kappas [1967], Kenderdine [1931], Laing [1939], Omwake [1937], Laffal, Levine, and Redlich [1953], Cunningham [1962]) mention that humor parallels intelligence and those students possessing a sense of humor are held above their peers in both popularity and emotional stability. Students having a sense of humor also tend to have a higher positive self-image, according to Goodchilds (1963).

The purpose of this study is to answer the following questions:

1. Are middle school students interested in humorous literature?
2. Are there differences by grade level, achievement level, and/or sex among middle level students in their degree of interest in humor?
3. Is there a significant difference between middle schoolers' preference for humor when compared to other literature categories?

#### Significance of the Study

This study is concerned with the literature preferences of middle school students. This study will

provide important information to those educators involved with middle schoolers, and especially those educators involved with middle school language arts.

Humor research is an uncommon area for many researchers, and especially with those having an educational background. Previous studies have shown, however, that adolescents view humor favorably.

This study is significant in the following ways:

1. Adolescents were the specific subjects of this humor research. Humor research has been completed in the past, but only a few studies have centered around this particular age group.
2. Adolescents were shown to be interested in humorous literature, and their other reading preferences were explored.
3. Adolescent differences and their relation to humorous literature appreciation were discussed.
4. Much humor research has been conducted by those outside the field of education. This survey has taken the educational viewpoint with regard to humor, and shown that it is a worthwhile addition to middle school programs.

This research will serve as a pilot study in the area of adolescent humor. It is hoped that this survey will invite others to also research this topic, for studies in this area remain relatively few.

#### Limitations of the Study

This study is limited in that it will be conducted at only two grade levels (seventh and eighth) and in one academic area (language arts). The language arts instruction is from only two teachers at each building. (One instructor for the seventh graders and one for the eighth grade students.) Both participating schools are in small Midwestern towns, and both are approximately the same size. The population of School 1 is 4,948, while the population of School 2 is 6,572. The students are predominantly white with farming being the typical family background and/or occupation.

#### Hypotheses

The following three hypotheses will be examined:

1. Middle School students will indicate a preference for reading humorous literature.
2. There will be no significant differences between

middle schoolers' grade, sex, or achievement level in their degree of interest in humorous literature.

3. There will be a significant difference between middle schoolers' preference for humor when compared to other literature categories.

#### Operational Definitions

1. Difference between humor preferences--A comparison of the students who indicated an interest in humorous literature by grade, sex, and achievement level.
2. Difference between literature preferences--A comparison of the literature survey answers selected by the students on the interest inventory according to grade, sex, and achievement level.
3. Interest in humor--The number of students who indicated they prefer humorous literature on the questionnaire for this study.
4. Literature preferences--The reading material categories rated by students on the interest inventory.

4. Standardized test scores--The student's percentile ranking on a prior standardized achievement test given by the school district. The student's percentile score on the language arts section was considered.

#### Definition of Terms

1. Action/Adventure--Fast-paced stories containing aggressive and/or exciting events and characters.
2. Biography--The story of someone's life, or the telling of a distinct achievement of an individual.
3. Classics--Literature considered to be of high and lasting quality.
4. Drama/Plays--Dialogue is "spoken" by each character.
5. Fantasy--Stories with fantastic, incredulous, and/or wishful events.
6. Fiction--Stories which are basically the author's own imagination.
7. Historical Fiction--Fictional plot and/or characters centered around a real event or era.
8. Humor Interest Inventory--An opinion questionnaire consisting of 17 types of literature.

9. Humorous Stories--Stories containing various amusing elements.
10. Middle School Students--Those students in grades seven and eight.
11. Mystery/Suspense--Literature considered macabre, eerie, frightening, or suspenseful.
12. Newspaper Articles--Any article taken from a newspaper.
13. Novels--Literature of varying length containing a complete and developed plot or storyline.
14. Poetry--Ideas written in verse form. The poetry may or may not rhyme.
15. Romance--Stories centering around the emotion of love.
16. Science Fiction--Fiction concerned with science or scientific ideas.
17. Short Stories--Complete tales with a beginning, climax, and ending, usually 20 pages or less.
18. Sports Stories--Stories centered around the sports world.
19. Survey Clarification--A random selection of those participating in this study. Responses were checked to determine if the students responded accurately to the questionnaire.

20. Teenage Literature--Literature written exclusively for teenagers.

#### Variables

##### Independent Variables

1. Grade level--Seventh and eighth grade language arts students.
2. Sex--Male and female middle school language arts students.
3. Achievement level--The low ability language arts student (1-33), the average ability student (34-66), and the high ability student (67-99).

##### Dependent Variables

1. Humorous literature--Category number six on the interest inventory.
2. Humorous literature differences and preferences--A specific review of those students indicating an interest in humorous literature.
3. Literature differences and preferences--The students' opinions of literature (excluding humor) as expressed on the inventory.



CHAPTER TWO  
Literature Review

There is a large amount of research devoted to the adolescent and his various interests or problems. Few of these studies, however, deal with humor and the adolescent. A computer search with the Thesaurus of ERIC Descriptors and Psychological Abstracts using a variety of descriptors resulted in only a few studies concerning the topic of humor and fewer still concerned specifically with adolescent humor. Furthermore, those articles found dealing with this subject are varied and cover many different areas of the topic without much overlap with each other. The following main points are recurrent in the research concerned with adolescent humor:

1. The understanding and appreciation of humor runs parallel with emotional development. (e.g. Laing, 1938, Kappas, 1967.)
2. The higher the student's IQ, the greater his/her appreciation and understanding of humor. (e.g. Kenderdine, 1931, Justin, 1932, Mones, 1939, Kappas, 1957, Prentice & Fathman, 1975.)

3. A sense of humor is regarded as a positive asset. Those possessing a sense of humor are rated highly in popularity among their peers. These students also have a higher self-image and see themselves more positively than others. (e.g. Bird, 1925, Goodchilds and Smith, 1963, O'Connell, 1969, Mettee, Hrelec, & Wilkens, 1971, Domash, 1975, Ransohoff, 1975, Winick, 1976, McGhee, 1977, Damico & Purkey, 1978.)
4. Students see and appreciate humor to a greater degree when with others. They laugh more frequently when in groups or with another than when alone. (e.g. Kenderdine, 1931, Perl, 1933, Doris & Fierman, 1955, Chapman, 1975, Ransohoff, 1975.)
5. The use of humor tends to release or ease anxiety among adolescents. (e.g. Laffal, Levine, & Redlich, 1953, Wolfenstein, 1955, Zwerling, 1955, Coser, 1960, Fadiman, 1972, Yorukoglu, 1974, Domash, 1975, Ransohoff, 1975, Winick, 1976, McGhee, 1977, Park, 1977, Mahaney & Townsend, 1981.)

6. The use of humorous material in schoolwork aids in an adolescent's comprehension and retention of the ideas presented. (e.g. McGhee, 1977, Park, 1977, Sheppard, 1977, Koenke, 1981, Lehr, 1981, Mahaney & Townsend, 1981, Perri, 1981, Sudol, 1981.)
7. Students recognize humor and are able to respond to it in at least some degree. Nearly every adolescent feels he has a sense of humor. (e.g. Omwake, 1937, Brumbaugh, 1940, Nevo & Nevo, 1983.)

This literature review will first discuss the previous themes and other findings relating to adolescent humor. These findings will be discussed in chronological order.

This review will also discuss the cognitive approach to the study of humor, as this approach attempts to show how humor is constructed. The cognitive review follows the chronological one.

#### Chronological Review

A great deal of humor research was completed in the 1930's and 1940's. Of course, there were earlier studies.

Bird (1925) conducted an early children's humor test. The favored humor was the unusual antics of persons or animals. Another favorite was the discomfiture of an individual. Children whose standard varied widely from the norm were seen by others as being socially unpopular, uncooperative, shy, or otherwise ignored. The test was seen as most humorous by those children aged four years to the fourth grade, lessening by the seventh grade into adulthood.

Another early article (Anonymous, 1927) reported that laughter raises low blood pressure and stimulates the heart. It also lowers high blood pressure and eases tension.

Kenderdine (1931) centered research around the pre-school child and concluded that the presence of other children seems to be an essential element in the occurrence of laughter in children. Children seldom laughed alone, but the presence of others did not necessarily mean increased laughter. This study also indicated that those students having a higher IQ tended to laugh more frequently than did others.

Justin (1932) discussed laughter and theorized as to why a person laughs. Grade school children were studied for this research, which again mentions that there is a

positive relationship between IQ and laughter response. The relation of seconds of response to incongruity and IQ was the most clearly indicated.

Perl (1933) discussed the influence of social factors upon humor appreciation. The research problem here was whether jokes presented under certain social conditions were judged to be more or less funny than equally humorous jokes presented under different social conditions. The subjects used were college students. It was concluded that jokes vocally and visually presented to a group were judged funnier than jokes judged privately. Jokes presented visually seemed funnier than jokes presented vocally, and social facilitation had a much greater influence in raising the scores of the poor jokes than it had in raising the scores of the good ones.

Wells (1934) studied the humor preferences of pupils in junior and senior high schools. With all grades tested, absurdity was favored, followed by slapstick, satire and whimsy. The total differences between the tastes of boys and girls were slight in the seventh grade, much greater in the ninth grade, still greater in the twelfth grade, and greatest between men and women of the mature group. It was also found that grade in school and social background were shown to

have more relation to tastes in humorous literature than did mental ability or social adjustment. Also, the appreciation of humorous literature seems to broaden to some degree with advancement in age and grade, and appreciation for style increases toward the end of high school. The study ends with the conclusion that the ninth grade may be the most satisfactory period for developing literary tastes.

Omwake (1937) studied the sense of humor and its relation to sex, age, and personal characteristics. The subjects for this study were college and high school students. The conclusions here showed that students rated themselves high on having a sense of humor. Only one percent rated themselves below average in having a sense of humor. It was also mentioned that the success of a joke depends as much upon the responding subject as upon the content of the joke.

