Using Interest Inventories with Struggling and Unmotivated Readers

By Arleen P. Mariotti

Many struggling readers do not like to read because classroom reading material is too difficult, they don’t want to be embarrassed or the task is just not enjoyable. Other children have the reading skills, but choose not to read. Reading may not be as much fun as other activities, it might seem “whimpy” or they just don’t derive any pleasure from it. We know that children, who read independently, are practicing their reading skills, and motivated readers become better readers.¹

Whether the child is a struggling reader or an unmotivated reader, finding his/her independent, instructional, and frustration reading levels, is just the first step in motivating him/her to read. We must also find out his/her interests. Administering an interest inventory at the beginning of the school year can help you locate materials for each child, select books for your classroom library, and help you form literary circles, book clubs, and research groups.

One way to find children’s interests is to interview them. Since this can be time consuming, you might consider a paper-and-pencil survey. Very young and/or struggling readers may need to have the survey questions read aloud to them. You might also conduct a survey of reading interests in small groups. Collect five or six titles from your library from a few different genres (folk tales, humor, fantasy, realistic fiction, etc.). Display the books in front of the group and tell them you’re going to read the title and first page to see if they would be interested in reading the story. After you read the title and first page, simply ask them to raise their hands if the story interests them. You could also use the Fist to Five technique where a fist means “not interested” and five fingers raised means “very interested.”

You can find many interest inventories on the Internet and a few forms follow. As interest inventories are not specific to a particular grade level, you can usually find one already developed that would be appropriate for your students. An excellent reading attitude survey for the primary student is the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey by McKenna and Kear (1990).²

Once students complete a survey, you should examine each inventory, collate the information and file each child’s interests on an index card or data base. With their independent reading level and reading interests now known to you, you have a higher probability of putting a book into their hands that they want to read and can read without assistance.

There are three basics to increasing student reading motivation:

1. Give students time to read. It doesn’t matter if it’s called DEAR (Drop Everything and Read), SSR (Sustained Silent Reading), or Quiet Reading Time. You should schedule a regular time each day when students can quietly read their chosen materials.

2. Give students access to a wide choice of reading material and allow them to choose what they want to read. Provide a classroom library which has books on many reading levels, as well as magazines, newspapers, graphic novels, and comic books. If you don’t have an extensive classroom library, schedule a weekly trip to the school library for students to select and check out books.

3. Read aloud to your students daily. Be a good model of oral reading. Get your friends to tape record books and have students check out the book and the audio tape. Invite your administrators, counselors, and ancillary teachers (physical education, art, music, etc.) to read to your students. They need to see and hear good role models engaged in reading.

To get students to read, you need to put the right book in their hands. This may take a great deal of patience and effort on your part, but the rewards will be worth it.
Reading Interest Inventory

Your Name ____________________________ Date ______________

Directions: Please follow the directions and answer honestly.

**Titles**
Directions: Please list three books you enjoyed reading last year.

**Reading Preferences**
Directions: Rank the following genres in order from your favorite to least favorite. (1 = favorite, 8 = least favorite)

- ___Mystery ___Science Fiction
- ___Romance ___Biographies / Autobiographies / Memoirs
- ___History ___Science
- ___Humorous ___Action/Adventure
- ___Other ____________________________________________

What magazines do you read?
__________________________________________
__________________________________________

Do you read a newspaper? Yes____ No____

Which parts? ____________________________________________

How often do you go to the public library? Every week ____ 1-2 times a month ____ 2-4 times a year ____ Never _____
Interest Inventory

Name _________________________________ Date ________________

1. What is the name of your favorite book?

2. What do you like to do after school?

3. What do you like to do on Saturday?

4. Do you like to read for fun? Yes ____ No ____

5. What sports do you like to play?

6. What is your favorite subject in school?

7. Of the types of books listed below, which ones do you like to read for fun?
   - Sport stories ____
   - Adventure stories ____
   - Stories about people ____
   - Funny stories _____
   - Mystery stories _____
   - Stories about real events/people _____
   - Poetry _____
   - Other:

8. If you could pick two books to have in your library, what would they be?
Reading Interest Inventory

Name____________________   Date________________

I like to read. (circle)   YES  NO  SOMETIMES

I like to read the following:

- fantasy
- mysteries
- science fiction
- horror
- plays
- poetry
- manga
- comic books
- myths
- biographies
- informational
- series
- graphic novels
- humorous books
- action stories
- magazines
- newspaper
- true stories

My favorite author is ______________________ because ____________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

My favorite book is ____________________________________________________________

because _______________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

My favorite magazine is ________________________________________________________

because _______________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________
What gives you the most problems when you read? ___________________
_________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________

What book would you like to read this year? ___________________
Why?_____________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________

What book have you read and disliked? ____________________________
Why?_____________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________

Finish the sentences:
I read best when I __________________________________________
_________________________________________________________

I believe reading is important because ____________________________
_________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________
My Feelings About Reading

Name ______________________________ Date ________________

YES ☑ SOMETIMES ☐ NO ☑

1. I like to read  ______  ______  ______
2. I read at home.  ______  ______  ______
3. Reading is hard for me.  ______  ______  ______
4. I like picture books.  ______  ______  ______
5. Reading is fun.  ______  ______  ______
6. I like to read long stories.  ______  ______  ______
7. I like someone to read to me.  ______  ______  ______
8. Reading is boring.  ______  ______  ______
9. I am a good reader.  ______  ______  ______
10. I like the stories we read in school.  ______  ______  ______