Laing (1938) surveyed students from ages 7 to 18 on the topic of humor, also finding that the development of a sense of humor runs parallel with intellectual and emotional development. The adolescent group surveyed again showed marked individual differences in their sense of humor. Visual wit was appreciated in all

groups, but adolescents did rate verbal humor higher than did the other groups. Adolescents also tended to reflect on why they laughed at a certain humor item.

Brumbaugh (1940) discussed the place of humor in the school curriculum. The students used for this research were in grades three to six. Almost every child surveyed attempted to draw a humorous picture although many were unable to complete other parts of a questionnaire. Verbal humor was rated highly and realistic stories were rated low. Favored stories contained absurdities, incongruities, and stupidity. The textbooks containing humor were also rated highly by the students. English classes provided the largest number of laughs in all grades, but evidence showed that teachers did not enjoy the same humorous situations as their pupils. However, the teacher was seen as the most important stimulus for laughter in the classroom.

Witty (1941) discussed the appreciation of comics by students in grades four, five, and six. The reading of comics appeared to be the most popular of all reading pursuits in this study. The students also enjoyed creating their own comics. These activities seem to satisfy the middle grade child's need for adventurous

or exciting experiences. Humor was not seen as particularly important here, for many comics do not contain humor or humorous situations. It was recommended that the teacher provide the student with a variety of quality reading materials to satisfy this need for excitement and adventure.

Andrews (1943) saw humor as a way to gather more information about an individual's personality. Subjects were given various articles of humor and asked to rate each. The responses to certain types of humorous material may serve as indicators of basic personality traits which are difficult to study by other methods. The subject matter of humor allows for establishing rapport with a subject and provides insight into the study of feeling and emotion. A person's answers on a humor test serve as unconscious measures of personality.

Laffal, Levine, and Redlich (1953) researched an anxiety reduction theory of humor. They found that the greater the anxiety reduction, the greater the mirth response. No mirth resulted if the humorous stimuli provided a good deal of anxiety. There was minimal response if low anxiety was evoked. The humor stimuli must be on the level of the listener for comprehension.



Wolfenstein (1953) discussed children's understanding of jokes. It was found that joke comprehension tends to increase with age. Intelligence is also relevant, for the rules of correct joke construction must be learned. Joke comprehension varies with age, intelligence, and in the interest of a particular joke. The distinction between joking and non-joking material is also something that depends upon age. It is again shown here that the understanding of humorous material is dependent upon emotional and intellectual development.

Doris and Fierman (1955) studied the relationship between humor and anxiety using college students as subjects. There seemed to be a relationship between a subject's rating of personal anxiety and his humor preferences. The more anxious students preferred aggressive humor. The study again mentioned that subjects rated jokes differently when tested alone than when tested in a group.

Wolfenstein (1955) researched laughter and stated that it serves as a substitute for a variety of functions. Laughter may serve as a defense against anxiety or to mask painful experiences. It is also a substitute for a wide variety of distressing emotions. Laughter in normal children postpones the need for immediate physical

gratification, substitutes verbal expression for motor expressions, and produces an admiring response for the joke-telling skill.

Zwerling (1955) studied the use of humor in diagnostic and therapeutic interviewing. A patient's favorite joke was assumed to be related to some emotional conflict which could be of use in diagnosis or therapy. A favorite joke may serve to reveal anxiety or provide insight into an area or conflict otherwise hidden. It provides insights in much the same way as dreams or early memories do. It may also serve as a guide into other areas of conflict. Although useful, this technique is limited to only certain types of therapy.

Grziwok and Scodel (1956) found that aggressive subjects preferred aggressive humor also.

Shapiro, Biber, and Minuchin (1957) used a cartoon situations test to assess aspects of teacher personality. The qualities of teachers are now seen as critical determinants of teaching effectiveness. The subjects were beginning teachers. The findings indicated that responses to the test were reliably related to important teaching aspects. The cartoon test may prove useful for assessing attitudes concerning children and methods of

relating to children. It also indicated that a good sense of humor was necessary for teaching.

Carr (1958) discussed the use of comic books in education. The disadvantages of using comics included the content being detrimental to desirable reading traits, the use of incorrect grammar, and unrealistic ideas. The advantages included the use of humor, reading ease, and knowledge expansion. Comic books have universal appeal, are easy to read, and readily available. Young children prefer fantasy comics, early elementary enjoy heroes, junior high students enjoy adventure, and high schoolers read romance comics. Comics may be used in the classroom, but interest should be centered upon the highest quality comic books.

Coser (1960) researched laughter and humor among colleagues. Humor is affected by the social distance between persons holding different positions in the same group. A positive aspect includes allowing relief from serious common concerns. A negative aspect requires group members to follow accepted practices. Humor is used to lend support and to also ask for it.

Levine and Redlich (1960) studied the intellectual and emotional factors found in the appreciation of humor using psychiatric groups and one normal control group.

It was found that the understanding of humor is dependent upon emotional and intellectual development. Intellectual and emotional deficiencies can interfere with the appreciation of humor. Psychiatric patients were not as able to enjoy humor as readily as others because of emotional factors. The failure to appreciate the humor could be traced to an underlying wish to avoid recognizing the joke because of some conflict which the theme aroused. The given cartoon or joke touched off the anxiety associated with the conflict.

Winick (1962) studied teenagers, satire, and MAD magazine. The most typical MAD reader is a high school student. Adolescents from economically secure households enjoy MAD more, for they are more aware and likely to enjoy satirizing the status symbols they hold. Satire is the end result of indignation and indignation is based upon awareness. MAD is popular with adolescents for they learn to exist in society while laughing at it. The title is a contradiction, meaning both foolishness and anger. This contradiction is appropriate, for adolescents are living in a contradictory lifestyle.

Ausubel (1963) states that meaningful generalizations cannot be simply given to a learner, but must instead be achieved through problem-solving activities. Also,

attempts to master verbal concepts fail unless the learner has recent prior experience with the realities to which these verbal concepts refer.

Goodchilds and Smith (1963) studied those students regarded as wits. The wit was found to consider himself intelligent. Wits also conformed less to group opinions, had a positive self-image, and did better on problem solving tasks than those not considered as wits.

Zigler, Levine, and Gould (1965) surveyed the humor response of normal and retarded children. Again the appreciation of humor depends upon a subject's intellectual and emotional development. As expected, the retarded groups showed a much poorer comprehension of the given cartoons than did the normal group. The comprehension of the retarded groups was approximately two years behind their expected level. The retarded group produced a mirth response to the cartoons regardless of their comprehension when told the cartoons were funny. This was due to their extreme desire to please the examiner and receive social reinforcement.

Smith and White (1965) surveyed the relationship between wit, creativity, and sarcasm. The subjects for this study were airmen at their base. It was found that wit and creativity were positively correlated, and that

creativity and defensiveness were negatively correlated. It was hypothesized that the wit would be an effective leader, but this was not supported. Wits were not effective leaders but were associated with less defensiveness and more effective group problem solving. Most of the positive relationships with wits were found to be associated with sarcastic wit.

Another study by Zigler, Levine, and Gould (1967) discussed the cognitive factor in children's appreciation of humor. It was found that while comprehension is necessary for mirth response, it does not necessarily guarantee a mirth response. Students laugh at those cartoons which make appropriate demands on their cognitive structures, not at those which are too easy or difficult. This suggested that an important ingredient in humor is the degree to which the humor stimulus makes a cognitive demand on the individual. Children enjoy most the humorous material which lies at the edge of their capacities. The students surveyed here were in the third, fifth, and seventh grades.

Kappas (1967) mentioned also that the formation of a sense of humor follows a general developmental pattern dependent upon intellectual and emotional development.

A child's comprehension of verbal humor grows only at the rate that he does, for one must know what is normal before recognizing an incongruity. The average child's sense of humor develops on a progressive, though intermittent, course. Also, as a child matures his humor appreciation becomes more individual, and there are differences between males and females. Kappas also found a positive relationship between intelligence, personality, emotional maturity and experience to a sense of humor. Adolescents tend to reflect upon why they laugh and have definite humor preferences. They also tend to have a greater appreciation for verbal wit and humor.

Monson (1968) tested fifth grade responses to humorous stories. The sex and socioeconomic level of the subjects seemed to be the most influential factors in determining humor responses. Girls tended to respond more freely than did boys.

Berlyne (1969) discussed the aspects of laughter, humor, and play. It is believed that the absence of the above three can impair physical and psychological health, but conclusive evidence is not available and would be hard to find and document. Humor's motivating factors include discovery, self-relief, self-justification, exclusiveness,

and discrediting. The most important theories surrounding humor include attitudes of superiority, conflict, and relief from stress. Humor releases tension and plays an important social function as well. In literature and in life the wit teaches us about ourselves.

Laughter can be described in terms of pleasure, superiority, safety, satisfaction, energy release, and a form of body language.

Studies on play define it as having an emotional element of pleasure and being related to maturity. Motivations for play in children include functional pleasure, relief from stress through fantasy, achievement, novelty, and social interaction. Enjoyment of play is influenced by the amount of skill required, the thinking process, the maturity to handle success and failure, sex, age and time. Adult play has been identified as organized play with competition, criterion for determining a winner, and rules. Adults enjoy games of physical skill, strategy, and chance. Children enjoy practice games, make-believe games, and games with rules.

O'Connell (1969) studied the wit and his relation to others. He found that the funny wit was regarded by his



peers as a leader, popular, active, and independent. The sarcastic wit seemed more hostile and less popular. There was little relationship between wit production and appreciation. Males favored hostile wit while females tended to prefer nonsense wit.

Wilson and Patterson (1969) surveyed the humor differences between high school liberals and conservatives. Conservatives tended to prefer safe humor, while liberals preferred humor of a more risqué nature. Neither age nor sex was seen to be significantly related to conservatism.

Gutman and Priest (1969) researched aggression to determine when it is deemed humorous. It was found that social perception plays an important role in humor. A good person's hostile act was seen as less hostile and more humorous, and a victim who deserved the hostility he received would be funnier than an undeserving victim. College students were the subjects for this study.

Felker and Hunter (1970) studied the sex and age differences in response to cartoons showing subjects of various sex and ages. The analysis showed that there were differences in responses to the cartoons associated with sex and age. Females tended to see the cartoons as being more humorous than the males regardless of age

and adults saw them as funnier than adolescents. The cartoon's subject did not influence its rating.

Hinson (1970) studied children's appreciation of humorous verses. Results did not reveal any significant sex differences in preferences. Situational humor was most popular, followed by satire and word play. Children preferred humorous poems based on concrete situations familiar to their own lives. Significant interaction was found between sex and age factors indicating a link between humor appreciation and physical and emotional development.

Mitchell-Dwyer (1970) advocated the use of humor in English classrooms. Teachers of the classics must allow students to appreciate the humorous aspects of literature. Parodies and satires are excellent ways of helping students analyze literature. Humor is important in the classroom, for students need to realize that teachers value their subject matter, students, and a sense of humor.

Treadwell (1970) studied the relationship between humor and creativity. A pilot study of a cartoon test showed a correlation between humor and creativity, but more study needs to be done in this area before definite

results are achieved.

Mettee, Hrelec, and Wilkens (1971) researched the idea of whether or not having a sense of humor is an asset or a liability. It was found that having a sense of humor does not necessarily guarantee popularity with others. A sense of humor could elicit negative or positive responses from an audience, depending upon the reputation of the person in question.

Fadiman (1972) discussed humor being used as a weapon, for it defends a point of view and arouses emotion. Humorists provide insight into life's absurdities and reconcile people to the human race instead of alienating them.

McGhee (1974) discussed children's humor and cognitive mastery. It was suggested that a Piagetian framework may offer the most promising approach to studying the relationship between cognitive mastery and the understanding and appreciation of humor. In another study, McGhee (1974) reviewed the development of a student's ability to create a joking relationship. Boys were better than girls at creating joking answers. The study also demonstrated that creating a joking relationship is more difficult than successfully naming an already created one. The ability to create and

and identify joking relationships seems to be acquired during the concrete-operational phase.

Shultz (1974) discussed riddles and child development. Between ages six and eight children move from a stage in which they enjoy the pure incongruity of riddles to a stage in which they prefer resolvable incongruity. Structure does influence children's appreciation of riddles. Riddles are similar to problems and a riddle's unresolved incongruity may generate a state of cognitive tension.

Yorukoglu (1974) researched children's favorite jokes and their relation to emotional conflict. Humor may be used for defense purposes and for allowing subjects to release tensions. A joke may become a vehicle for release and is an effective way of achieving rapport.

Chapman (1975) reviewed humorous laughter in children and also discovered that children laugh more when with a companion than when alone, whether or not the companion can hear the material. Girls tended to be more interested than boys in sharing the social situation. Laughter and smiling scores supported the idea that sharing the social situation is a major factor in the facilitation of humorous laughter.

Domash (1975) studied the use of wit in psychotherapy.

Humor was seen as a sign of emotional maturity. Wit strengthens confidence and allows children to make positive contact with others.

Prentice and Fathman (1975) used joking riddles in their developmental study of children's humor. From grade one to five comprehension of joking riddles increased while enjoyment decreased. Children's enjoyment also decreased sharply with age. This decrease was caused by the diminishing appeal of these riddles to older children with more complex cognitive structures. No major sex differences were found in riddle understanding or enjoyment. No major relationships between intelligence and enjoyment of riddles were found, but comprehension was related to intelligence. The enjoyment of joking riddles was not significantly correlated with their comprehension.

Ransohoff (1975) observed humor and laughter in young girls. It was found that humor worked when frightening words could be reduced to familiar ones. Humor failed when the content was too adult or produced threatening images and ideas. Reliance upon a group and group humor was important, for it tended to reassure each girl that she was not alone.

Cantor (1976) surveyed the role gender plays in humor appreciation. It was found that in humor the sex of the target of ridicule is an important determinant of the humor response, and that it is still funnier to see a woman than a man disparaged.

Chapman and Gadfield (1976) showed that the appreciation of sexual humor is linked to sex role concepts and personality variables. Aggressive material was rated as funnier by males, while females show a preference for humor based on the absurd. Female students also judged anti-male jokes as more funny than anti-female jokes, while males see anti-female jokes as funnier. Nearly all the subjects felt that their own sense of humor could be rated as average or above average. There was a high positive correlation between degree of conservatism and ratings of funniness for women, while the correlation for men was much lower.

McGhee (1976) looked at the sex differences in children's humor. It was found that girls' humor responsiveness is more susceptible to the reactions of others. Boys appear to be more responsive to hostile-aggressive forms of humor than girls. Boys may also be better at creating their own examples of humor, perhaps because they have had more practice.

Winick (1976) discussed the social contexts of humor by stating that jokes reflect trends in American life and help groups manage various problems. Jokes are told by a teller to an audience that is perceived as being equal to the speaker. As Americans face more problems they are likely to continue to make up and tell jokes as one way of dealing with their problems. Humor is one way of shrinking significant problems down to manageable size.

Zillmann and Stocking (1976) provided research on the topic of putdown humor. The appreciation of different types of putdown humor depends on who is disparaging whom. Males enjoyed witnessing the disparagement of another person more than self-disparagement, with females having the opposite viewpoint. It was also concluded that the person who is eager to dominate others will neither put himself down nor enjoy witnessing the self-disparagement of someone else.

Bryant and Meyer (1977) studied the developmental analysis of children's favorite jokes. Features which often occur in the humor of adults apparently are not particularly important for describing children's humor.

The older children's sense of humor is more verbally based than that of younger children, and is defined by an increased portion of logical elements and higher levels of intellectual and language sophistication.

McGhee (1977) reviewed research trends in children's humor. Theoretical advances included the idea that appreciation of humor in pure incongruity begins at about 18 months, although some existence is seen during the first year in connection with certain games of tickling.

The empirical advances included the cognitive aspects, personality variables, social influences, and the creative aspects of humor. Humor appreciation is greatest when a greater demand is put on the intellectual capabilities of the individual. The personality variables mentioned that the fifth graders who could list more jokes or humorous events had higher self-concept scores. Children with low self-concepts in the area of peer relationships had more instances of hostility in their humor items. Highly anxious children rate all humor types as funnier than the less anxious, and humor was used as a means of coping with stress. Social influences showed that the presence of other children facilitated laughter regardless or whether they were listening to the same material. The



relationship among humor and creativity is hard to determine, but there is a close link between humor, playfulness, and creativity.

Also in 1977 McGhee saw humor as a facilitator of children's learning. It was found that humor facilitates incidental but not intentional learning. Humor released tension among highly anxious test takers, but distracted some moderately anxious ones. Humor may also cause the student to lose the point of the lesson. The highly assertive child is most likely to laugh. The difficulty of measuring humor appreciation was again mentioned.

Park (1977) discussed the value of using riddles in the schools. Riddles give children opportunities for logical guessing, evaluation of reality, language play, and adaptation. Riddling fits into the cognitive developmental view of those who feel the child must act upon his world and who see the process of interaction as necessary for learning. Riddling supports the view that children become more logical through social interaction. Here the child must cope with the reasonings of others, and riddles can provide practice in this area.

Sheppard (1977) researched developmental levels of humor. The humor of adolescence differs in each child's ability to apply a reference point, interpretation, and

to discover the social truths in a particular piece. Humor was seen as an attitude which one may or may not choose to adopt.

Damico and Purkey (1978) surveyed those students considered to be class clowns. Clowns were found to be predominantly male. Clowns were seen by their teachers to be higher than non-clowns in asserting, unruliness, attention seeking, leadership, and cheerfulness. They were seen to be lower in accomplishing. Clowns reported lower attitudes toward teacher and principal than did non-clowns, and saw themselves as leaders. They were also vocal in expressing their ideas and opinions in front of their classmates. Clowns came from families of about the same size as did other students and participated in extra-curricular activities to the same extent. Female clowns were significantly more likely than male clowns to complete their academic work.

Koenke (1981) discussed the proper way to use comic books in the classroom. Reading levels of comic books vary and should be taken into consideration. The content should stimulate reading interest. Many comics rely upon stereotypes, but some are educational. Comics may be used for teaching dialect, finding consonant blends,

and enhancing vocabulary.

Lehr (1981) stated that English class is the natural home for humor, for these teachers have many literature sources at hand. Classes can be enlivened by encouraging humor study. Comical materials can give students humorous perspectives on current events along with reinforcing language arts skills.

Mahaney and Townsend (1981) discussed humor, anxiety, and their relation on class test performance. Humor was seen as an aid to the learning process, for it reduced test anxiety and facilitated cognitive functioning.

Perri (1981) discussed the use of humor in the curriculum and school. A sense of humor provides relaxation, but works only when used appropriately. Humor examples may be found everywhere, from literature to student writing mistakes. Junior high teachers often combine strict discipline with humor. In-service workshops may also be seen as a source of humor. A sense of humor is necessary to withstand the rigors of teaching.

Prasinos and Tittler (1981) studied the family relationships of humor-oriented adolescents. Males were used for this study, chosen because they are more likely to engage in humor than girls. It was indicated that the

humor-oriented subjects perceived less cohesiveness in their families than the other groups. They also perceived greater distance from their fathers. It was suggested that humor represents an attempt to relate from a distance.

Sopher (1981) analyzed the structural patterns of various jokes and cited examples showing how particular features of language are used for the purpose of producing humor. Some features were multiple meaning, syntactic structures, hyperbole, and speech patterns. All features produced incongruity, which is an element of humor.

Sudol (1981) reported on the dangers of using humor in the classroom. Jokes are not always acceptable, for the teacher may lose control and the class may remember nothing but the joke. The use of clowning keeps student interest high, but tends to create an image of incompetence. Teasing creates warmer personal relationships, but may be interpreted incorrectly. Sarcasm is valuable if used without malice and may be of help in embarrassing or difficult situations.

Nevo and Nevo (1983) surveyed male twelfth graders in Israel. The students were asked to answer a questionnaire both ordinarily and humorously. When the

answers were compared, the humorous answers contained more expressions of aggression and fantasy denials. The subjects applied clear rules when answering with humor. They used more aggression, sex, and fantasy, and they also used Freud's techniques as if they had read his writings. The survey also found that not one of the subjects refused to answer humorously or said that he could not do so. All of the subjects knew what to do when they had to answer humorously. However, when asked how they answered humorously, they were unable to explain their method.

#### Cognitive Approach

Another important approach to the study of humor is the cognitive viewpoint. This cognitive component attempts to answer the question of how humor is constructed. Surprise, violation of expectations, inconsistency, contradiction, and incongruity are the basic concepts of cognitive theory according to Nevo and Nevo (1983).

Berlyne (1969) states that many researchers have attempted to discover some universal structure that may

be present in humorous material in order to understand the cognitive processes involved in the appreciation of the humor piece. Shultz (1972) makes the assumption that the subject's cognitive processes must correspond to this universal structure in order for him to appreciate the humorous piece. Kappas (1967) mentions that although incongruity is a main component of humorous pieces the child appreciates incongruities of size and space only after he is familiar with normal relationships between objects. His comprehension and expression of verbal humor expand and grow only at the rate that he himself does.

Ausubel (1963) stated that the existing cognitive structure is the major element affecting meaningful learning and retention. In 1968 Ausubel stated that the learning process cannot be meaningful to a person unless it is relatable to a cognitive structure.

Kappas (1967) supports the idea that the formation of a sense of humor follows a general developmental pattern. This pattern parallels and depends upon the individual's particular emotional and intellectual development. Graham (1958) advocates that a sense of humor basically develops on a progressive, though

intermittent course. As a child matures his humorous behavior becomes increasingly more individual. Justin (1932) stated that a certain maturity is needed before the child becomes fully responsible to his own emotional environment. Jersild (1960) said one must know what is normal before being able to perceive an incongruity. Kappas (1967) stated the intellectual perception of humor within a certain situation demands familiarity with the various elements in the situation and a comprehension of their normal relationships. For most students, increased experiences provide an expansion of the sense of humor. Ausubel (1968) maintained that the learner must of course rearrange information himself and add it to his existing cognitive structure to discover or create the desired end product. Brownell-Sims (1946) said that meaningful generalizations cannot be simply given to the learner, but can only be acquired through problem-solving activities. All attempts to master verbal concepts and ideas are useless unless the learner has had some experiences with the realities to which the verbal concepts might refer.

Zigler (1967) suggested that the child laughs at those humorous pieces which make appropriate demands upon

his present cognitive structure, and not at those which are either too easy or too difficult. Children seem to enjoy most that which lies at the edge of their particular capabilities at the time. This suggests that an important ingredient in humor is the degree to which the humor stimulus makes a cognitive demand upon the individual.

Zigler, Levine, and Gould (1965) stated that the understanding of a humorous piece invariably requires the cognitive capacity to meet the intellectual demands posed by the piece. The appreciation of a humorous piece is a complex achievement and not finding an item amusing may reflect insufficient cognitive ability or perhaps inadequate societal experiences. Zigler (1967) maintained that although comprehension is an important factor in determining a mirth response, comprehension does not necessarily guarantee laughter or even appreciation for the piece. Also, the formation of a sense of humor is not entirely dependent upon just a developmental sequence. Kappas (1967) said the opinion of many investigators is that the greatest diversity in perception and expression of humor can be found between individuals rather than between groups. For example, Landis and Ross (1933) found a distinct difference in the humorous preferences



of introverts and extroverts. Nevertheless, Ausubel (1968) stated that a cognitive drive is a most important factor in the motivation to learn new concepts or ideas.

Other studies have shown several factors that seem to explain the differing levels and characteristics of humorous attitudes. Sex is one factor, for boys and girls on the whole fail to find the same things funny to the same degree. This sex difference will also increase with age, according to Landis and Ross (1933).

There also seems to be a positive correlation between an individual's intelligence and his sense of humor according to Mones (1939). The more intelligent person is able to perceive a greater variety of humorous situations than his less intelligent peer. The degree of intelligence will also influence the individual's humor preferences.

Wells (1934) stated that the cultural background of an individual is also seen to influence his preference for and appreciation of various forms of humor. Those on a higher cultural level tended to prefer the more sophisticated humor forms.

Kappas (1967) described personality as yet another factor that influences an individual's humorous attitude and variety of humor tastes.

Of course, in any analysis of children's humor one is thinking in terms of children's humor as opposed to adult humor. This definitely stresses the importance of the developmental sequence of humor.

Finally, Kappas (1967) maintained that a composite of an individual's personality, sex, education, intelligence, emotional maturity, and experience determine the humorous attitude and account for the differences in appreciation of humor among each person.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

#### Subjects

There were four student groups used in this survey. The first group consisted of the male and female seventh grade language arts students from School 1. There were 91 participants included in this grouping. The second grouping consisted of the male and female eighth grade language arts students from School 1. Those participating here totaled 57 students. The third group consisted of the male and female seventh grade language arts students from School 2. There were 39 students participating from this section. The final group consisted of the male and female eighth grade language arts students from School 2. There were 74 students participating from this section.

These students were considered participants of the study and their data were selected and recorded in this research. Only those students returning signed permission forms from a parent or guardian were able to participate.

Table 1 presents a further overview of the subjects:

Table 1

Summary of Participants

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Total Participants	261		
Total Males	119		
Total Females	142		
Total 7th Males	66	(School 1) 51	(School 2) 15
Total 7th Females	64	(School 1) 40	(School 2) 24
Total 8th Males	53	(School 1) 23	(School 2) 30
Total 8th Females	78	(School 1) 34	(School 2) 44

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The above students were also categorized according to their total percentile score on a standardized achievement test given earlier by their school district. The students from School 1 were given the Scientific Research Association (SRA) test, and their percentile score in the language arts category was considered. The students from School 2 were given the California Achievement Test (CAT), and their percentile score in the language arts category was again considered.

Table 2 presents the student groupings according to achievement level:

Table 2

Summary of Subjects' Percentile Scores

	High (67-99)	Average (34-66)	Low (1-33)
Total Students	156	77	28
Total Males	62	41	16
Total Females	94	36	12
Total 7th Males	34	23	9
School 1	21	22	8
School 2	13	1	1
Total 8th Males	28	18	7
School 1	11	7	5
School 2	17	11	2
Total 7th Females	48	13	3
School 1	32	6	2
School 2	16	7	1
Total 8th Females	46	23	9
School 1	24	6	4
School 2	22	17	5

### Subjects' Rights

The following guidelines were used to obtain permission for research purposes in both middle schools. These items were contained in packets sent to the administration of each attendance center.

1. The research project was endorsed by Kansas State University.
2. The administration and personnel in each district received a purpose statement and summary of research procedures.
3. Copies of all research materials to be used in collecting data were provided.
4. The schools and grades to be involved were indicated, as was the amount of time required and the approximate number of participants.
5. Copies of parental permission forms were included for review.
6. Each district surveyed will receive a copy of results and thesis abstract.
7. It was emphasized that all results and data would be used confidentially and professionally.

All seventh and eighth grade language arts students received a cover letter explaining the intended research and a permission form. Both forms emphasized the

confidentiality and anonymity of the intended research. Numbers, not names, would identify the students. The cover letters were intended for informational purposes only and were not returned by the students. The permission forms were to be returned with the signature of a parent or guardian before the student may participate in the research. Only those students with a signed permission form or the equivalent were allowed to become a part of the study. Participation was voluntary on the part of both the student and parent, but was encouraged by the individual instructor.

#### Time Schedule

This project followed the time schedule as shown below:

Table 3

#### Summary of Time Schedule

Monday, May 7th, 1984

Cover letters and permission forms, School  
1 and 2

Tuesday, May 15th, 1984

Interest Inventory, School 2

Thursday, May 17th, 1984

Interest Inventory, School 1

Time Schedule, Cont.

Friday, May 18, 1984

Survey Clarification, School 2

Wednesday, May 23rd, 1984

Survey Clarification, School 1

Research Design

The research design used is a 2 (seventh and eighth grade) x 2 (sex) x 3 (low, average, or high achievement level) pilot study.

The students were already in intact groups by their attendance center before the study began. Students were not regrouped in any way. Each student completed one survey form in his and/or her assigned room. The instructors provided explanations and definitions necessary for understanding of the questionnaires but did not attempt to influence student preferences. The students worked alone and were not allowed to discuss the survey until all forms were completed and given to the instructors.

The questionnaires were later grouped according to the student's grade, sex, and ability level. The achievement level scores were taken from previous



standardized tests given by each school district. These scores were used for the study but these achievement tests were not administered especially for this study.

All completed survey forms were considered but those left incomplete or nameless were not. All forms were identical as were teacher instructions and administration.

#### Reliability and Validity

The interest inventory consisted of 17 literature items. The actual test construction consisted of two main steps.

The first step was the gathering of prospective literature categories. These categories were amassed from the researcher's own knowledge of literature types and from seventh and eighth grade anthology collections. Those categories which were extremely specialized and/or not commonly introduced to middle schoolers (e.g. medieval literature) were not included. Wherever possible similar literature types were combined (e.g. action/adventure) into one category.

The categories were then given to three language arts instructors for review. These instructors also relied

upon their varied experiences to provide suggestions for the survey construction. The category titles were simplified wherever possible for maximum student comprehension. For example, a classroom anthology classified a literature section as "macabre" stories. This was later given the title of mystery/suspense.

The final form consisted only of items considered to be widely taught and/or familiar to middle schoolers. The 17 items do not necessarily account for every literature item, but they are a current representation of the categories commonly presented to middle school students. The alpha reliability of the interest inventory was listed as .69.

#### Materials

All surveys were written by the researchers for this study.

The main survey administered was the humor interest inventory. (See appendix E.) This survey contained 17 literature types and was four pages long. The 17 literature types were placed randomly on the survey. The categories and their definitions are as follows:

1. Action/Adventure--Fast-paced stories containing aggressive and/or exciting events and characters.
2. Biography--The story of someone's life, or the telling of a distinct achievement of an

individual.

3. Classics--Literature considered to be of high and lasting quality.
4. Drama/Plays--Dialogue is spoken by the characters.
5. Fantasy--Stories with fantastic, incredulous, and/or wishful events.
6. Fiction--Stories which are basically the author's own creation.
7. Historical Fiction--Fictional plot and/or characters centered around a real event or era.
8. Humorous Stories--Stories containing various amusing elements.
9. Mystery/Suspense--Literature considered macabre, eerie, or frightening.
10. Newspaper Articles--Any article taken from a newspaper.
11. Novels--Literature of varying length containing a complete and developed plot or storyline.
12. Poetry--Ideas written in verse form. The poetry may or may not rhyme.
13. Romance--Stories centering around the emotion of love.
14. Science Fiction--Fiction concerned with science or scientific ideas.

15. Short Stories--Complete tales with a beginning, climax, and ending, usually 20 pages or less.
16. Sports Stories--Stories centered around the sports world.
17. Teenage Literature--Literature written exclusively for teenagers.

All literature categories were gathered on the basis of the researcher's own experience, literature anthologies used in middle schools, and the opinions of three other language arts instructors. Only literature commonly introduced to middle schoolers was selected for the form. Titles were combined wherever possible to avoid repetition and confusion. Category titles were also simplified as much as possible and given generic terms. Literature categories not used by any one of the instructors was not placed on the survey form.

At the right of each category was a Likert Scale. The determiners for each of these continuous scales read (from left to right) as would definitely not read, would probably not read, may or may not read, would probably read, and would definitely read.

The students were to read each literature category, then place an "X" in the space which best reflected

their opinion of that selection. The students were required to mark each category one time, for incomplete questionnaires could not be considered for the study. The students were also requested to mark their scale choice with an "X" instead of circles or other marks.

The students were to indicate the following information at the top of their form: name (first and last), sex (circle M or F), school (name of attendance center), and instructor (name of language arts teacher). It was not necessary for the student to indicate his grade as each teacher exclusively taught a separate grade level.

The participating instructors received a separate form (appendix D) that was not given to the students. The instructor was expected to supply any supplemental directions as needed. The supplemental instructor sheet contained the following information:

1. Directions for marking the form's student information section (name, grade, etc.).
2. The preferred writing instrument for the survey.
3. The 17 literature categories and definitions.
4. The correct way to mark the scale determiners.

5. Classroom behavior during the survey.
6. Proper collection and storage of the questionnaires.
7. The researcher's address and phone number.
8. An example of a completed scale.

The primary objective of this questionnaire was to determine the extent of a student's appreciation for humorous literature. Comparisons between the students and their interests in humorous reading material were then to be made. Those students marking the humorous literature category with may or may not read, would probably read, or would definitely read were considered to have an interest in humorous literature. Those marking otherwise (would probably not read, would definitely not read) were not considered to have an interest in this category. The same scoring system applied to the other 16 literature items as well. Also of interest were the overall literature preferences of the students and the relationship of humorous literature to the other 16 survey items.

The final survey was not a printed one, and only a few students were selected for this section. Twelve students from each grade level were randomly asked to

participate. The following questions were asked to determine both the student's comprehension of the interest inventory and whether or not it was answered correctly. The students were interviewed privately by the researcher and their answers were recorded on their survey form. The exact questions were as follows:

1. Did you understand how to fill in the top portion of your form?
2. Were there any literature items on the test that were unfamiliar to you?
3. Were there any vocabulary words listed that you did not understand?
4. Did your teacher provide the class with the instructions needed to take this survey?
5. Did your teacher help you individually with any part of the survey?
6. Did you enjoy taking the survey?
7. Do you feel you carefully followed the test's instructions?
8. Which is your favorite literature item, and why?
9. Which literature item do you like least, and why?

Although the students tended to answer with a yes or

no answer, he and/or she was pressed until a further explanation was received. This section was informal with the questions being asked in a varying order. The students were spoken to when they were able to leave their classroom. All of the questions were asked of each student for this section.

#### Method of Sampling

All students involved in this study have already been assigned by grade to a regular language arts classroom at the beginning of the 1983-1984 year. Those students enrolled in special education classes were not included in the survey unless their language arts period was normally spent in the regular classroom. Also excluded were those students involved in homebound programs, in-school suspension, or those currently enrolled in an elective other than English. Students new to the district or school were included, but those who would be moving or away during all or part of the study were not. Those students who were absent during a section of the study were allowed to take the survey test upon their return if possible.

The two participating language arts instructors and principal from School 2 received a packet containing cover



letters, permission forms, and set of instructions for these forms. It was suggested that the forms be given to the students on May 7th, 1984, but this was left to the individual teacher's discretion. The participating personnel from School 1 received similar instructional packets.

Participating School 2 received and began their survey before the research was started at the first school. This was done for the time factor, as the forms were administered at the end of the school year. Also, any problems could be resolved before the second test administration at School 1.

The first step in sampling was for the cooperating teachers to briefly explain the research to their students. The students then received the cover letter and permission form. The students were given one week to return the forms, but were encouraged to return them as soon as possible. Written permission was required from the parent or guardian, but signed pieces of paper were accepted if the original form was lost. If the student had a sibling in the seventh or eighth grade only one signed form was required of the parent or guardian. Permission forms were accepted until the actual test

administration was begun. The participating teachers were instructed to retain the permission forms.

After receiving the signed permission forms, the next step was to record the student's score on the language arts category on a standardized achievement test. Scores were recorded for only those students who returned signed permission forms. The School 2 students were tested using the California Achievement Test (CAT), while the School 1 pupils took the Scientific Research Association (SRA) test. Both tests measure the student's ability in language arts and mathematics, and both tests break the language arts and math areas into several categories along with giving the total score for each area. For this research, the percentile score achieved in the total language arts category was used. These tests are given during the students even school years (6,8,etc.) in the spring months. The scores used for the eighth graders were current, while the scores used for the seventh graders were taken from tests administered to this group when they were in the sixth grade. All students had scores on record, but a few students new to the district had less current scores. These scores were taken from the test administered to the student when he or she was in the fourth grade.

The main questionnaire administered was the humor interest inventory (appendix E). The participating School 2 members received a packet containing these forms and instruction sheets. It was requested that the surveys be given by both teachers on the same day. The actual administration date was suggested, but left to the individual teacher's discretion. This test was given to the School 2 students on May 15, 1964, and the School 1 students on May 17th, 1964.

This survey test consisted of 17 different literature types. The individual instructors were asked to explain and/or define each type (appendix E). Definitions were provided, but each instructor was encouraged to use whatever definition was most familiar to their students. All students with permission forms were given this survey during their regular language arts classtime. It was suggested that this survey be given at the beginning of the hour, but this was also left to the individual instructor. Those students not participating remained in the room, but were asked to read or work on other assignments. The students were asked not to confer with anyone other than the instructor during the survey, but discussion was allowed once the forms were turned in. The average time for this survey to be completed was five

to ten minutes. The instructors were asked to collect and keep the surveys in order according to each student's language arts hour.

The students placed their literature preferences on a Likert Scale with answers ranging from would definitely not read to would definitely read. Those students answering negatively to the humorous or any other category (would definitely not read, would probably not read) were assumed to have low or no interest in reading this type of literature. Those students answering in the middle (may or may not read) were assumed to have at least a marginal interest in the literature type mentioned. Those students answering positively on a certain category marked the responses would probably read or would definitely read.

The final part of this survey was the clarification. This was a double-checking step. The individual instructors were not participating in this section, other than allowing students to leave the classroom to speak with a researcher. This section took place soon after the interest inventory, and its purposes included the following:

1. To determine if the survey directions were understood by both instructor and student.
2. To determine if the instructors provided adequate explanations for the survey.

3. To determine if the survey items, content, and vocabulary were understood by both instructor and student.
4. To determine the amount of instructor clarification and input needed in order for the student to complete the survey.
5. To determine student opinion regarding the survey.
6. To determine if the student correctly and fairly answered the survey questions.

Twelve students (six male and six female) from each grade level at both schools 1 and 2 were randomly selected to participate. The students chosen were excused from the beginning of their language arts hour to speak with a researcher. They were asked variations of the points shown above along with being asked to supply and explain their favorite and least liked survey item. These student answers were written on their completed form by the researcher. Although only 24 students from each attendance center were asked to participate in this section, more asked to be included. The comments of these students were also taken into account, but not necessarily recorded on a test form. The time spent with each student on this section averaged

from three to five minutes. The students were selected from different language arts classes to allow for a wider variety of student input. No student refused to participate when asked.

#### Data Analysis

Several methods were used to analyze the data collected from this study. The humor interest inventory contained Likert Scales for all 17 items. Mean scores were first previewed to determine the extent of student interest in humorous and other literature categories.

A factor analysis determined the actual number of factors contained in the interest inventory. There were 17 literature categories on the inventory, but it was assumed that there were not 17 separate items listed. Both the rotated and unrotated factor matrix were reviewed to determine the highest possible loadings for each factor.

A 2 (7th, 8th grade) x 2 (sex) x 3 (low, average, high achievement level) was used to compare the response of student subpopulations to survey item six (humorous literature).

A split-plot factorial analysis of variance was next used to determine the literature factors (1 or 2) which

appealed to certain students. This multivariate test used sex as the grouping variable. This analysis was performed in order to obtain the information concerning the literature factors and also to insure the successful completion of the final univariate analysis.

The last analysis performed was a Dunnet post-hoc. This measure compared inventory item number six (humorous literature) to the remaining 16 literature categories on the interest inventory. This analysis determined whether humor was actually a separate literature category and compared its ratings to those given to the other categories.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Results

Table 4 presents the means and standard deviations resulting from the administration of the interest inventory. These items are shown in rank order.

Table 4

Summary of Interest Inventory Means and Standard Deviations  
in Rank Order

<u>Item Number</u>	<u>Item Name</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>
6	Humorous lit.	4.2299	0.8325
9	Action/Adventure	3.9617	0.9479
3	Fiction	3.9464	0.8532
1	Mystery/Suspense	3.7816	0.9856
11	Teen Literature	3.6897	1.1126
5	Short Story	3.4751	1.0021
4	Fantasy	3.3103	1.1699
13	Romance	3.1801	1.5071
7	Novels	3.1686	1.2474
8	Sports Stories	3.0307	1.3892
10	Newspaper	3.0307	1.0520



Table 4 cont.

<u>Item Number</u>	<u>Item Name</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>
12	Science Fiction	3.0230	1.2768
14	Historical Fiction	2.8927	1.1783
2	Biography	2.7471	1.0025
17	Classics	2.5594	1.1902
15	Drama/Plays	2.4866	1.2172
16	Poetry	2.4751	1.2201

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Item number six, humorous literature, reported the highest mean at 4.2299. Poetry, item number 16, displayed the lowest mean at 2.4751.

Table 5 presents the interest inventory's means and standard deviations in their order on the survey form.

Table 5

Summary of Interest Inventory Means and Standard Deviations  
in Survey Form Order

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<u>Item Number</u>	<u>Item Name</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>
1	Mystery/Suspense	3.7816	0.9856
2	Biography	2.7471	1.0025
3	Fiction	3.9464	0.8532
4	Fantasy	3.3103	1.1699

Table 5 cont.

<u>Item Number</u>	<u>Item Name</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>
5	Short Story	3.4751	1.0021
6	Humorous lit.	4.2299	0.8325
7	Novels	3.1686	1.2474
8	Sports Stories	3.0307	1.3892
9	Action/Adventure	3.9617	0.9479
10	Newspaper Articles	3.0307	1.0520
11	Teenage lit.	3.6897	1.1126
12	Science Fiction	3.0230	1.2768
13	Romance	3.1801	1.5071
14	Historical Fiction	2.8927	1.1783
15	Drama/Plays	2.4866	1.2172
16	Poetry	2.4751	1.2201
17	Classics	2.5594	1.1902

---

A 2 (grade 7 or 8) x 2 (male or female) x 3 (low, average, high achievement level) multiple analysis of variance was used to compare the response of student subpopulations to survey item six (humorous literature).

Table number 6 displays the student subpopulations compared.

Table 6

Summary of Student Subpopulations Compared with Item Six


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<u>Subpopulation</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Mean</u>
All Males	119	4.15
All Females	142	4.30
7th Males	66	4.14
8th Males	53	4.17
7th Females	64	4.34
8th Females	78	4.26
All Low Ability	28	4.07
All Average Ability	79	4.22
All High Ability	154	4.27
Low Ability Females	12	4.08
Average Ability Females	38	4.26
High Ability Females	92	4.34
Low Ability Males	16	4.06
Average Ability Males	41	4.17
High Ability Males	62	4.16

---

P=.05

The differences between the subpopulations' interest in humor is not statistically significant. All groups displayed an interest in reading humorous literature.

It was assumed that the interest inventory did not contain seventeen separate literature categories. This instrument was next factor analyzed using a principal axis method with varimax rotation. The inventory was first suspected to contain five factors, but eigenvalue scores indicated only two main existing factors. The literature items loaded higher on the unrotated factor matrix, which was used to determine the categories contained in each factor. Each literature item must be greater than .30 (>.30) and the amount of differences between each item must be greater than .20 (>.20) to be assigned to either Factor 1 or 2.

Table 7 presents the unrotated factor loadings for each factor.

Table 7

Summary of Unrotated Factor Loadings for Factors 1 and 2

<u>Item</u>	<u>Factor 1</u>	<u>Factor 2</u>
Mystery/Suspense	0.25371	0.22714
Biography	0.13411	-0.05325
Fiction	0.41838	0.03614
Fantasy	0.40134	0.19562
Short Stories	0.44088	0.11846
Humorous Literature	0.31904	0.15338
Novels	0.51360	0.18629

Table 7 Cont.

<u>Item</u>	<u>Factor 1</u>	<u>Factor 2</u>
Sports Stories	-0.06939	0.36400
Action/Adventure	0.32626	0.54837
Newspaper Articles	0.17623	0.21784
Teenage Literature	0.39044	-0.47474
Science Fiction	0.13172	0.66522
Romance	0.52771	-0.61616
Historical Fiction	0.27113	0.31376
Drama/Plays	0.67969	-0.02536
Poetry	0.49384	-0.06944
Classics	0.52844	0.09029

<u>Factor</u>	<u>Eigenvalue</u>	<u>Pct. of Var.</u>	<u>Cum. Pct.</u>
1	2.62758	59.3	59.3
2	1.80649	40.7	100.0

---

These loadings indicated two main factors. Table 8 presents the literature categories contained in Factor 1.

Table 8

Summary of Factor 1 (Traditional Literature) Categories

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<u>Inventory Number</u>	<u>Item Name</u>	<u>Factor Loading</u>
3	Fiction	0.41838
4	Fantasy	0.40134

Table 8 Cont.

<u>Inventory Number</u>	<u>Item Name</u>	<u>Factor Loading</u>
5	Short Stories	0.44088
6	Humorous Literature	0.31904
7	Novels	0.51360
15	Drama/Plays	0.67969
16	Poetry	0.49384
17	Classics	0.52844

Table 9 presents the literature categories contained in Factor 2.

Table 9

Summary of Factor 2 (Action-Oriented Literature) Categories

<u>Inventory Number</u>	<u>Item Name</u>	<u>Factor Loading</u>
8	Sports Stories	0.36400
9	Action/Adventure	0.54837
12	Science Fiction	0.66522

Not every literature category included in the interest inventory loaded sufficiently into one of the two factors according to the set requirements. (The item must be

>.30 and the amount between items must be >.20.) Six literature items did not load highly enough to be included in either factor. These categories were placed in a separate (ambiguous) category and were not considered part of either Factor 1 or 2.

Table 10 presents the literature categories apart from Factors 1 and 2.

Table 10

Summary of Ambiguous (Esoteric Literature) Categories

<u>Inventory Number</u>	<u>Item Name</u>	<u>Factor 1 Loading</u>	<u>Factor 2 Loading</u>
1	Mystery/Suspense	0.25371	0.22714
2	Biography	0.13411	-0.05325
10	Newspaper Articles	0.17623	0.21784
11	Teenage Literature	0.39044	-0.47474
13	Romance	0.52771	-0.61616
14	Historical Fiction	0.27113	0.31376

Table 11 presents the overall view of each inventory item, the factor loading, and assigned factor category. These 17 literature items are divided into three categories, but only two decisive factors.

Table 11

Summary of Factor Loadings


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<u>Item Name</u>	<u>Loading</u>	<u>Loading</u>	<u>F1</u>	<u>F2</u>	<u>Amb.</u>
Mystery/Suspense	0.25371	0.22714			X
Biography	0.13411	-0.05325			X
Fiction	0.41838	0.03614	X		
Fantasy	0.40134	0.19562	X		
Short Story	0.44088	0.11846	X		
Humorous Literature	0.31904	0.15338	X		
Novels	0.51360	-0.18629	X		
Sports Stories	-0.06939	0.36400		X	
Action/Adventure	0.32626	0.54837		X	
Newspaper Articles	0.17623	0.21784			X
Teenage Literature	0.39044	-0.47474			X
Science Fiction	0.13172	0.66522		X	
Romance	0.52771	-0.61616			X
Historical Fiction	0.27113	0.31376			X
Drama/Plays	0.67969	-0.02536	X		
Poetry	0.49384	-0.06944	X		
Classics	0.52844	0.09029	X		

---



A split-plot factorial analysis of variance was used to determine the literature factors which appealed to students. This test used sex as the grouping variable. The unweighted scores were considered for this survey.

Table 12 displays the combined observed means for sex and achievement concerning Factors 1 and 2 (Traditional and Action-Oriented Literature).

Table 12

Summary of Combined Observed Means for Sex and Achievement Concerning Factors 1 and 2

<u>Sex</u>	<u>Factor 1 Means</u>	<u>Factor 2 Means</u>
Male	2.95719	3.85047
Female	3.44951	2.95578
<u>Achievement</u>	<u>Factor 1 Means</u>	<u>Factor 2 Means</u>
Low (1-33)	3.26953	3.44444
Average (34-66)	3.12572	3.40629
High (67-99)	3.21481	3.35864

The significant main effect was between the sexes. There were no significant effects between achievement and literature appreciation. Males tended to appreciate the literature found in Factor 2 (Action-Oriented), while Females prefer Factor 1 (Traditional Literature).

A review of the main effects shows significant differences only between the sexes in literature appreciation.

Table 13 presents the main effects of sex by achievement in literature appreciation.

Table 13

Summary of Main Effects of Sex by Achievement

Multivariate Tests of Significance ( $S = 2$ ,  $M = \frac{1}{2}$ ,  $N = 126$ )

<u>Test Name</u>	<u>Value</u>	<u>Approx. F</u>	<u>Hypoth. DF</u>	<u>Error DF</u>	<u>Sig. of F</u>
Wilks	.97862	1.38002	4.00	508.00	.240

There were no significant differences found when reviewing this groups literature preferences.

Table 14 presents the main effects of achievement in literature appreciation.

Table 14

Summary of Main Effects by Achievement

Multivariate Tests of Significance ( $S = 2$ ,  $M = \frac{1}{2}$ ,  $N = 126$ )

<u>Test Name</u>	<u>Value</u>	<u>Approx. F</u>	<u>Hypoth. DF</u>	<u>Error DF</u>	<u>Sig. of F</u>
Wilks	.98969	.65951	4.00	508.00	.620

There were no significant differences found when reviewing this groups literature preferences.

Table 15 presents the main effects of sex in literature appreciation.

Table 15

Summary of Main Effects by Sex

Multivariate Tests of Significance (S = 1, M = 0, N = 126)

<u>Test Name</u>	<u>Value</u>	<u>Approx. F</u>	<u>Hypoth. DF</u>	<u>Error DF</u>	<u>Sig. of F</u>
Wilks	.64528	69.81391	2.00	254.00	0.0

This table shows that there were significant differences by sex in literature appreciation. As shown in Table 12, males and females prefer different types of literature, with males leaning toward action based literature and females preferring the more traditional forms.

The final analysis performed was a Dunnet post hoc analysis. This univariate measure compared inventory item six (humorous literature) to the other 16 literature items on the survey to determine if this category is actually a separate item. Table number 16 presents item six as compared to the other 16 literature categories.

Table 16

Summary of Comparisons Between Humorous Literature and All  
Other Inventory Literature Types

Univariate F-tests with (1,259) D.F.

Humorous literature  
compared to:

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Hypoth. SS</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>Sig.of F</u>
Mystery/Suspense	24.66818	33.99292	.000
Biography	278.01878	258.88513	.000
Fiction	22.79174	35.41197	.000
Fantasy	27.70757	26.70294	.000
Short Stories	3.32575	4.07594	.045
Novels	44.90878	41.23336	0.0
Sports Stories	41.09690	28.04279	.000
Action/Adventure	63.16695	104.53094	.000
Newspaper Articles	53.51199	56.49161	.000
Teenage Literature	6.50525	7.77484	.006
Science Fiction	40.80658	36.76113	.000
Romance	29.97442	24.96408	.000
Historical Fiction	63.04013	52.97090	.000
Drama/Plays	207.67808	195.17986	.000
Poetry	186.18298	161.60342	.000
Classics	126.00627	116.67839	.000

These results indicate that humor is considered to be a separate literature category. Elements of humor may be included in all types of literature, but humorous literature may stand alone as a specific literature type. Students also consistently rate humorous literature higher than other categories of reading material.

The survey clarification further indicated the level of interest in the literature types. Not every student was polled, but all who were indicated favorable results. All students reported understanding the basic instructions concerning the form. All returned were labeled correctly.

No student stated an unfamiliarity with a literature type, but examples of each category were discussed before beginning the test. Wherever possible, examples were taken from the student literature anthologies for better comprehension.

No student reported having a difficulty with any vocabulary words found on the form. All students reported receiving adequate teacher instruction before beginning the survey. There was also ample time allowed for administration.

A few students asked for further instructor clarification during the survey. Various reasons were cited here, most concerning the correct way to mark the Likert scales.

The students provided favorable comments regarding the form, and all said they followed the test's instructions. The instructors placed an example of a scale on the blackboard for reference when explaining procedures. No student reported having problems understanding the correct way to mark the scales.

Various literature forms were cited as likes and dislikes by the students. Reasons for these opinions assumed a wide range, but most centered around the particular opinion of a literature unit taught in the language arts class.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Discussion

Middle school students are interested in reading humorous literature. Tables 1 and 2 showed the mean for the humorous literature category at 4.2299. This was the highest mean reported. The students participating were not influenced by the instructors concerning the content or purpose of this study before its administration. Each of the 17 literature categories was defined for the students, but equal emphasis was placed on each one. The humorous literature category was equally emphasized by the participating instructors. At this time, neither attendance center surveyed offers a regular language arts unit or section dealing with the study of humorous literature. The individual instructors may at times use humorous materials or literature in their daily teaching, but these items are not necessarily defined as study units concerning humor. These miscellaneous materials are also not always introduced as being humorous or funny to the students. The students may find humor in their language arts studies, but they are not actually reviewing humor as a separate instructional unit. This high rating given to humorous

literature definitely becomes significant, for although the students have no major classroom exposure to humor they are demonstrating a high interest and awareness for this literature category.

The majority of the 17 literature items loaded into two main factors, although an ambiguous category was specified. Factor 1 contained eight literature types (Fiction, Fantasy, Short Story, Humorous Literature, Novels, Drama/Plays, Poetry, and Classics) and was titled Traditional literature. These categories are most often reviewed in language arts classrooms and are probably the most familiar to students. These categories are also quite broad, and many were rated highly by the students. A broad category is prone to higher ratings as the student may interpret the category in various personal ways. For example, the category of fiction may contain any number of elements to the student which will result in a higher rating. The more specific categories tended to result in lower rankings. These specific categories did not allow for much student interpretation and were more prone to strong likes or dislikes. Fiction may mean many things to a student, but a category such as romance tends to carry a specific



association which may or may not be favorable.

The second factor (Sports Stories, Action/Adventure, and Science Fiction) consists of literature items centered around strong, exciting themes. This was titled as Action-Oriented literature. These three types were given average ratings by those students surveyed.

The ambiguous items (Mystery/Suspense, Biography, Newspaper Articles, Teenage Literature, Romance, and Historical Fiction) were not included in either Factor 1 or 2. They were titled as Esoteric literature due to their specific themes. These categories were quite narrow and probably partially unfamiliar to some students.

Table 13 shows that females tend to enjoy the traditional forms of literature (Factor 1) while the males enjoy more the action-oriented (Factor 2) types of literature. This is a reasonable finding, for instructors and others tend to steer the sexes towards these literature types quite early.

Although the students were given definitions for each literature category before the survey administration, preferences were most likely based upon personal

experience. It is unlikely that preferences would be altered after hearing a short category definition, and it is assumed that the inventory accurately reflects the literature preferences of the students.

Students appreciate humorous literature, and they tend to enjoy it equally. The grade level, sex, and achievement levels did not create differences among the enjoyment of humorous literature. This category was rated highly by every subpopulation, showing that humor does have a wide and diverse appeal. Humorous literature is a broad category capable of containing various elements favorable to all students.

Humorous literature was contained in Factor 1, which was rated higher by females. Although males tended to rate action-oriented literature (Factor 2) higher, humorous literature still remained an overall favorite. Humorous literature is regarded as a separate, specific category. It is not meant to be confused with other categories, although elements of humor may be found in many forms of literature. Humorous literature enjoys several distinct qualities. It is recognizable and popular with all diverse student groups. It is also a separate category of literature which may be incorporated into other

areas of reading material.

The survey clarification indicates that the forms were answered correctly and fairly by the students. Form comprehension must be achieved before results may be considered. This clarification shows that the answers and results received are a true representation of student opinion and not randomly marked items. The data from this survey should be considered as actual statements of student preferences. Those students participating in this study did so with interest and it should be assumed that the returned forms are a true profile of middle school literature preferences.

This study has answered and discussed the research questions and hypotheses. It has shown, perhaps most importantly, that middle school students are interested in humorous literature. It is also important to realize that middle schoolers of all varieties view humorous literature highly. This literature type has a wide, versatile appeal among this age group. Finally, humorous literature is seen as a separate literature category and as such is viewed favorably by middle schoolers.

### Instructional Implications

This survey provides several implications for language arts instructors. Humorous literature was rated highly by the students, but most middle schools do not provide an actual teaching unit relating to this literature type. This disposition for humor is even more significant when realizing this point.

Previous studies have shown humor to be a positive addition to the classroom if used correctly, and this study shows humor is of interest to adolescents. Humor is useful as both a teaching technique and as a unit of study. Middle school students are often seen as a particularly challenging group, so their high humor interest should definitely be explored. Suitable humor materials are not difficult to amass, but care must be taken to insure that they are of high quality and not chosen simply because they happen to be comical. This study has shown that all students surveyed saw humorous literature favorably, so materials selected would be appreciated to at least some degree by all. Humor and humorous literature should be a component of the language arts program, not the only or main teaching technique. Humor should be employed, but constructively

and well. One does not have to act humorously to effectively provide instruction regarding humorous literature.

The interest inventory is also beneficial to language arts instructors. This inventory provides information regarding 16 other categories besides humor. Although most instructors have set study units, it is always of interest to determine where student preferences lie. An inventory given at the beginning of the school year or even at various intervals would be helpful when planning literature reviews.

The main instructional implication is simply awareness. Humorous materials should be seen as the benefits they are and used in the classroom. The students are aware of humorous materials, but unfortunately many instructors are not or perhaps not implementing these materials to any large degree in their teaching. Whatever the case, the opportunity to use humorous materials should not be overlooked by educators.

#### Research Implications

This survey does provide areas for further research.

The current inventory is of benefit to language arts instructors in its present state, for it indicates where student literature interests lie. More inventory items, such as subcategories, would aid in an even more complete profile for the instructor. Some categories contained on this instrument might be renamed to aid student comprehension. Total student understanding is necessary to achieve significant results. There are many literature areas and if we truly desire student input regarding these areas we must include as many literature categories as possible on any similar surveys administered.

It is also recommended that a humor survey be given following the interest inventory. A humor survey would indicate the most popular forms of humor for this age group along with providing a specific profile of those rating the humor types. Middle school students have already expressed a strong interest in humor, so an accompanying humor survey would be definitely beneficial. This knowledge of desired humor forms would certainly be useful when constructing a language arts unit concerning humor. The student should be exposed to various humor and literature forms, but preferences

must be considered when planning a unit of study.

### Conclusions

Humorous literature was rated highly by middle school students and further exploration of this topic is needed. Previous studies have shown that humor is capable of being both positive and detrimental when used in the classroom. The humor examples used for study should be appropriate as should the actual use of humor by the instructor. Comedians are unnecessary in the classroom as are poorly selected humor examples. Both humor selected for study and humor used as an instructional technique should be chosen for both content quality and appropriate use of humor. Teaching techniques should remain consistent whether humor or another literature type is being discussed. Students should have input regarding their course of study, but the teacher remains in control of the classroom. A wide variety of literature should be reviewed by students and teachers alike. The purpose of this study was not to maintain that humor should infiltrate every level or area of a school's course of study. Instead, it is hoped that this survey will remind instructors of the advantages of using humor and humorous study in the classroom. Humor is not a

panacea but it is recommended, beneficial, and effective when properly used. It is, perhaps most importantly, highly rated by students in the middle grades.



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## Appendices

Appendix A  
Contact Letter

Letterhead

Inside Address

Date

Salutation

I am applying for permission to conduct research for my master's thesis in your school district. I currently teach middle school English in Clay Center, Kansas, and will receive my degree from Kansas State University. My topic is concerned with the types of humor and humorous literature preferred by middle school pupils.

I have followed these application guidelines:

1. My research has been endorsed by Kansas State University.
2. I have enclosed a purpose statement regarding my research and a summary of procedures.
3. I have provided copies of all research materials to be used in collecting data.
4. I have indicated the schools and grades to be involved, the amount of time required, and the approximate number of participants.
5. I have enclosed copies of parental permission forms.
6. I agree to submit a copy of results collected along with an abstract of my thesis.
7. All research will be used confidentially and professionally.

I would like to conduct this research at the end of this April or at the beginning of May. I have set no specific starting date as I realize this project must depend upon schedules other than mine. If this research project is accepted I will be pleased to work with the classroom instructors in order to set a convenient starting date.

Thank you very much for considering my research. I am looking forward to working with you and your staff members. I may be contacted at the below address.

Sincerely,

Name

Address

Appendix B  
Cover Letter

Dear Parents:

I am collecting research data for my master's thesis. My topic is concerned with the types of humor and humorous literature preferred by middle school pupils. This survey will be conducted during the student's language arts period, and I am asking your permission for your son/daughter to participate in this study.

The results of the study can give educators current information regarding adolescent humor preferences. This data will also be useful in the future planning of a language arts curriculum dealing with humorous literature.

Your son/daughter has been selected by a random sampling method from members of \_\_\_\_\_ Middle School to participate in this study. Students will be grouped according to their language arts/reading scores on previous standardized tests given by their school district. I will need written permission from you so that your son/daughter can be a part of this study. I assure you the confidentiality of the results and the anonymity of your child in this research. Identification numbers, not names, will be used when analyzing the data.

I will be glad to share the results with you at the conclusion of the study. If you have any questions now or in the future, please contact me at (913) 632-3232.

Please complete the enclosed form and return to your son's/daughter's regular English instructor.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Miss Lisa Spiegel  
Language Arts  
McKinley Middle School  
731 Crawford  
Clay Center, KS 67432

Appendix C  
Permission Form

## PERMISSION FORM

I hereby give my permission for \_\_\_\_\_ to participate in the humor research being conducted by Lisa Spiegel. I understand that this study will involve a review of my son's/daughter's standardized test scores and his/her taking two separate surveys during English class:

Humor Interest Inventory  
Survey Clarification

I understand that the results of these tests will be kept confidential and that any publication that results from this study will not reveal the names or scores of individual participants.

I understand that upon my request (or upon the request of my son/daughter after reaching legal age) my son's/daughter's scores will be made available to me.

---

Parent (or Guardian)

---

Date

Return to: Lisa Spiegel  
McKinley Middle School  
731 Crawford  
Clay Center, KS 67432



Appendix D  
Inventory Instructions

## TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS FOR HUMOR INTEREST INVENTORY

1. Please instruct students not to begin until everyone has a questionnaire.
2. Instruct students to fill out the top of the form answering these questions:

Name: First and last name  
 Hour: Hour of English class  
 School: Student's attendance center  
 Teacher: Student's English teacher

The students may write in either pencil or pen.

3. There are 17 literature types mentioned on this survey. Please briefly review and define each type with the students. Below are broad definitions for each type. Please use these definitions as a guideline for your own explanations, discussing them in the terms most easily understood by your students.
  1. Action/Adventure: Fast-paced stories containing aggressive and/or exciting events and characters.
  2. Biography: The story of someone's life, or the telling of a distinct achievement of an individual.
  3. Classics: Literature considered to be of high and lasting quality.
  4. Drama/Plays: Dialogue is "spoken" by the characters.
  5. Fantasy: Stories with fantastic, incredulous, and/or wishful events.
  6. Fiction: Stories which are basically the author's own creation.
  7. Historical Fiction: Fictional plot and/or characters centered around a real event or era.
  8. Humorous Stories: Stories containing various amusing elements.

9. Mystery/Suspense: Literature considered macabre, eerie, or frightening.
  10. Newspaper Articles: Any article taken from a newspaper.
  11. Novels: Literature of varying length containing a complete and developed plot or storyline.
  12. Poetry: Ideas written in verse form. The poetry may or may not rhyme.
  13. Romance: Stories centering around the emotion of love.
  14. Science Fiction: Fiction concerned with science or scientific ideas.
  15. Short Stories: Complete tales with a beginning, climax, and ending, usually 20 pages or less.
  16. Sports Stories: Stories centered around the sports world.
  17. Teenage Literature: Literature written exclusively for teenagers.
4. The students are to rate each literature type only ONCE, according to their own opinions and preferences. They are to place an "X" in the appropriate space on each scale. (Please, no circles or other marks!) Every literature type should be rated by the students.
  5. The students are to work individually. They are not to confer with anyone but the instructor.
  6. The questionnaires should be turned in to the classroom teacher when completed. Please separate according to the student's English hour.

Thank you for your cooperation. For further questions, my address is:

Lisa Spiegel  
 McKinley School  
 731 Crawford  
 Clay Center, KS 67432  
 913-632-3232

would definitely not read	would probably not read	may or may not read	would probably read	would definitely read
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Appendix E  
Humor Interest Inventory

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Hour: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_

There are 17 different types of literature listed below. Please rate each separately, according to your own likes and dislikes. To rate, place an "X" in the space which best matches your opinion of the literature type. Be sure to rate each category once, using only one "X" per literature type.

## 1. Mystery/Suspense

would definitely read	would probably not read	may or may not read	would probably read	would definitely read
-----------------------------	-------------------------------	---------------------------	---------------------------	-----------------------------

## 2. Biography

would definitely not read	would probably not read	may or may not read	would probably read	would definitely read
---------------------------------	-------------------------------	---------------------------	---------------------------	-----------------------------

## 3. Fiction

would definitely not read	would probably not read	may or may not read	would probably read	would definitely read
---------------------------------	-------------------------------	---------------------------	---------------------------	-----------------------------

## 4. Fantasy

would definitely read	would probably not read	may or may not read	would probably read	would definitely not read
-----------------------------	-------------------------------	---------------------------	---------------------------	---------------------------------

## 5. Short Stories

would definitely read	would probably not read	may or may not read	would probably read	would definitely not read
-----------------------------	-------------------------------	---------------------------	---------------------------	---------------------------------

## 6. Humorous Stories

would definitely read	would probably not read	may or may not read	would probably read	would definitely not read
-----------------------------	-------------------------------	---------------------------	---------------------------	---------------------------------

## 7. Novels

would definitely read	would probably not read	may or may not read	would probably read	would definitely not read
-----------------------------	-------------------------------	---------------------------	---------------------------	---------------------------------

## 8. Sports Stories

would definitely read	would probably not read	may or may not read	would probably read	would definitely not read
-----------------------------	-------------------------------	---------------------------	---------------------------	---------------------------------

## 9. Action/Adventure

would definitely read	would probably not read	may or may not read	would probably read	would definitely not read
-----------------------------	-------------------------------	---------------------------	---------------------------	---------------------------------

## 10. Newspaper Articles

would definitely read	would probably not read	may or may not read	would probably read	would definitely not read
-----------------------------	-------------------------------	---------------------------	---------------------------	---------------------------------

## 11. Teenage Literature

would definitely read	would probably not read	may or may not read	would probably read	would definitely not read
-----------------------------	-------------------------------	---------------------------	---------------------------	---------------------------------

## 12. Science Fiction

would definitely read	would probably not read	may or may not read	would probably read	would definitely not read
-----------------------------	-------------------------------	---------------------------	---------------------------	---------------------------------

## 13. Romance

would definitely read	would probably not read	may or may not read	would probably read	would definitely not read
-----------------------------	-------------------------------	---------------------------	---------------------------	---------------------------------

## 14. Historical Fiction

would definitely read	would probably not read	may or may not read	would probably read	would definitely not read
-----------------------------	-------------------------------	---------------------------	---------------------------	---------------------------------

## 15. Drama/Plays

would definitely read	would probably not read	may or may not read	would probably read	would definitely not read
-----------------------------	-------------------------------	---------------------------	---------------------------	---------------------------------

## 16. Poetry

would definitely read	would probably not read	may or may not read	would probably read	would definitely not read
-----------------------------	-------------------------------	---------------------------	---------------------------	---------------------------------

## 17. Classics

would definitely read	would probably not read	may or may not read	would probably read	would definitely not read
-----------------------------	-------------------------------	---------------------------	---------------------------	---------------------------------



Appendix F  
Clarification Questions

## CLARIFICATION QUESTIONS

1. Did you understand how to fill in the top portion of your form?
2. Were there any literature items on the test that were unfamiliar to you?
3. Were there any vocabulary words listed that you did not understand?
4. Did your teacher provide the class with the instructions needed to take this survey?
5. Did your teacher help you individually with any part of the test?
6. Did you enjoy taking the test?
7. Do you feel you carefully followed the test's instructions?
8. Which is your favorite literature item, and why?
9. Which is your least favorite literature item, and why?

PREFERENCES OF  
MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS  
IN HUMOROUS LITERATURE

by

LISA SPIEGEL

B.S. - Kansas State University, 1981

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S THESIS

submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
Manhattan, Kansas

1984

The study of humor and the adolescent is an uncommon but worthwhile area of research. Humor research in general is somewhat sparse and few studies have dealt specifically with adolescent humor. Research in this area especially needs to be completed by educators.

The values of both humor and having a sense of humor were discussed. The understanding and appreciation of humor runs parallel with emotional development and intelligence. Those possessing a sense of humor have higher self-concepts than others and are rated highly by their peers. The use of humor tends to ease anxiety and aids in retention. Nearly every student feels he has a sense of humor.

The purpose of the study was to answer the following questions:

1. Are middle school students interested in humorous literature?
2. Are there differences by grade level, sex, and/or achievement level among middle school students in their degree of interest in humor?
3. Is there a significant difference between middle schoolers' preference for humor when compared to other literature categories?

A survey questionnaire containing 17 literature

categories including humorous literature was administered to seventh and eighth grade language arts students. Answers were recorded on Likert Scales and ranged from would definitely not read to would definitely read.

Computation of mean scores showed that students gave the highest ratings to humorous literature. The 17 categories were factor analyzed into two factors with several items not loading high on either factor. A 2 (grade) x 2 (sex) x 3 (achievement level) multiple analysis of variance compared the students and their response to humorous literature. Results showed no significant differences between subpopulations and humor appreciation. All groups appreciated humor.

A split-plot factorial analysis of variance indicated females preferred the traditional forms of literature (fiction, novels) while males preferred action-oriented literature (adventure, science-fiction).

A Dunnett post hoc compared humorous literature to the other 16 literature items and indicated that this category is considered to be a separate, specific item. Humor was consistently rated higher than other forms.

The author recommended a follow-up humor test to indicate where specific humor preferences lie and indicated the need for further research in this area.